

Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

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KID BITS

Conference time

A parent-teacher conference, whether virtual or in person, lets you share information about your youngster and learn how you can help her. Mention what she likes best about school and what's challenging for her. And ask what you can do that will build on what she's learning.

Dancing flashlight

Here's a fun way for your youngster to explore the beat in music. Together, take a flashlight into a dark room. Play a fast song—can he make the flashlight “dance” to the music? Now play a slower tune while he moves the beam. *Idea:* Have him make colorful beams of light by taping squares of colored tissue paper over the end of the flashlight.

Prevent choking

Little ones don't always chew their food completely, which can lead to choking. Minimize the risk by making sure your child always sits down while she eats. Slice grapes, carrots, and hot dogs in half lengthwise. Also, wait until she's older for hard candies and chewing gum.

Worth quoting

“If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden.”

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Just for fun

Q: What followed the piglet?

A: Its tail.



I'm an alphabet detective!

Let your child play detective and investigate the alphabet with these fun “cases.” He'll practice recognizing letters and their sounds—skills that will help him learn to read.

Note: Have your youngster write each letter, A–Z, on a separate slip of paper to use for these activities.



Mysterious sounds

Put all the letters in a pillowcase. Secretly pull one out, and say a word that starts with the letter, emphasizing its sound. (“R-r-rainbow.”) Encourage your child to repeat the word and tell you the first letter. (“R-r-rainbow, R!”) Now let him pull out a letter and make its sound for you to “investigate.”

Hidden clues

Help your youngster make a “magnifying glass”: Cut the center from a small paper plate, tape plastic wrap over the hole, and attach a craft-stick handle. Then, have him gather items

with tiny print (toothpaste tube, gift card, coin). Can he use his magnifying glass to spot every letter of the alphabet? To keep track, as he finds each one he can turn the slip of paper with the matching letter upside down.

Vanishing letters

Ask your child to arrange the letters in ABC order. Next, he should close his eyes while you take away a letter. His mission is to tell you which letter has “disappeared.” If he needs help, he could sing the alphabet song as he touches each letter. Play again, and let him make a letter “vanish.”♥

What we're thankful for

Noticing small things to be grateful for each day helps everyone in your family have a brighter outlook. Here's how to start a daily thankfulness routine.

1. Set aside time every day to share what you're grateful for. Perhaps you'll chat at bedtime or during dinner.

2. Have each family member name three things she's thankful for that day—big *and* little. Your child might say she's grateful for you and for takeout pizza, for instance.

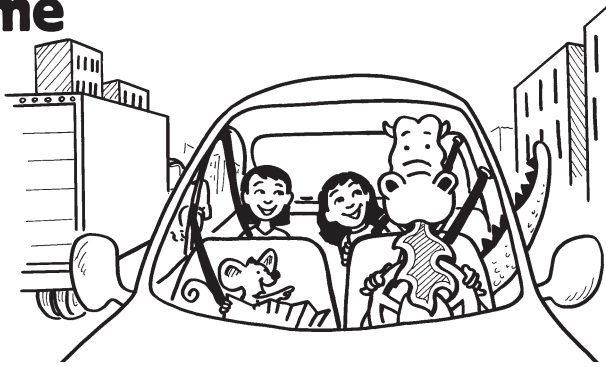
3. Let your youngster make a gratitude notebook. Help her write down what everyone is thankful for each day and illustrate it. *Tip:* Read over past entries together as a reminder of all the positives in your lives.♥



Tame screen time

Electronic devices often keep little ones happily occupied, which can make limiting screen time a challenge for busy parents. We asked parents to share their top tips for cutting back, and here's what they told us.

Keep track. "I discovered this idea last year after taking my daughter to an arcade. When we got home, she got four checkers to use as 'game



tokens.' She hands me a token in exchange for 15 minutes of screen time. When she's out of tokens, her screen time is up for the day."

Play games. "The car is the number one place where my child begs to play on my phone. So we started playing screen-free games instead. Our favorite is where we act like storybook characters and have to guess each other's

identities. We might pretend to breathe fire like a dragon or talk in a squeaky voice like a mouse."

Redirect. "I found this strategy by accident. My daughter asked to use my tablet because she was bored. I cheerfully replied, 'But it's not tablet time, it's coloring time.' It worked! Now if she asks for too much screen time, I suggest it's time for a different activity. She usually shifts gears without complaint."♥

PARENT TO PARENT

Following directions: A simple strategy

My son Lucas sometimes struggles to follow directions when he does school-work or chores. I asked his teacher for advice, and she said that before she gives instructions, she signals students to listen by touching her ear.



So when Lucas left his Legos on the floor, I held my finger to my ear and said, "Please put your Legos in the bin." Lucas laughed and replied, "Mrs. Sanchez does the same thing!" And he promptly did exactly as I asked. Then recently, he had an assignment to draw healthy Thanksgiving foods. I read the instructions aloud, tapping my ear for *healthy* and *Thanksgiving*. He listened, then drew foods like turkey and carrots—and no pumpkin pie.

I like having a silent reminder to use, and Lucas is getting better at following instructions.♥



Q & A

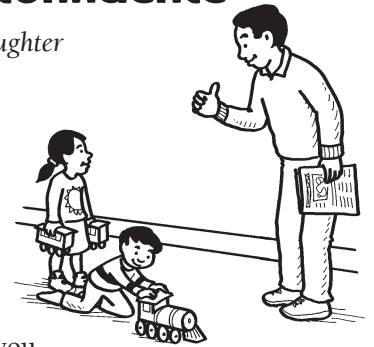
Praise that builds self-confidence

Q: I usually just say "good job" when my daughter does something well. Is there a better way to praise her?

A: Everyone wants to hear that they're doing well, and your child is no different. While there's nothing wrong with saying "good job," a more specific compliment tells your daughter exactly what she did well.

If she shows you her completed jigsaw puzzle, you might say, "That puzzle has a lot of pieces—you really stuck with it." Or when she shares a toy with a sibling, you could tell her, "I noticed you were generous by letting your brother play with your favorite train."

She'll feel good about herself—and be likely to find more ways to solve problems on her own or get along with others.♥



ACTIVITY CORNER

Think outside—and inside—the box

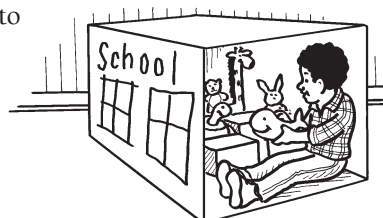
Big cardboard boxes can inspire your child to think creatively. Let him try these ideas:

- A box can become a cozy "classroom" for your youngster's stuffed animals. He could "teach" them by reading aloud or showing them how to count.

- Encourage your child to climb inside a box and draw on the "walls" with crayons. Maybe he'll design stars and planets so it looks like an outer space scene.

Or perhaps he'll create an undersea environment with colorful fish.

- Suggest that your youngster decorate the outside of a box. He might draw gumdrops and lollipops to turn it into a gingerbread house or add zigzags to make a race car, for instance.



Tip: No large box? Have your child help you make one. Open several smaller boxes at the seams, and tape them together.♥

OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote school readiness, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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