

Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

September 2019
Vol. 24, No.1

St. Helen Catholic School



Back-and-forth conversations promote vital brain growth

Preschoolers who engage in frequent conversations with their parents not only have better language skills, they also develop the brain power needed for school success.

That's the finding of a recent study on language exposure in early childhood. Scientists concluded that back-and-forth conversations build brain pathways—which, in turn, boost children's ability to think and learn.

To strengthen your preschooler's brain power:

- **Discuss everything** you do together throughout the day. Describe your actions and feelings. Encourage your child to do the same.
- **Follow her lead.** Talk and play with your child as long as she shows

interest. Focus on the words and objects that *she's* focusing on at the moment.

- **Ask open-ended questions**, such as, "Why do you like playing with your stuffed animals?" Give your child plenty of time to respond.
- **Be an active listener.** When your child speaks, stop what you're doing and pay attention.
- **Speak clearly** and use correct grammar. Don't use baby talk.
- **Seek guidance.** If you have any concerns or questions about your child's language development, talk to her pediatrician.

Source: R.R. Romeo and others, "Beyond the 30-Million-Word Gap: Children's Conversational Exposure Is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function," *Psychological Science*, Association for Psychological Science.

Questions can help your child solve problems



When it comes to helping your child learn to think for himself, the key may lie not in what you

tell him, but in what you *ask* him. Asking the right questions can spur him to come up with his own solutions.

Here's how to use questions to help your preschooler solve a problem:

1. **Encourage him** to state the problem. Ask questions such as, "What's going on?"
2. **Try to get him** to come up with solutions. Ask, "What do you want to do about that?"
3. **Help him think about** the consequences. "That could work. What do you think might happen if you did that?"
4. **Ask about alternatives.** "Do you have any other ideas?" It's OK if your child doesn't solve the problem or come up with the "right" answer. The idea is to get him to think on his own first, rather than having you supply the answers for him.

Source: M.B. Shure, Ph.D., *Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along with Others*, Gallery Books.

Pretending to read boosts your preschooler's reading readiness



Children love to be read to. But they love it even more when *they* read to you. Although most preschoolers aren't able to read just yet, they can pretend!

Pretending to read helps children build recall skills, print awareness and confidence—crucial elements of reading readiness.

To encourage pretend reading, follow these steps:

1. **Find a book** that features simple pictures and contains text with rhythm and rhyme.
2. **Reread the book often.** Your child will likely memorize all or parts of the book.
3. **Pause while you're reading.** Point to a picture. Ask your child to tell you what it shows.

4. **Stop before you say a word or phrase**—perhaps one that repeats or rhymes. See if your child can fill in the word.
5. **Omit more words and phrases** until your child is telling the story.
6. **Ask your child to “read”** the story to you. Help as needed. Remember, your child isn't really reading, so don't insist she say the exact words.

Source: C.M. Cassano and S.M. Dougherty, *Pivotal Research in Early Literacy: Foundational Studies and Current Practices*, Guilford Press.

“There are perhaps no days of our childhood we lived so fully as those we spent with a favorite book.”

—Marcel Proust

Responsibility and autonomy are keys to academic success



When your child behaves and thinks independently, he is being *autonomous*. And studies show that this trait, combined with responsibility, leads to school success.

Children who have learned responsibility and autonomy are better adjusted. They tend to make friends more easily, too.

To help your child develop these important traits:

- **Assign regular chores.** Your child could take out the trash, feed a pet or set the table. Show him how to do the chore first, and help him the first few times.
- **Keep expectations realistic.** Try to see things from your child's point of view. A four-year-old cannot make complex decisions or handle

responsibilities that have more than a few steps.

- **Offer choices.** Within limits, let your child decide what clothes he'll wear, what chore he would like to do or what book you'll read to him.
- **Give reasons.** Explain *why* you want your child to do something he's resisting. For example, it's important to pick up his clothes to keep them clean and neat.
- **Avoid using bribes.** Don't say, “If you pick up your toys, I'll take you out for ice cream.” Rather than teaching respect or responsibility, bribes encourage your child to focus on what he can get.

Source: A.C. Vasquez and others, “Parent Autonomy Support, Academic Achievement, and Psychosocial Functioning: a Meta-analysis of Research,” *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer Science+Business Media.

Are you helping your child deal with separation?



Separating from parents, even for a few short hours of preschool, isn't always easy for a young child.

But learning to adjust to a parent's absence helps build confidence and the ability to handle change—necessary components of childhood development.

Are you helping your child handle separation anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you acknowledge** your child's feelings by listening and telling her you understand how she feels?
- ___ 2. **Do you disguise** the sadness you may feel because your child can pick up on your feelings?
- ___ 3. **Do you tell** your child what she'll be doing while you are away?
- ___ 4. **Do you let** your child know when you will return and show her she can count on you by arriving on time?
- ___ 5. **Do you smile**, tell your child you love her and hug her goodbye without lingering too long?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child handle separation. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Early Childhood
Parents
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Fun activities can build your preschooler's attention span



Staying focused on an activity is an important skill for school success. Children (like nearly everyone else) find it

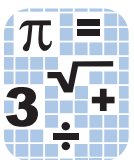
easier to pay attention to activities that interest them. So, choose an activity your child enjoys. Then look for ways to keep her focused on it for increasing periods of time.

Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- **Extend your story time.** Instead of looking at a short picture book, try reading a longer story or a beginning reader's chapter book over a period of several nights. Each night, remind your child of where you are in the story. Then explain that tomorrow
- **Work together on a jigsaw puzzle.** Try one with about 25 pieces. Move on to more complicated puzzles once your child masters these. Remember, there is no need to finish a puzzle in one sitting! Attention span also involves coming back to a project after you have put it aside.
- **Try a multi-step art project.** For example, help your child shape an animal out of clay. Allow the clay to dry and harden. On another day, let her paint the animal. After the paint dries, help your child apply fur or eyes using glue and yarn or bits of paper.

night, you are going to read on to find out what happens to the characters.

Show your preschooler that math is a natural part of life



Early childhood is a great time to show your child that math is not only fun, it's a natural part of his daily

life, too. Nearly everything your child does involves math. Each time he gets dressed, for example, he follows a sequence. That's a basic math skill.

Here are some other natural ways to help your child become aware of the math around him:

- **Look for numbers everywhere.** Search together for numbers your child knows. If he doesn't recognize numbers yet, point them out to him. "That big sign has a number 2 and a number 5 on it!"
- **Estimate.** Say to your child, "I think you can finish your sandwich in 10 bites. Let's see." Then help him count the bites as he takes them.
- **Look for patterns.** Help your child find patterns on sheets, curtains and clothing. "Your shirt has a red stripe, then a yellow stripe, then a red stripe, then a yellow stripe. That's a pattern."
- **Have a "shape of the day."** In the morning, show your child a shape. "Look at your plate. The shape of your plate is a circle. We're going to have a circle hunt today!" Throughout the day, point out circles where you see them. Praise your child when he points one out.
- **Sequence.** Preschool children love daily routines and knowing what's going to happen next. Talk about the course of the day. "First, I'll drop you off at preschool. After preschool is over, Grandma will pick you up. Then, you will go back to her house to play."

Q: My child's preschool teacher says our son has trouble interacting with other children during free play. He either argues with them or avoids them. What can we do to help?

Questions & Answers

A: Many preschool children need a little help to develop their social skills. To promote these skills:

- **Play with your child.** Aim for spending at least 10 minutes a day on the floor with him and his toys. When he starts playing, join in and encourage him to interact with you. Or, think of a pretend game to play together. For example, the toy animals are going to hop on the toy cars and go on an adventure.
- **Schedule playdates.** Before a child can do well in a group, he must master one-on-one interaction. Invite a friendly child over to play with your son. Invite only one at a time, and keep the playdates short at first—one hour or two. Make sure there are enough toys for both children. Plan something special for the last 15 minutes, such as a puppet show or a favorite snack.
- **Talk with your child** about his experiences. If he says, "Michael wouldn't play race cars with me," you could ask, "Did you and Michael want to play with the same car?" If so, talk to your child about taking turns.

If Michael wanted to play something different, talk with your child about first playing what Michael wants to play, then asking him to play what your child would like to play. Consistent practice will benefit your child. So keep at it!

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance is critical for your kindergartner!



Attendance rates for kindergartners are lower than for students in later school grades. Yet attendance in

kindergarten is essential. Students who attend school consistently are more likely to have academic success.

To help your child develop the habit of regular attendance:

- **Let her know** that you expect her to go to school every day. If you tell your child school attendance is important to you, it will be important to her.
- **Remain calm** if she says she doesn't want to go to school. This is normal for kindergartners. Don't discuss it or raise your voice. Just tell her she must go.
- **Keep her home** if she is sick—especially if she has a fever or the illness is contagious. Simply being tired, however, is not a valid reason to miss school.
- **Don't make staying home** seem like a treat. A sick child should be resting, not playing on a digital device or watching television.
- **Schedule medical appointments** outside of school hours.
- **Schedule family vacations** during school breaks.

It's also important to help your child develop the habit of getting to school on time. If she arrives late, she might miss something important. Late arrival also disrupts the whole class. So be sure your child gets to school before the bell rings.

Source: "10 Facts About School Attendance," Attendance Works, niswc.com/ec_attendance-priority.

Form a partnership with your child's kindergarten teacher

Studies consistently show that when parents play an active role in their children's education, their children do better in school. That's one of the reasons it's so important to develop a positive relationship with your child's kindergarten teacher.

Here's how:

- **Attend parent events.** Be there to meet the teacher and find out what your child will be learning this year.
- **Schedule conferences.** Make the most of one-on-one time with the teacher. Bring a list of topics you'd like to discuss.
- **Keep an open mind.** If the teacher mentions areas in which your child needs improvement, try not to be defensive. You and the school are on the same "team."



- **Stay in touch.** Let the teacher know about any changes that affect your child, such as a divorce, a new sibling or a move. Ask about ways you can support your child's learning at home.

Daily routines help your child have a successful school year



Most children thrive on routines. Knowing what to expect helps them feel safe and secure.

Following routines also helps children develop responsibility and practice important skills.

The start of a new school year is the perfect time to implement some new routines.

Before school, have your child:

1. **Wake up** at the same time each day.
2. **Make his bed** or straighten it.
3. **Eat breakfast.**
4. **Get dressed** and brush his teeth.
5. **Read or play** until it's time to leave for school.

After school, have your child:

1. **Empty his backpack** and show you important papers.
2. **Unwind** and eat a healthy snack.
3. **Complete homework** or read together for 10 minutes.
4. **Play.** Encourage outdoor play and limit the use of screen devices.

Before bed, help your child:

1. **Put his backpack** near the door.
2. **Make his lunch** if needed. Put it in the refrigerator.
3. **Choose clothes** for tomorrow.
4. **Take a bath**, put on his pajamas and brush his teeth.
5. **Read a story** together before bedtime.