

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School  
Mesa Unified School District #4



January 2023

## Use authoritative parenting to encourage positive behavior

Children will make mistakes and poor choices as they learn and grow. It's the purpose of discipline to teach them what to do instead. No one discipline tactic works with every child. But research points to a combination of strategies called *authoritative parenting* that has positive effects.

Authoritative parents are warm and loving, yet firm. They also:

- **Set realistic standards.** When parents expect perfection, kids are doomed to fail. Expecting too little, on the other hand, hurts kids' skills and confidence.
- **Establish appropriate limits.** For example, children are not allowed to hit. Instead, they are encouraged to use words to describe their feelings.
- **Communicate effectively** with clear, brief instructions in calm tones.
- **Are consistent.** They choose a few basic rules and stick to them.
- **Provide opportunities** for their children to act responsibly. These might include doing chores and making choices.
- **Allow their children** enough freedom to grow without risking their well-being.
- **Accept their children** for who they are, and make them feel proud of their strengths.

Source: G. Dewar, Ph.D., "The Authoritative Parenting Style: An Evidence-Based Guide," Parenting Science.



## Make your home rich with learning

It's often said that parents are their children's first teachers. In fact, the things your child learns at home now can have a big impact on school performance later. Studies also show that children who grow up in learning-rich homes are more likely to thrive in school.

You don't have to *be* rich to have a learning-rich home. Just interact with your child in meaningful ways over things like literacy activities and educational materials. Here's how:

- **Read daily with your child.** Point out new words. Show how print works by running your finger from left to right under words as you read them. Ask questions about the text and pictures.
- **Select toys** that foster skill-building and creativity, such as puzzles, blocks, dominos, puppets and crayons and paper.
- **Have lots of conversations** together. Introduce new words. Discuss what's going on nearby. Ask what your child thinks.

Source: C.S. Tamis-LeMonda and others, "Early home learning environment predicts children's 5th grade academic skills," *Applied Developmental Science*.

## Provide predicting practice

Encouraging your child to make predictions is a great way to nurture thinking skills. Predicting requires kids to consider evidence, recognize patterns and make guesses based on what they know. Ask your preschooler to predict:

- **What will happen** next in a story.
- **What you will see** on a familiar route.
- **What it means** if you put on your pajamas or get out an umbrella.

Then discuss your child's prediction results. "You said we would see a gas station on the way to Grandma's. You were right! Look, I see a red car and a black car filling up."



## 'You have what it takes'

Feeling capable gives children confidence to tackle all sorts of challenges. To instill self-confidence, teach your child three lessons:

1. **"You are competent."** Break big tasks down into small steps your child can manage.
2. **"You can wait."** Say things like, "I am helping your sister now. You will be fine coloring your picture until it is your turn."
3. **"You can entertain yourself."** From time to time, encourage independent play by suggesting activities that your child can do alone, such as looking at books or putting together puzzles.

## Shine a light on letters

Take advantage of winter's dark evenings to have some fun helping your child learn letters. In a dark room, use the light beam from a flashlight to draw letters on a ceiling or wall. Can your child follow the beam and figure out the letters you are writing? Take turns making letters and guessing.





## How can I tell if my child is ready for kindergarten?

**Q:** I have to tell the preschool soon if my child will be going to kindergarten next year or returning for another year of pre-K. I'm not sure how to decide. What skills do kids need to be ready for kindergarten?

**A:** The ability to recognize letters and their sounds, and to count and identify numbers, will help your child succeed in kindergarten. But just as important as academic skills are the skills that make children ready to engage with learning when they get there.

These include skills like:

- **Following directions.** Kindergarten teachers know their pupils are five-year-olds. They won't give complicated directions. But when the teacher says it's time to sit down and listen to a story, your child needs to do it.
- **Working with others.** Your child may be in a class with 20 or more students next year. Cooperating, getting along, taking turns and sharing supplies and teacher attention are all necessary for kids to learn well.
- **Basic self-care.** On arrival at school, kindergartners will be expected to take off jackets and put away school bags. Your child should also be able to use the restroom independently, including washing hands.

Reach out to the preschool teacher for guidance about your child's readiness.



## Are you teaching patience by example?

Patience doesn't come naturally to most preschoolers. However, your child can learn this school success trait by watching you. Are you modeling patient behavior? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you create** schedules and routines so you don't have to push your child to hurry?

and move forward in positive ways?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you demonstrate** polite patience when you have to wait or take turns?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are setting a positive example of patient behavior. For each no, try that idea.*

\_\_\_ **3. Do you allow** your child time to practice and master new skills?

\_\_\_ **4. Do you react** calmly when your child is upset? Model how to behave in difficult situations.

\_\_\_ **5. Do you show** your child that when mistakes happen, people can learn from them

*"When we teach a child patience we offer them the gift of a dignified life."*

—Allan Lokos

## Make a timely resolution

As a new year begins, resolve to make the most of your time with your child. You can:

- **Help your child contribute** to family life. Your preschooler can help you sort laundry or pick up sticks in the yard.
- **Eat meals as a family.** Family meals promote social skills and bonding.
- **Join in your child's interests.** If trains are a favorite thing, read books about them together. Ask your child to tell you why trains are great.

## Take pictures into account

When choosing books to read with your child, take a look at the number of illustrations on each page. Research shows that lots of pictures on a page can be confusing, and kids learn more new words when there is only one illustration per page.

If a book has more than one picture per page, it's still OK to read it—all reading is beneficial. Just be sure to point to the picture that goes with the text you are reading at the moment. This will help your child connect the words to the correct illustration.



Source: Z.M. Flack and J.S. Horst, "Two sides to every story: Children learn words better from one storybook page at a time," *Infant and Child Development*.

## Encourage organization

Preschoolers are old enough to practice the basics of organization. Here's how to help:

- **Keep it simple.** Have your child reshelve books, not tidy the whole room.
- **Designate places** for your child to put belongings.
- **Praise effort,** even if your child doesn't put something away the way you would.

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