

Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

September 2019



KID BITS

Stay in touch

Reach out to your child's teacher whenever you have a question or concern—no need to wait for parent-teacher conferences. You could email to let her know about any changes in your youngster's life, such as a new sibling. She'll be happy to hear from you, and the information can help her help your child.

My library card

Using a library card teaches your youngster to take responsibility for books. Visit the library to get her a card and check out books. Then, consider celebrating with a reading picnic in the park. At home, help her write the books' due date on the calendar so she remembers to return them with you.

DID YOU KNOW?

The visual skills your child needs for school success are still developing. You can help by offering activities that let him follow moving objects with his eyes, sharpen his eye-hand coordination, and improve his depth perception. *Examples:* Play catch, read hidden-picture books, build with blocks, color.

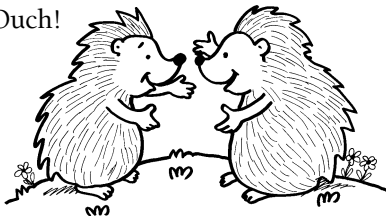
Worth quoting

"It is books that are the key to the wide world." *Jane Hamilton*

Just for fun

Q: What did one hedgehog say to the other after they hugged?

A: Ouch!



Supporting your little student

Whether your child is starting school for the first time or beginning a new year, your involvement will help her do her best. Try these ideas.

My school

Encourage your youngster to draw a map of her school so she can show you where she spends her days. Together, label her favorite spots (music corner, science lab, playground). Then, let her tell you about what she does in each place. You might ask, "Which musical instrument is your favorite?" or "What do you like to play at recess?"

My learning

Have your child share with you what she's learning in school, and do related activities at home. For example, if she's studying community helpers, you could visit a fire station or set up a pretend post office where family members "mail" cards to each other. Or if the class is



learning about apples, perhaps you'll go apple picking or bake an apple pie.

My work

Find special ways to save your youngster's schoolwork. You might let her decorate a binder or box and write "2019–2020" on it. She can put her favorite papers and projects inside. Every so often, look through it with her. You'll both have a reminder of her accomplishments.♥

Routines to count on

Life with little ones goes more smoothly when everyone knows what to expect. Consider these tips for setting up predictable daily routines.

● **Mornings.** Create a goodbye ritual that your child can count on. For instance, you might sing a favorite song together on the walk or car ride to school.

● **Evenings.** As part of dinner cleanup, help your youngster pack tomorrow's snack and set out breakfast supplies (cereal box, spoon, bowl). Also, look through his backpack with him to make sure he has everything he'll need for school the next day.♥



How to make friends

Your youngster's earliest friendships build social skills he'll use throughout life. Here's advice to help him get along with classmates and make new friends.

Friendly introductions. Encourage your child to introduce himself to new classmates. He might say his name, ask a question, and share something about himself. ("Hi, I'm Adam. What's your favorite color? Mine's blue.")



Role-play at home so he's more comfortable starting conversations.

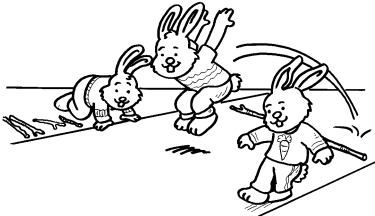
Shared activities. Suggest ways your youngster can ask to play with others. For example, he could take a toy dump truck to a group of kids playing with construction vehicles and say, "Can this truck help out?" And if he is playing with a group of kids,

he might warmly invite a classmate to participate by asking, "Would you like to play with us?"

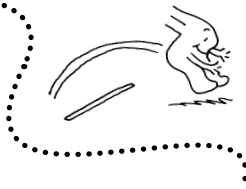
Playdates. Have your child tell you the names of classmates he'd like to get together with. Then, call their parents to set up a playdate at your home or the park. Help your youngster think of ways to make the visit more pleasant—perhaps by setting out or taking along toys his friend might enjoy.♥

PARENT TO PARENT Jump and measure

A family jumping contest is an active way for your child to practice measuring. Follow these three steps.



- 1. Jump.** Mark a starting line. Each player stands behind the line, jumps forward as far as possible, and marks her landing point.
- 2. Measure.** After each turn, have your youngster measure how far the person jumped. She can use her own feet as a unit of measurement by walking heel-to-toe in a straight line between sticks. Let her write the correct number of "feet" next to each player's name on a sheet of paper.
- 3. Compare.** Ask her questions about the results. "How many 'feet' was the longest jump?" (9) "The shortest?" (4) Help her find the difference between the longest and shortest jumps (9 - 4 = 5 "feet"). *Tip:* Play a few more times to give family members a chance to beat their distances.♥



ACTIVITY CORNER

Alphabet rocks

This rockin' activity builds your youngster's alphabet skills as she writes letters on rocks and matches them with objects.

Write

Ask your child to gather five rocks outside and use chalk to write a different letter on each one. Together, say the sound of each letter as she writes it.

Play

Can your youngster match each rock with an item that starts with its letter? For instance, she could place a *t* rock under a tree, a *b* rock on a picnic blanket, and a *p* rock on a plate. Now have your child wipe the chalk off the rocks. She can write five new letters and play again!♥



Q & A Learning self-control

Q: My son sometimes acts without thinking about the consequences of his behavior. How can I help him develop more self-control?

A: It's common for children this age to be impulsive. As your son gets older, he will gain more control over his behavior. In the meantime, there are strategies that can make a difference.

First, ask your child questions rather than telling him what to do. For instance, if he puts a candy bar in the shopping cart without permission, ask, "What should you have done instead?" Coming up

with the answer on his own ("I should have asked you") will teach him to stop and think.

You could also create a special signal to use when he's acting impulsively (say, throwing a ball in the house). Maybe you'll put your index finger to your temple. That's his cue to think about his behavior.

As your son's self-control improves, you're likely to find yourself asking fewer questions and using the signal less often.♥



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KID BITS

Parent with confidence

What do you do well as a parent? Focus on the positives in your parenting life, perhaps a fun family tradition you started or the way you've gotten your youngster to try new foods. Having a good attitude about your parenting can influence your child's attitude in a positive way!

Shape match

Comparing shapes and sizes is an essential early math skill—and it's easy to practice with your youngster. On a piece of paper, trace around the bottoms of building blocks, cups, or containers. Then, ask her to match the objects to their outlines. Next, she could make tracings for you to match.

DID YOU KNOW?

Little ones often use their left and right hands until they discover a preference (typically between ages 4 and 6). Be sure to let your child decide which hand to use. For example, when you give him a pencil, hold it at the middle of his body so he can pick a hand to grasp it with.

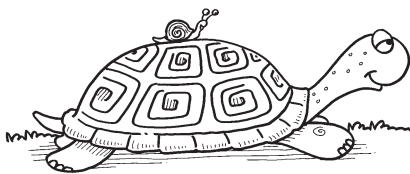
Worth quoting

"Be silly, be honest, be kind." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Just for fun

Q: What did the snail say when he found himself on the turtle's back?

A: Wheeeee!



I know how you feel

Youngsters are still learning to sort out their feelings, so they may not always understand what others are going through. Try these strategies to help your child become aware of his emotions and learn to feel and show empathy.

Looking in the mirror

Stand in front of a mirror together. Make a face that shows emotion, like an open mouth and widened eyes for surprised. Have your youngster identify your emotion. Then, it's his turn to make a face for you to name. He'll learn to "read" faces and link expressions with their emotions, which is a great way to understand how others are feeling.

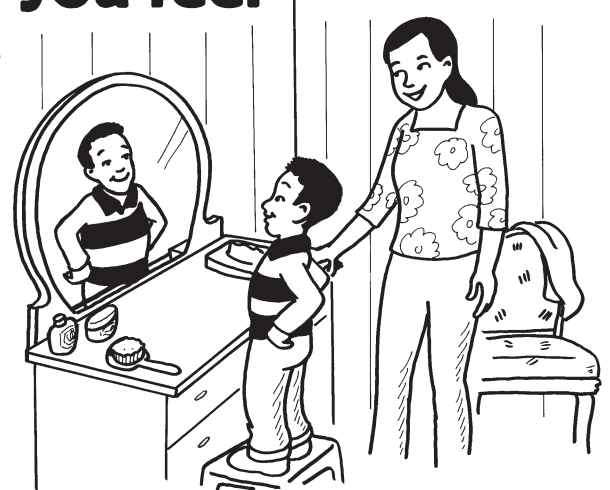
Reading deeper

When you read a book with your child, take some time to discuss the pictures. Ask him questions about the characters, such as "Look at Anna's face. Do you think she's worried or excited?"

Listen up

Can your child follow one-step directions? How about those with two or three steps? Here are tips for helping her become a better listener.

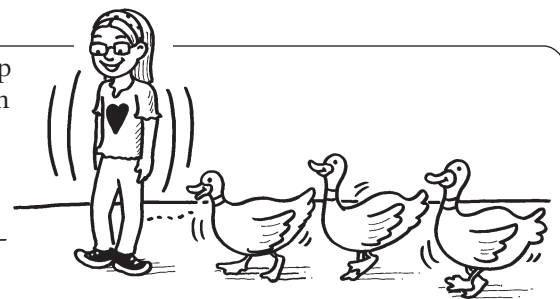
- **Cook.** While your youngster listens, read the first step in a recipe. ("In a small bowl, whisk together milk, eggs, and sugar.") Ask her to repeat what you said. Then, help her complete the task.
- **Be silly.** Build memory and concentration with three-step directions. Give your child three silly instructions to follow: "Spin three times, waddle like a duck to your bedroom, and pick out your favorite toy to play with." Now let her give you three silly directions! ♥



Talk about why the character might feel that way. ("Yes, she is probably excited because she learned to jump rope!")

Modeling empathy

You're one of the people your youngster depends on to empathize with him. Show him that you understand his emotions by validating what he feels. For example, you could say, "I understand you're mad because your favorite shorts are in the laundry. Let's find something else to wear while they get washed." ♥



Explore nature

Outdoor play lets your child discover what nature has to offer. Encourage a love of the outdoors with these activities.

Go on a hunt. Search your yard or park for bugs. Your youngster could look in bushes, under rocks, and on trees. Ask her what's different and similar about the creatures she finds. She might notice that some have wings to fly (dragonflies) but others crawl around on legs (caterpillars) or without legs (worms).



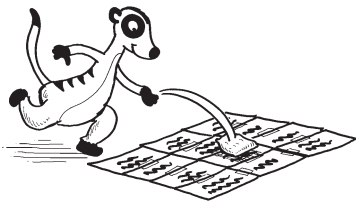
Plant a garden. Start a small garden of fall flowers, herbs, or vegetables in your yard or in containers. Check to see what will grow in your area this time of year—perhaps cabbage or chives. Your child can care for her plants and spot changes. *Tip:* Suggest that she record her observations in a notebook.

Feed the birds. Have your youngster make a bird feeder by spreading nut or seed butter on a paper towel tube and rolling it in birdseed. Thread about 3 feet of string through the tube and tie the ends together. Hang the feeder on a nail or tree branch. Your child could draw or snap photos of the different birds that come to visit each day.♥

ACTIVITY CORNER Toss and move

This life-sized board game will build your youngster's coordination and large motor skills.

Materials: 3 sheets of construction paper (cut into fourths), marker, tape, beanbag, timer, active toys



Think of 12 challenges for players to complete, and write each one on a separate piece of paper. *Examples:* "Count how many times you can bounce a ball." "Time how long you can balance on one foot." Tape the pieces of paper together into a game board.

Take turns tossing the beanbag and doing the activity it lands on. Then, the other players do the same challenge. Whoever wins the challenge (stands on one foot the longest, bounces a ball the most times) earns one point.

Keep going until you've finished all the activities. The player with the most points wins!♥

PARENT TO PARENT Work-friendly volunteering

I work during most of the hours my son Charlie is in school. At the beginning of the year, I asked his teacher how I could still be involved with his class. Mr. Roberts gave me a few great ideas that fit into my schedule.

One suggestion is helping to get the classroom ready in the morning. Twice a month, I go about 15 minutes before class starts to set up the calendar and lay out the morning's activities so the teacher is free to greet his students. Mr. Roberts also had ways I could volunteer from home, such as cutting and laminating game pieces for lessons, compiling book orders, or washing dress-up clothes.

Charlie's teacher is always grateful for whatever time I can squeeze in each week to help him. And I'm glad I have a new way to show my son that I care about his education!♥



Q & A Bored? No way!

Q: My daughter often complains she's bored and asks to play with my phone. How do I handle this?

A: Believe it or not, boredom can be beneficial for children. It's tempting to turn to screen time when your youngster says, "There's nothing to do!" But letting her work through her boredom gives her the chance to use her imagination.

Gently guide your daughter to come up with her own

ideas. You might say, "I wonder what you could do with the pillows and blankets in this closet?" That may lead her to build a fort or a pretend snowman.

Or have your child make a craft box filled with stickers, crayons, paper, craft sticks, and glue. It can inspire her to get creative when she's bored—and even keep her from asking for your phone.♥



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Watch closely

Boost your child's concentration with this fast-paced game. Line up three colored plastic cups upside down, and put a coin under one. Have him watch the cup with the coin as you quickly rearrange the cups for 10 seconds. Then, ask him to tap the cup the coin is under. Was he right? Switch roles, and see if he can stump you.

Getting enough sleep

A good night's sleep prepares your youngster's body and brain for a new day. It may be tempting to let her stay up late or sleep in on weekends and during school breaks, but try your best to keep a consistent schedule. This will help her get the 10–13 hours of sleep she needs each night.

Thanksgiving helper

Involve your child in your Thanksgiving plans. If you're hosting guests, he could hang up coats or refill water glasses. Or if you visit relatives, he might pick out a game to take and share with his cousins. He'll feel proud to contribute, and he'll learn to be a good host or guest.

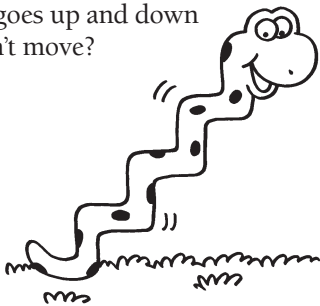
Worth quoting

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have." *Maya Angelou*

Just for fun

Q: What goes up and down but doesn't move?

A: Stairs.



Ready to read

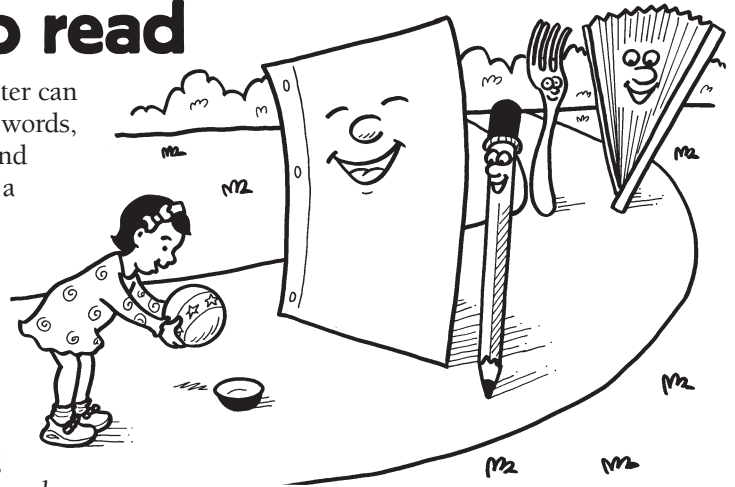
Before your youngster can identify letters or read words, playing with sounds and syllables in words lays a strong foundation for reading. Try these ideas.

Match beginning sounds

Gather pairs of small household objects with beginning sounds that match. *Examples:* ball and bowl, pencil and paper, fork and fan. Mix them all up—can she put each item with its partner? Now have her collect objects for you to pair up. Each time, she'll work on hearing beginning sounds in words.

Spy the rhymes

Play this version of "I Spy," and your youngster will practice hearing rhymes. You might say, "I spy something green that rhymes with *beef*" (*leaf*) or "I spy something on the table that rhymes with *boy*" (*toy*). She could point to or bring you the correct item. Then, let her come up with "I Spy" rhymes for you.



Jump for syllables

Help your child hear individual syllables in words. Think of a familiar word with multiple syllables (*tomato*, *helicopter*). Say the word slowly while she does a different movement for each syllable. Since *tomato* has three syllables, she might hop for *to-*, spin around for *-ma-*, and stomp for *-to*. What four movements will she do for *he-li-cop-ter*?♥

Keep going!

A child with grit knows how to work through challenges and handle setbacks. Use these suggestions to promote a stick-with-it attitude in your youngster:

- Encourage him to use positive phrases like "I can try" or "Can you help?" instead of saying "I can't" or "I don't know how." This shift in thinking will make a big difference! *Tip:* Remember to model positive language when you talk to him. ("I know you can do it!")
- Do a new activity together, such as making your own play dough or bubble solution. It might take a few attempts to get the recipe just right, but you'll show your child that continuing to try leads to learning—and fun.♥



Good behavior habits start early

Encourage your child to behave well by letting him know what you expect—and following through if he doesn't meet your expectations. Here's how.

Be clear and positive. Tell your youngster how you want him to behave—and that you know he can do it. Before you go into a movie theater, you might say, "We want everyone to be able to hear the movie, so I know you'll



whisper quietly if you need something." Or at bedtime, maybe you'll say, "You've been doing better at staying in bed and not asking for things. I bet you'll do great tonight."

Be consistent. Set consequences that your child can count on. If he talks loudly in the theater, you might take him into the lobby and explain you'll need to leave if he does it again. Or if he gets out of bed to ask for another snack, perhaps you will have him go to bed earlier the next night. It

may not be easy to follow through, but when he sees you mean what you say, he'll be more likely to meet your expectations in the future.♥



Q & A Holding a pencil

Q: I'm not sure my son holds his pencil correctly. Is it important for him to hold it a certain way?

A: A strong "tripod" grip will help your child write comfortably. That means he should grasp his pencil between his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger.



If your youngster isn't using a tripod grip, try this when he writes. Let him hold a small toy, such as a bouncy ball, in his palm with his ring and pinky fingers. That will keep those two fingers out of the way, leaving the other three to grip the pencil.

Or if your son's fingers are too far from the tip of his pencil, give him a pencil that's about half the length of a regular one. He'll need to move his fingers down to control it.♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Put together a healthy plate

What does a nutritious meal look like? Your youngster will find out with this activity.

Materials: paper plate, marker, old magazines or grocery circulars, scissors, white paper

Help your child draw lines to divide a paper plate into four sections, two slightly larger and two a little smaller (see choosemyplate.gov). She can label the bigger sections "Vegetables" and "Grains" and the smaller ones "Fruits" and "Protein." Then, she could cut a small paper circle to represent "Dairy."

Browse through magazines together, and have her cut out healthy foods from each group. *Examples:* Strawberries (fruit), spinach (vegetables), brown rice (grains), chicken (protein), milk (dairy).

Let her experiment with different combinations of foods, creating delicious meals by putting photos into the right sections of the plate. Each time, she'll see that a healthy plate has a variety of foods. Now make it for real! Your youngster might fill up her dinner plate that looks a lot like her favorite paper plate.♥



PARENT TO PARENT

Conferences: Involve your child

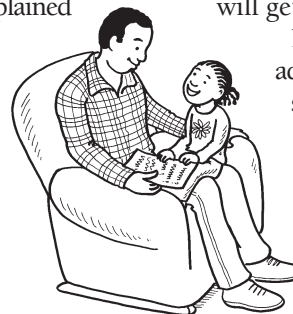
I had my first parent-teacher conference last year, and afterward my daughter Vera was worried about why I met with her teacher. I explained that having a meeting is one way her teacher and I work together to help her learn.

This year, I decided to talk to Vera about the conference ahead of time. I asked if there was anything she'd like me to

say or ask. And there was! She wanted her teacher to know that she likes math group—and she loves being the calendar helper. Vera also wondered if her class will get to study butterflies this year.

I wrote down Vera's ideas and added my own, such as "What does she like to do during playtime?" and "What can I do at home to help her learn?"

I feel prepared for this year's conference, and Vera is looking forward to hearing what her teacher says.♥



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