

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



February 2026

Bristol Bay Native Association
Head Start Program

Reinforce your child's ability to tackle tasks independently

Developing your preschooler's ability to handle self-care tasks is an important way to boost kindergarten readiness. When teaching your child a new task, demonstrate the steps a few times. Then, stay nearby to answer questions when your child tries to do it alone.

Help your preschooler learn how to:

- **Put on clothes.** Start with pants and shirts that pull on. Let your child practice buttoning and zipping on unworn clothing. It's OK to help with this after your child puts items on.
- **Prepare a simple meal** or snack. Your preschooler could pour dry cereal into a bowl and peel and slice a banana with a plastic spoon. If your child makes a mess, just show how to clean it up and talk about how to do it better next time.
- **Retrieve needed items without help.** Put frequently-used items, like cups for water, on low shelves or in drawers your preschooler can reach easily.
- **Put away outerwear.** Provide low hooks your child can use to hang up jackets and a place to put dirty shoes or boots.
- **Tidy up and organize.** Teach your child to clean out school bags each day and put books and toys in their places after using them.



Create crafts with heart

This month, help your child develop caring, creativity and fine motor skills by making and sharing valentines. Try these ideas:

- **Beaded hearts.** Help your child thread beads along the length of a pipe cleaner, then shape it into a heart and twist the ends together.
- **Cookie hearts.** Let your child help with measuring, rolling out dough and decorating.
- **Handprint hearts.** Cut several large hearts from construction paper. Then, help your child dip one hand into non-toxic paint and make a handprint on each heart. Add a message such as "Love goes heart in hand" and help your child sign them.



Can your child see clearly?

Children don't always know that they can't see well. To avoid vision-related struggles in school, get your child's eyes checked yearly. Also have your child:

- **Wear sunglasses** on bright days.
- **Take breaks** when using screens.
- **Eat foods** that support eye health, such as dark leafy greens, eggs and fish.



Use discipline that works

Authoritative discipline strategies encourage positive behavior. They are loving, yet firm. Begin with these three:

1. **Set reasonable expectations.** Expecting too much dooms your child to failure. Expecting too little hurts skill and confidence development.
2. **Choose a few essential rules** and stick with them.
3. **Give brief, clear directions** for what to do, and praise your child for doing it.



Your child wins when you read aloud

Reading aloud is one of the most effective things you can do to prepare your child to succeed in school. But busy lives, screen distractions and adults who don't enjoy reading mean that about half of kids under five are missing out.

Here are four ways reading aloud together daily makes a difference:

1. **Regularly seeing books** and other reading material and listening to reading makes children more likely to learn to read well in school.
2. **Read aloud time** lets you share affection and positive attention. This builds children's feelings of self-worth and confidence as well as their interest in reading.
3. **Reading aloud** helps your child build language skills, vocabulary and knowledge. Children almost always hear words and concepts in books that they don't hear in everyday speaking.
4. **Listening to books** encourages children to think and use their imaginations.

Source: E. Heubeck, "Fewer Parents Are Reading Aloud to Their Kids. Why That Matters," Education Week.



How can I teach my child to be a better sport?

Q: My child doesn't like to lose, and often throws a fit when it happens. I know it's wrong, but I sometimes let my child win to avoid dealing with this behavior. What should I do to help my child learn to manage disappointment and frustration?



A: Life doesn't always go the way people want it to—things may not go as planned, or someone else may come in first. To help your preschooler learn this lesson and move on after a disappointing outcome:

- **Say you understand that losing** feels yucky. Then, explain that there are appropriate ways to react when feeling that way.
- **Discuss what it means to be a good sport.** Don't assume your child already knows. Say, "Being a good sport means playing fair. It also means being a respectful winner (no gloating) and a calm, polite loser."
- **Emphasize that what matters most** is trying your best and having fun, not whether you win or lose. Having a good time while playing a game makes your child an automatic winner.
- **Let your child lose.** Then, help your preschooler use words to describe feelings, rather than storming around. Encourage your child to say, "I'll try again another time," then switch to a different activity.



Are you nurturing creative thinking?

Imaginative and creative play helps your preschooler develop the thinking skills needed for problem-solving and self-expression. Are you providing lots of opportunities for your child to be creative? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child supplies for making and drawing things, such as blocks, play dough and crayons?
- ___ **2. Do you allow** for mess by protecting your child's work area?
- ___ **3. Do you make up** stories with your child? Do you ask your child to think of new endings for books you read?
- ___ **4. Do you expose** your child to different kinds of creative arts, such as photography, painting, drama and music?

- ___ **5. Do you offer** positive feedback about your preschooler's creations?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child think creatively. For each no, try that idea.

*"The future belongs to those who learn more skills and combine them in creative ways."
—Robert Greene*

Explain positional words

Spatial relations—where things are in relation to other things—are key in math and science. Introduce your child to *positional words* that describe these relationships, such as:

- **In, out and on.** Say, "The blocks are *on* the floor. Let's put them *in* the bin."
- **Over and under.** "Your red shirt is *under* the blue one in your drawer." Point to each shirt as you name it.
- **Behind, in front of and next to.** Demonstrate with toys, then ask your child to position them. "Can you put the horse *in front of* the barn?"

Source: L.M. Platas, "The Why and What of Spatial Relations," DREME, Stanford University.

Be a screen violence shield

Viewing screen media violence in early childhood is linked to a higher risk of social and psychological issues and lower academic achievement in adolescence. To limit your child's exposure:

- **Preview content** and set rules about what your child is allowed to watch.
- **Make sure you can see** the screen when your child uses a device.

Source: D. Gray, "Violent Screen Time in Preschool Linked to Aggressive Behavior, Study Shows," Newsweek.

Nurture observation skills

Encourage your child to observe nature by making a simple bird feeder together. Here's how:

- **Tie** a long string through the hole in a stale bagel.
- **Spread** peanut butter or shortening on the bagel.
- **Press** the coated bagel into birdseed.
- **Hang the feeder outside** and watch who visits! Use a guide or go online to help your child identify birds you see.



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Daily Learning Planner

*Ideas families can use to help children
prepare for school*

Bristol Bay Native Association
Head Start Program



THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE[®]

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Daily Learning Planner: Ideas Families Can Use to Help Children Prepare for School—Try a New Idea Every Day!

- 1. Start a chain of hearts. Cut out small paper hearts. Each day, write a reason you love your child on one and attach it to the chain.
- 2. Ask your child to line up measuring spoons from *biggest* to *smallest*, then nest them one inside another.
- 3. With your child, build something with blocks, such as a barn or tower.
- 4. Teach your child how to sing in a round. This is when each person sings the same song but starts at a different time.
- 5. As you do errands, help your child talk with people you meet about the jobs they do.
- 6. Spray shaving cream on a cookie sheet and show your child how to draw letters in it with a finger.
- 7. With your child, practice walking sideways today.
- 8. Experiment at dinner together. Does holding your noses affect the taste of the food?
- 9. Mix up all of the shoes in your closet. Challenge your child to match them back into pairs.
- 10. Help your child measure something with a ruler. Count the inches together.
- 11. Paint pictures with your child using only black and white paints.
- 12. Ask your child to *hop* like a bunny, *crawl* like a turtle or *slither* like a snake.
- 13. How many animals can your child think of that have fur?
- 14. At dinner, have each family member say something nice about every person at the table.
- 15. Read a news article with your child today.
- 16. Cut out shapes from paper (triangle, rectangle, square, circle). Challenge your child to arrange them to form a boat.
- 17. Make a "machine" with your child. Use markers to decorate a box with dials and buttons. Pretend to use the machine. What does it do?
- 18. Take turns telling a story. Say, "There once was a family who lived ...," Have your child finish the sentence.
- 19. Involve your child in preparing tonight's dinner. Your preschooler can help set the table, or mix ingredients.
- 20. Choose a book with lots of pictures. Instead of reading it, have your child tell you a story based on the illustrations.
- 21. Exercise large motor skills. Visit a playground where your child can run, jump and climb safely.
- 22. Invite a friend to play with your child. Encourage your child to share and take turns.
- 23. Review the meanings of *first* and *last*. Have your child touch the first and last objects in a row.
- 24. Practice cutting with safety scissors. Have your child cut along a straight line and then along a curve.
- 25. Cut or print out a detailed picture. Find three things in it that your child is familiar with. Ask your preschooler to find and circle them.
- 26. Help your child stretch uninflated balloons over flashlights to create colored light. What happens when you mix the colors?
- 27. Cut a paper plate into wedges. Ask your child to fit the pieces into a circle again.
- 28. Will your child start kindergarten in the fall? Find out when to register.

