

HOME LEARNING GUIDE



Developed by Washington County Head Start
A Program of Washington County Community Action Organization
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Parents are Educators

The overall purpose of this Home Learning Guide is to support parents as the primary educators of their children.

Sections of the Guide include:

Teaching Methods

Home Learning Activities

The Learning Child

Living with Your Child

Home teaching can be successful without special materials. Any parent can use the ideas in this guide.

Skills that will improve are:

Teaching with everyday home activities.

Understanding developmental stages of children.

Guidance and discipline.

Dealing with common childrearing problems.

Assessment

Does one of these skills seem more important to you than the others?

Do you see yourself as your child's most important teacher?

Teaching Methods

- Communication, Demonstration, Repetition
- Feedback and Attention
- Expectations



Teaching Methods: Communication, Demonstration, Repetition

Communication: You can teach a lot with words.

Tell the child what you are doing and why you are doing it. Your child will learn the words to go with the actions.

"I'm putting some oil in the pan so the food won't get stuck when we cook it."

Explain and describe to the child what he or she is doing. This teaches new words and concepts.

"You're stacking the boxes, one, two, three."

Use more words than the child does when you answer. This builds the child's vocabulary.

The child says, "That a book," and you say, "Yes, that's a book about animals. See if you can find a horse."

Demonstration: Show and Tell

You show the child how to do it, and at the same time explain. Let the child try to imitate the new skill right away.

If the new skill has many separate actions in it, the child will not be able to imitate it all at one time. You can help with the tricky parts until he or she can remember it all.

Skills you can demonstrate are:

- Holding a pencil
- Cutting
- Brushing teeth
- Getting a coat on
- Folding clothes

Repetition: Practice makes perfect

Give your explanation or demonstration each time your child does the new thing. Don't force practice: Most children are very willing to practice unless a skill is too difficult for them. Read a new book every day, or several times a day, if your child is interested. Let him or her go down the slide twenty times, and go back in a day or two to do it again!

Teaching Methods: Feedback and Attention

Feedback

We all need to know when we're doing well, and need encouragement when we are trying. Children need to know their parents believe in them.

Encourage efforts: encouragement will give your child confidence. The child who tries will eventually succeed.

"Use your muscles. I think you can do it but I'll help if you need me to."

"Soon you'll be able to do it all by yourself."

"I think you can figure that out."

"I like to see you trying."

Praise small steps: Each little step is a success. Praise shows you think your child's learning is important. Don't criticize-- it takes away the desire to try. Specific praise is much more helpful than 'good girl' or 'good boy'.

"What a good J you made! Soon you'll be able to write your whole name."

"You got your shoes on all by yourself! Now I'll help you tie them."

Attention

Giving full attention is something many adults find difficult. Yet it forms the basis for all teaching. A lot of 'bad' behavior is really children trying to get attention. Give it ahead of time and you won't see as much of the bad behavior.

Zip your lips: Listen without interrupting. Look at the child and stop your activity to really hear what he/she is saying. Ask questions that will encourage the child to tell you more. Listening makes your child feel loved and respected and shows the child that his/her ideas are important.

Give daily attention: Find time to give a few minutes of full attention each day; time to talk, to watch your child, to teach, encourage, and play with him or her. This gives your child security and makes learning stick.

"Tell me about it."

"Show me how you did that."

"What happened next?"

Expectations

Parents and teachers often have high hopes that a child can learn to write his or her name in an afternoon or learn to read on his or her own by learning the alphabet. This is too much to expect.

It can be disappointing to arrange a special learning experience or buy an expensive "educational" toy only to find the child is not interested. But this is the nature of learning: the learner must be ready and willing and able to accomplish the steps in the task. Here are some things to avoid:

Don't compare your child to others.

It's tempting, but somebody's feelings will always be hurt.

Don't label your child.

If you say he's dumb, eventually he will believe it, and he will be more and more likely to act dumb. Children listen to what is said about them.

Don't make home teaching unpleasant work.

If it isn't fun, you are trying too hard! Children have short attention spans. The goal is for your child to enjoy learning from you.

Don't worry about products.

Children under six learn more from the doing than from the end result. Making scribbles is a step in learning to draw pictures and write letters.

Don't take away learning opportunities because of mess:

All children are forgetful and messy sometimes. Help your child with cleanup many, many times until it becomes habit.

If learning materials are misused, they can be put away for the rest of the day, but tried again tomorrow with gentle reminders of proper use.

Control the use of learning materials that might be a problem if scattered around the house.

Keep scissors in a cupboard and only allow them to be used at the table.

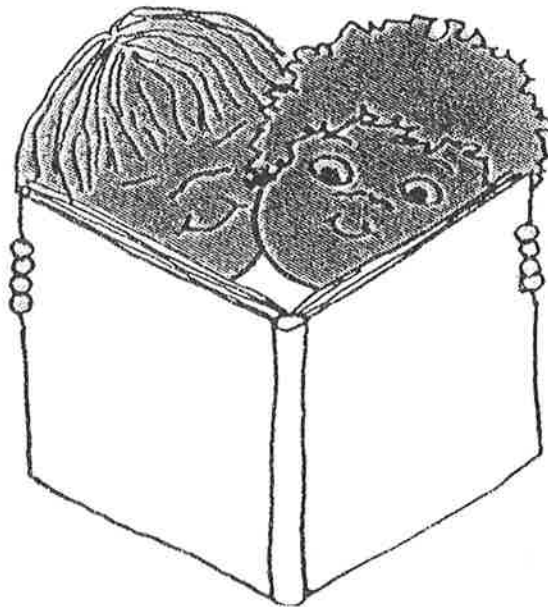
Find a shoe box or other container for art supplies and for sets like legos.

Plan on spending some time making sure things get put in their containers.

You and your child can enjoy decorating the toy containers as well.

Home Learning Activities

- Language Activities
- Working with Numbers
- Body Skills
- Thinking Skills
- About Diversity
- Literature
- Reading Skills (Literacy)
- Writing
- Teaching with Food
- Television



Language Activities

Thank goodness we do not have to teach children how to talk! They learn it on their own, naturally, better than we could ever hope to teach it. Children who live in a language-rich environment are more likely to do well in school. Create a rich language environment in your home and listen to your child learn!

EXPAND what your child says.

The child says "I want ball." You say, "You want the red ball?" or "You want the new red ball we got at Safeway?"

BE SPECIFIC when talking to your child.

Instead of "Give me that," say, "Give me my purse." Instead of "Sit over there," say, "Sit on the brown chair by the window."

DESCRIBE things to your child. Children are interested in lots of things we take for granted.

When you see your child getting curious about something, start talking. Talk about its color, its shape, what it is made of, how people use it, its size, and how it feels. Encourage your child to ask questions and join in the description.

ASK your child about his or her activities; then LISTEN.

"What did you play with?" "What did your friend do?" "Did you paint a picture?" "What colors did you use?" "Can you tell me about it?"

READ to your child.

Read the mixing directions when you make pancakes, the ads in the paper, the traffic signs, the swimming pool rules, the directions on the lid of the washing machine.

This shows your child what reading is for.

Assessment

Can your child tell you all about some exciting thing he or she did?

Does your child like to talk to you?

What new words have you heard your child trying out today?

Language Activities

Describing Words Children Can Learn

large huge enormous tiny teensy small easy simple hard difficult impossible
terrible wonderful silly heavy gigantic beautiful lovely exactly interesting puzzled
curious odd unusual surprising smooth rough slick thin thick slender hard
soft puffy sharp pointed bumpy cold warm hot cool delicious

(Remember, if they can say, "Teenage mutant runja turtle," they can say any of the words above!)

Food Talk: Talk about how food tastes, smells, and feels. Is it sweet, sour, salty, spicy? Is it crunchy, smooth, cool, hot, juicy, slippery?

Food Names: Ask your child, what did you eat at school today? Teach your child the name of every food he or she eats. Children have very good memory for such important things!

Speech

Because they have only been talking for a couple of years, preschoolers do not talk perfectly. Most of their language mistakes correct themselves over time.

Grammar: It is normal for children this age to say words like teached, brang, tooths, and foots.

Don't try to make them say it right, but instead repeat what they said, using the right words. For example, the child says, "My foots are cold," and you say "Your feet are cold? Let's get some warm socks for those feet."

Sounds: It is also normal for children to have trouble making sounds like r's and l's and combinations as in "spaghetti" or "hamburger."

If your child is very hard to understand, you might need to talk to a speech specialist to develop a plan to help your child practice making sounds. Otherwise, it is best to use good pronunciation yourself and avoid making your child feel self-conscious about his or her speech.

Working with Numbers

People use math every day without realizing it. When you grab the plates for the dinner table, or look at the speedometer, or tear a piece of gum in half, or sort clean clothes, you are using number and math concepts. Children are able to use this type of math long before they can sit down with a pencil and do math problems. The more experience they have with informal, everyday math, the easier it is for them to learn paper and pencil math later!

Counting

- ☒ Count things in your house: the chairs, windows, people, feet, spoons, doors, beds, doorknobs. Make a list and add to it as your child thinks of new things to count.
- ☒ After lots of practice counting, you can add challenges such as asking how many toes are at the dinner table--without taking shoes off. This is beginning multiplication, yet many children can figure it out.
- ☒ Count how many blocks can be stacked before the tower crashes.
- ☒ Count the child's age on his or her fingers.
- ☒ When you want something done right away, say, "See if you can do it by the time I count to five." If you try this too often, children learn to just stand there and smile while you count.
- ☒ Have a penny jar and let the child count real pennies.
- ☒ Make a "hundred sheet", a square piece of paper about 8x8 inches, with one hundred squares drawn carefully on it with a ruler. Write the numbers from 1 to 100 in the squares. Children enjoy making rows or filling the sheet with pennies, buttons or rocks.
- ☒ Snack counting game: roll dice and let the child eat as many cheerios or raisins or cheese cubes as the dice show.
- ☒ When giving your child crackers or other snacks, ask "How many do you want?" Then count them out loud as you hand them over.
- ☒ Memorizing the numbers from one to ten is not the same as counting objects: practice both.

Toys for counting: playing cards, dice, blocks, money, buttons.

Working with Numbers

Making Patterns

- ◇ Set the table: plate, glass and silverware for each person.
- ◇ For children who can cut and fold, show them how to make designs by folding, then cutting notches out of paper.
- ◇ Draw Patterns. When your child asks you to draw with him/her, make a pattern by folding the paper in half, opening it, then having the child make a mark on his/her side, and you imitate it on your side.
- ◇ Let your child string Fruit Loops, at first any way he/she wants, but later by suggesting a pattern of color--two yellow, two red, etc.

Sorting and Classifying

- ◇ Match socks and sort clothes.
- ◇ Put away clean silverware in the little tray that separates knives, forks, spoons.
- ◇ Give your child an egg carton and a jar of buttons. (You can buy buttons in thrift stores, or pull them off clothes you are discarding). Let your child play with the buttons and egg carton at the table. Most children start by just filling the carton with buttons. Another time they might decide to put their "favorites" in one compartment. You can help by describing how the buttons are alike and different--how many holes, what color, size, thickness, etc.
- ◇ For experienced sorters: after your child sorts buttons according to color, suggest, "Can you find another way to sort them?"
- ◇ "Play cards" by letting your child sort them. At first a child will pick out the face cards, or search for all the aces. Later he/she will notice they can be sorted by number or by suit. Make it a game by turning the stack face down and flipping the cards up one at a time.

Assessment

How many objects can your child count before skipping a number?

Is your child interested in counting?

Does watching Sesame Street help your child with counting?

What "natural" math did your child do today?

Body Skills

Playing at the Park

Swinging:

Encourage your child to learn to pump on the swings. Some children find this easy; others practice for two or three summers before they can pump. Always be willing to give "just three" pushes. Never push a child higher than he or she wants to go.

Climbing:

Most children love to climb. If your child wants to climb high, stand nearby ready to help him or her find a foothold. It is harder to come down than go up, and often it looks scary once they get to the top. Help the child down by telling her or him what to do next, even guiding a foot or two, rather than by just plucking the child from the climber.

Running:

Encourage your child to run. The park is the place to do it, not the living room! Rather than competing in races, children can be encouraged to run with a partner, staying right next to them no matter how fast or slow the partner goes. Or they can try running up hills, down hills, around things, sideways, or backwards (only on soft grass). They can try to gallop, sprint, or jog.

Riding:

Pedaling can be learned by most three-year-olds if they have a suitable trike or Big Wheel. Learning to ride a two-wheeler is easy for some children at five, and impossible for others until they are seven or eight. Your own child's interest in trying is probably the best indicator. A child can play with a trike or bike in lots of ways even before riding it.

Toys for body skills: A trike (Big Wheel types are safer because they are lower to the ground), a large ball (which will probably get lost or pop but is worth replacing), small balls, beanbags, balloons, and a visit to a park at least every week.

Body Skills

Ball Games

We don't realize the coordination required to catch or throw a ball until we toss one to a two-year old! Three and four year olds are not accurate throwers, but don't mind chasing the ball.

- ◇ A big ball can be gently bounced to the child from about 4 feet away. Encourage the child to watch the ball. Be patient, and have a sense of humor, and do this many times on many days.
- ◇ Small balls are good for throwing. Nerf (foam) balls are good for indoors. Tossing rocks into a creek is fun.
- ◇ Provide a "target." A bucket or box that is propped sideways against a wall is a good target for tennis balls or 4-inch rubber balls. Basketball hoops set low can be fun, but only if mounted on a backboard or wall.

Other games

- ◇ Walk-a-straight-line on the sidewalk crack, along the parking ridge in a parking lot, etc. This really builds balance.
- ◇ Teach your child to skip. Hold his or her hand while you skip together. This is HARD for most 4-year-olds, impossible for threes.
- ◇ Jumping games. Children can jump down from 2 or 3 feet easily, but probably can't jump over things more than 6 inches high. They can also see how far they can jump.
- ◇ Simon Says or copy me: You can lead with exercises, jumps, toe-touching, standing on one foot, etc. Then let the child lead. Start slowly and build up speed. At four the child isn't ready for the tricking part of Simon Says but very much enjoys the game without being tricked.

Wildness: Sometimes children lose control and get very wild, running and jumping and throwing things around in the house. Parents do not need to allow this. Give the children three choices of things they can do, and in your own mind plan a trip to a park or playground soon!

Assessment:

Is your child bold or hesitant when trying new body skills?

Are you bold or hesitant when your child wants to try new things-- do you get nervous and tell him or her to be careful?

Is your child overly active? Underactive? About right?

Thinking Skills

Foundations of thinking come from simple experiences repeated often. These activities provide practice with solving problems, especially if you take an interest.

Water Play

In the bathtub:

Nesting cups, measuring cups, straws or tubes, empty plastic shampoo bottles, and boats are all fun in the tub. Have a bucket or basket in the bathroom and let your child choose.

Outside:

A bucket with plastic cups and spoons, an old paintbrush, pie tins or TV dinner trays-- these can provide hours of outside fun on a warm day. Encourage imagination: "What kind of pie are you making?" Expect the children to get dirty and to make their play area muddy! Run the bath before they are done.

Discovery

Examination:

When your child finds something interesting, you can examine it together. Small things found on the ground are great for this. When he or she discovers a spider or beetle, look with the child (you don't have to touch!) and talk about it in detail: "Look how many legs it has. I wonder how it eats? Does it have wings?" A magnifier can be handy.

Collections:

Your child will probably want to collect or save found treasures. Collecting increases from age 4 through age 10 or more. It is a sign that your child's mind is working! Save clean plastic containers your child can use for bugs. Donate shoe boxes for feathers or rocks. When your child is older, he or she may get involved in mounting and labeling the collections and showing them at the fair.

Walks are Field Trips:

Any time you travel is a potential discovery time. The only limit is your imagination. Today when you walk to the store, make it an animal walk. Tomorrow, a green walk. Other things to look for and talk about: holes, water, bugs, circles, squares, trash.

Toys for thinking:

A doll or stuffed animal, sturdy plastic containers (can be rescued from the garbage), a few large spoons you won't miss if lost, toy cars or vehicles, and lots of imagination. A calendar for the child's bedroom is handy.

Thinking Skills

Cooking: Let the child stir or mix, and peel. Talk about what you are doing. Notice how the food changes as it is cooked.

Acting: "Be" animals, cars, plants, monsters. You be the child and let the child be the parent.

Teach about time: "Yesterday we went to the park, today we are going to the doctor, tomorrow you will go to school," or "When the long hand points to this 12, Sesame Street will be on."

Plan the day with your child: "First we'll go to the store, then we'll come home and have lunch, etc." This helps reduce children's resistance to activities that are coming up.

Games of Wonder

These talking games are great with four and five year olds. Be sure to get your child's opinions, don't correct, and try not to laugh unless the child is joking.

Are monsters alive?

What can we make out of this piece of paper?

What if people didn't have mouths?

What if your eyes were where your ears are?

Where were you when your mom was a little girl?

Why does the sun go away at night?

What would you do with a million dollars?

What if it was always day, never night?

Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving is a four step process that we all struggle to learn. You can help teach your child:

1. What is wrong? Or, What is the question? Define the problem.
2. What could I do? Brainstorm possible solutions. Accept all ideas.
3. What will I try? Decide what solution to try first.
4. Did it work? How good was the solution--should you try another? This is where we learn from the experience.

Assessment:

Is your child able to play creatively with water or sand?

Can you allow your boy to dress up or feed a doll, your girl to build with blocks or play super heroes?

How does your child respond when faced with a problem?

Does your child have a sense of humor?

About Diversity

Children are curious about those who are different from the people they are familiar with. Some preschoolers ask questions (loudly, in public) about such people. Examples are "How did that lady get so fat? What is wrong with his legs?" Some children don't ask questions but avoid people who are different. They pick up the attitudes and biases of our culture by watching TV and advertising. But they learn how to treat other people from us, their parents and teachers.

Depending on their experience, children may have questions or concerns about the following differences:

People with disabilities
Very tall or very short people
Elderly people
People with visible scars or birthmarks
People who speak another language
People whose skin is darker or lighter

Questions are OK:

When your child asks that embarrassing question within hearing of the person it is about, calmly say you will talk about it later. Bring it up as soon as you can, saying "*You had a question about that man in the wheelchair. Let's talk about it now.*" Make a mental note to give your child opportunities to be around other people similar to the person in question.

Questions might include: Was the person always this way or did something happen to cause it? Can I catch it from the person? Can that person talk, play, be friends?

Provide Factual Information:

Give your child a one-sentence factual answer to his or her question. Invite more questions. NEVER tell a child ANYTHING like 'that's what will happen to you if you aren't good.' Explain that there is no difference that automatically makes a person not-ok to be friends with.

Build Empathy:

When you can, help your child think about what it would be like to be that person. If you saw a very old person with a walker, talk about what that person would need to do to get to the bathroom, or to get a bowl of cereal. If you saw someone in a wheelchair, let your child sit in one next time you are at the clinic. Children are very capable of understanding differences in the context of activities they are familiar with.

Literature

Many wonderful books and stories have been written for young children, and every local library has an extensive selection. It can be overwhelming! Here are some "classics" you can try:

Abiyoyo	Flip the Pony	Alexander and the Terrible,
Are You My Mother?	Goodnight Moon	Horrible, no Good, Very Bad Day
Bedtime for Frances	Green Eggs and Ham	Love You Forever
Brown Bear, Brown Bear	Harold and The Purple Crayon	Name Lizzie's Colors
Caps for Sale	Harry and the Terrible Whatzit	The Digginess Dog
Chickens aren't the Only Ones	King Bidgood	The Giving Tree
Clifford the Big Red Dog	Peter's Chair	The Paper Bag Princess
Curious George	Pierre	The Song and Dance Man
Dr. Seuss Books	Stone Soup	The Very Hungry Caterpillar
Fairy Tales by Paul Caldone	Swimmy	What's Inside
Five Minutes' Peace	There's a Nightmare in my Closet	Where do Butterflies Go When it Rains?
Little Blue, Little Yellow	The Balancing Girl	Where the Wild Things Are
		William's Doll

Teach nursery rhymes (great when waiting or walking)

One, two, buckle my shoe
Three, four, shut the door
Five, six, pick up sticks
Seven, eight, lay them straight
Nine, ten, start again!

Five little monkeys, jumpin' on the bed
One fell off and bumped his(her) head
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said, "No more
monkeys jumpin' on the bed!"
(Repeat with four, three, two, etc.)

Eensy, weensy spider went up the water spout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
And the eensy weensy spider went up the spout again.

Ask your child's teacher for copies of the words to the nursery rhymes and fingerplays they are singing in class.

Reading Skills (Literacy)

A child has begun to read when he or she can find that favorite kind of cereal on store shelves, can recognize a stop sign, and can recognize his or her own name.

Teaching Concepts

Concepts are important so the child will understand what he or she later learns to read. Here are some things a beginning reader needs to know:

At least six colors	Big/little, up/down, over/under
Knife, fork, spoon	At least eight animals
At least ten body parts	His or her first and last name

The Alphabet

Sing the ABC song. This doesn't necessarily mean the child can pick out an F or S in written words, but is fun and easy.

Say the names of the letters in the child's name as he or she learns to write it.

Teach other letters by pointing out the first letter of common signs the child already knows.
Example: "Yes, that's a stop sign. It starts with S. Ssssssstop."

Borrow or buy an alphabet book: A is for apple, etc. Make your own with magazine pictures.

Follow the child's lead

If you are available, listening, and reading to your child, you will know when your child is ready to learn more.

Don't rely on TV or older children to teach a three or four year old. When you hear interest, take the opportunity to answer the question, then teach one more little bit your child didn't ask for. A minute or two at a time does it.

Toys for beginning readers: A box of magnetic letters to stick on the refrigerator, an ABC book, a picture dictionary like The Golden Book of Words, and storybooks. You do not need a computer or a set of encyclopedias!

Reading Skills (Literacy)

Reading Aloud

- Read the cereal box, the TV guide, and recipes aloud.
- Have your child help you find favorite brand names at the store.
- Let your child see you reading and tell him or her what you are reading about.
- Read the child's favorite books many, many times--until the child can "read" it to him/herself. Even then, keep reading it. Try changing a word or two and see how your child reacts.
- Look at pictures in books and magazines and talk about them with your child. What are they doing? What are they going to do next? Look at all the small details in the pictures. Make up a story.
- When your child draws a picture and tells you about it, offer to write his or her words on the paper; then read it back.

Figuring out Words

After your child knows most of the letters, he or she might start figuring out words. The age at which children begin reading words varies a lot, from age three to age six.

Three Letter Words: Play with three letter combinations that make lots of words: hit, hat, hot. Him, ham, hum. Bat, cat, sat. Changing the first letter is easiest. Write them, tell your child the first one, and then play with letter sounds until he or she guesses the second and third ones.

Rhymes: Early words are easy to rhyme. This is the time to get out the Dr. Seuss-type books with the label "I Can Read" on them. Read these to your child, asking the child to predict the next word on the rhymes. Point to the words together.

Sight words: You can start teaching your child some basic words that need to be known early on: the, and, something, exit, stop, speed, etc. A fun way to do this is to show the word and have your child hunt for it in a story, maybe circling it in a newspaper article.

Assessment:

What did you notice about your child's memory?

How is your child's vocabulary: does he or she know lots of words?

How is your child showing signs of literacy?

Writing

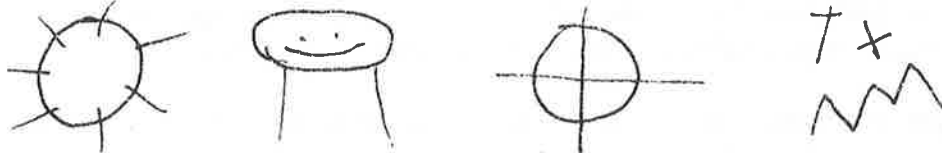
Drawing

Drawing is the best preparation for writing. Let your child draw every day. Plain paper is best; coloring books are better for six year olds. Markers are more rewarding than crayons--try both. The best drawing time is when you are cooking or sitting nearby so the child can visit with you and tell you about the picture. Don't try to tell the child what to draw; don't criticize or laugh at his or her efforts; save and put up at least a few drawings. If you don't have much wall space, put up a small bulletin board or a border around an area about 16 inches square and let your child decide what to put on it.

Left or right-handed? It is common for children to use either hand, or even switch hands, while drawing. Encourage your child to think about it and use the hand that feels best. Handedness is determined by the brain; there is no way to change a child's hand preference. It can take up to age 5 or 6 for a child to establish his or her hand preference.

Draw-in or draw-around: Let your child use container lids, boxes, etc. to trace around or inside. This is quite hard for preschoolers. Inside tracing is easier than outside tracing. If you have flat plastic lids (as on margarine tubs) you can cut shapes out of the middle for tracing.

Draw shapes and figures: As the child gains control you will start to see designs. When you see circles, you can show how dots make eyes and a line makes a mouth. Early pictures often have these forms:



Shape Paper: Provide plain paper in interesting shapes--circles, triangles, ovals, diamonds--to encourage your child to experiment with drawing.

Dictation: To help your child learn what writing is for, offer to write his or her words on his/her drawings.

Signs: Make labels for things in your house: chair, table, window, bathroom, etc.

Assessment

Is your child consistently right- or left-handed, or unsure?

Does your child like to tell you about his or her drawings?

If your child is not showing much interest in drawing or writing, what interests does he or she have that you could use to "lure" him/her? (for example, writing a recipe or making a list of favorite TV shows).

Writing

Imitation: The child takes paper and pen or pencil and makes some marks which he or she claims are your name, or are a shopping list, etc. Respond to this by asking the child to tell you what it says. You will be interested to note that the marks on the paper do help the child remember what they stand for, even if they mean nothing to anyone else.

Imitation of Formats: Some children begin making patterned squiggles that look like imitation writing. They may organize these squiggles to look like a list, or a letter (with greeting and signature), or a story (with title and body of text). Invite your child to tell you about it, and to draw a picture to go with the story or letter.

Writing Letters

The child needs to be able to draw simple shapes before starting to write letters. Usually the child wants to write his or her name. Print names using a capital for the first letter, lower case for the others, and tell the child the name of each letter. It may take several months for your child to learn to write his or her name without your help.

Backwards Letters: Most children go through a stage where they don't seem to notice when the letters they make are backwards or even upside down. Even when they are printing very clearly, they may start on the wrong edge of the paper and end up writing the whole message in mirror image. Backward letters can continue to show up even in first and second grade. *Don't worry* about this, and don't correct your child unless he or she asks you to.

Tracing over letters and shapes: Draw shapes or letters with a thick marker on one piece of paper, and clip another piece over it so the child can trace them. This is very good practice. You can also hold two pencils or pens and make "roads" for the child to follow.

Junior Office: For little or no money you can set your child up with a junior office, complete with blank forms to fill out (unused deposit slips, check registers, school forms), blank books to write or draw in (folded paper stapled into books), and equipment such as a hole punch, cup with pencils and pens, envelopes, "stamps" (stickers you get in the mail for record companies), and anything else you have handy that might go with an office. All you need is a little table to put it all on. Your child will use this most when he or she can imitate something you are doing, such as paying bills or writing a letter.

Toys that help with writing are: felt pens, crayons, pencils, plain paper (such as typing paper), scissors, envelopes, a variety of paper types, hole punch, tape, unused forms.

Teaching With Food

Good nutrition in childhood is very important for lifelong health, and because of their natural interest in food, it is easy to teach preschoolers about healthy food.

Beautiful meals are fun to make and enjoy: all orange food (macaroni and cheese, oranges, and carrots); all green food (spinach pasta, broccoli, kiwi); color combinations in mixed vegetables, etc. can all encourage children to take an interest in food.

Peel carrots and cucumbers or other vegetables and serve them with a simple dip for snacks.

Wash an orange and cut a 1/2 inch hole in the peel, then let your child squeeze and suck until all the juice is gone.

Make a salad with your child. Simple combinations, like lettuce with tomato or cucumber or shredded carrot, are enjoyed by children. They are much more likely to eat a salad if they helped prepare the food and had some nibbles along the way. Any child can tear lettuce!

Make homemade popsicles out of real juice. Use a little less water to mix frozen juice, then put in ice cube trays with popsicle sticks (sold as "craft sticks").

Cut sandwiches in interesting shapes (triangles, long strips, etc.). Make pancakes in animal, ring, or letter shapes. Hunt for letters in alphabet soup.

Food Language

Talk about how the food tastes, smells, feels, and looks. Is it sweet, sour, salty, spicy? Is it crunchy, smooth, cool, hot, juicy, slippery? How does its taste and smell fit with how it looks? What other food does it remind you of?

Teach your child the name of every food he or she eats. He or she will have a very good memory for such important things!

Assessment

Is your child interested in talking about food?

Is he or she more willing to try food if you talk about it and prepare it together?

Does grocery shopping go more smoothly when you talk about the foods and how you will fix them?

Television

Children can learn about things and places from television, and of course it entertains them. But a child learns much more from playing than from watching TV. Television doesn't help children learn to talk well, either--talking with adults does. Some children get overly active when the TV is always on, because it adds to the background noise.

Watch Sesame Street and/or Mr. Rogers with your child, and reinforce what you see him or her learning.

Don't let bedtime slide for television.

Turn it off when it isn't being watched.

Watch shows with your child and talk about what you are watching.

Talk about a show you liked a day or two later, to remember it.

Turn off inappropriate shows. When your child starts to watch a show that is too violent or scary or dumb, firmly turn it off or change the channel and give your reason. Some people think it is OK to have adult shows on while children watch because the child "Won't understand it." True, the child won't understand it, but is likely to be confused and/or frightened and may develop some misunderstandings of adult behavior as a result.

Some things to talk about:

- ♣ What was funny/sad?
- ♣ Was the show true or a story?
- ♣ What is an actor?
- ♣ How does the picture get into the TV?
- ♣ What is your favorite show? Why?

Get a large box, cut a square opening in it and let the children play TV with it.

The best thing about TV: snuggling up to watch a show.

The worst: feeling hypnotized into watching whatever junky stuff is on.

Assessment

Does your child sit and watch TV, or play nearby and occasionally look at it?

Do you feel your child watches too much TV, not enough, or about right?

How do your TV viewing habits influence your child?

Does your child pressure you to buy things he or she sees on commercials?

The Learning Child

- Social Development
- Knowledge Development
- Physical Development
- Language Development
- Special Needs
- The Individual Child
- Educational Goals for Preschoolers
- Personal Safety Goals



Social Development

<u>The preschool child...</u>	<u>And the child needs....</u>
* can engage in dramatic (pretend) play	to play with neighbors, to go to preschool
* is beginning to share and take turns	supervision and help with sharing
* can trade one toy for another	suggestions to trade when conflicts arise
* likes to help, enjoys working along with adults	to help with housework, and to live in an orderly environment
* is developing skills in eating with fork and spoon.....	to try new foods and to feed self
* is learning to dress self.....	to choose clothes to wear, to have 'just the right amount' of help
* can get frustrated when trying new tasks	encouragement and lots of chances to try again
* has strong feelings and may cry or hit when upset	'no hurting' rule and encouragement to use words
* is proud of new skills and tries hard to show them off.....	praise for trying, adult audience, encouragement to help others learn
* is trying to learn rules and good behavior, but forgets and makes mistakes	to be told what to do as well as what not to do
* is very active and seems not to listen sometimes.....	to be looked at when being talked to
* has a very active imagination.....	opportunities to pretend
* may have fears of the dark, strangers, monsters	adults who will listen and talk about the child's fears
* is developing a sense of cultural, family identity	to participate in family and cultural traditions
* is curious about the body and about people who look different	simple, honest explanations; opportunities to play with people who seem different
* knows his/her own sex, but pretends to be either.....	permission to try out male and female roles in play

Knowledge Development

The preschool child...

And the child needs....

- | | |
|--|---|
| * displays curiosity in lots of ways | chances to explore, take things apart,
watch adults fix things |
| * asks lots of questions | patient answers about how things work and
what they are for |
| * learns by doing, touching, building, playing | sets of things to play with: building toys, art
materials, pretend props |
| * is interested in knowing colors, names of things | things described in detail--color, shape, use |
| * learns numbers and counting through play | blocks, collections of objects like buttons,
coins, small cars |
| * develops a sense of quantity and size | opportunities to play outside or in the
bathtub with containers, cups, spoons |
| * has a sense of time: today, another day
(yesterday = not today)..... | a predictable routine of daily activities, an
idea of what is planned each day |
| * is ready to learn about the community | opportunities to go places and see new
things |
| * sorts and classifies things | opportunities to match socks, put silverware
away, help put sets of toys away. |
| * recognizes common signs and symbols
(stop signs, store names) | on short trips to the store, etc., a 'teacher'
to point out some signs and symbols |
| * recognizes his/her own name | adult puts child's name on his/her coat,
drawings, toys |
| * is interested in using real tools for building
or cooking (hammers, knives)..... | close adult supervision so the child can try
these things safely |
| * can learn from TV, stories, books | to be exposed to quality television and
books |
| * asks to be read to | ** you guessed it! |
| * shows interest in print medium - enjoys
looking at books, asks what signs say, etc..... | to see a variety of printed things each day;
adults who value reading |
| * is beginning to write, to make things, and
to draw pictures that are recognizable | opportunities to draw, write, and make
things daily at home. |

Physical Development

The preschool child ...

And the child needs ...

- * is ready for lots of active play..... daily opportunities to run, climb, swing,
..... and ride
- * is developing a hand preference..... encouragement to use the hand that
..... feels best
- * likes to use writing (office) tools
such as pencils, hole punch, typewriter a set of materials to use at the table
- * likes to imitate the movements of others..... to dance and play games
- * has much more energy than adults..... to play actively with other children
- * plays hard and tires quickly ten hours of sleep a night; maybe a nap
- * adjusts well to a daily routine regular bedtime and meals
- * gets hungry more often than adults three meals a day and healthy snacks
..... between meals
- * is growing rapidly a well-balanced diet
- * catches colds easily; may get ear infections..... lots of fruit, doctor visit for ears, learn to
..... wash hands frequently
- * can brush own teeth thoroughly..... adult who will brush with child, to show
..... how to do it
- * finds it hard to sit still and prefers
to play on the floor to be given active learning opportunities
- * is learning to hold and use pencil,
crayons, scissors lots of opportunities to draw, scribble,
..... and cut--with adult supervision

Language Development

The preschool child...

And the child needs...

- * can speak in sentences to be listened to
- * makes lots of mistakes in speech sounds encouragement to talk freely, no
..... correction of talking errors
- * is learning to describe things..... adults to expand child's world
- * can have conversations full attention of a parent for conversation
..... every day
- * can express ideas and thoughts to be asked what he/she thinks
- * is better at talking to adults than to children..... adults to talk to and to help him/her
..... communicate with other children
- * can listen to stories in a group participate in preschool, story hour, or
..... other group experience.
- * can follow directions if not too complicated to be given one and two-step directions
- * enjoys singing and can memorize
songs and rhymes to listen to records or tapes, learn
..... nursery rhymes and finger plays
- * loves stories and will ask to hear
them over and over **you guessed it again!
- * can tell about experiences or events
in a logical sequence chances to 'tell about school today'

Special Needs

Is There Something Wrong?

Perhaps as you read the previous section you kept thinking, 'my child is not doing those things yet,' or 'my child is not playing that way.' Perhaps you have been noticing differences between your child and the other children at preschool.

Each child develops at his or her own pace. It is very hard to know which differences are normal variations in development, and which are cause for concern. When you ask friends or relatives, they say, "Oh, she's just lazy," or "She will grow out of it." Here are the steps to take if you are concerned about your child and want to check it out. Your child may have a disability that is causing the delay--and *Early Intervention* will help your child get the most out of school.

1. Developmental Screening

Ask your child's teacher about *developmental screening*. This is a brief test that tells the teacher whether the child is functioning within the normal range, just below it (indicated by a result that says "rescreen"), or significantly below normal (a result that says, "refer for evaluation").

2. Hearing and Vision Screening

Whenever there are concerns about a child, these essential senses should be checked. Ask your teacher about screening results, or arrange screenings yourself. Pacific University offers free vision screenings. Most doctors can arrange a hearing screening.

3. Contact Early Intervention (690-5446)

You can work with your child's teacher to arrange a referral to Early Intervention, or you can call yourself. In Washington County, the Education Service District operates the Early Intervention program. This is a program to identify and provide services to children with disabilities and special needs. *By law, children with disabilities have a right to these services.*

Early Intervention staff will arrange with you to evaluate your child. If the evaluation indicates that your child is eligible for their services, they will make a plan with you, called an IFSP (Individual Family Support Plan) to decide on goals, services, and placement for your child. Federal law requires children to be served close to home and in programs that serve typical as well as disabled children. Early Intervention staff can help your child's preschool teacher meet his or her individual needs, and they will prepare the elementary school to provide needed services for children who will be starting kindergarten in the fall.

The Individual Child

Every family is unique, yet we all try to accomplish similar things each day. It can be helpful to look at how your child responds to daily routines.

When you observe your child's everyday home activities, you can see how much learning happens at home. He or she is learning all the basic life skills: how and when to eat, sleep, and take care of oneself and one's things, and how to live with and interact with other people.

Most parents have trouble with their child during some daily routines. Many discover that one particular activity--mealtime, for example--is always a problem. If this is true for you, *the first thing to do is congratulate yourself and your child for doing so well on all the other daily routines.* Then you can take a closer look at the problem area and set out to try something new.

You may also notice style differences: you like it quiet and slow in the morning, but she wakes up ready to leap tall buildings! Many of these preferences seem built-in to the person and are not easy to change. Others go with the age and stage of your child.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions below. They are designed to help you notice your child's unique style and needs, and to make you aware of all the ways that children are different from one another, and from their parents.

Going to School: Many children like school and look forward to going, but also hesitate to leave their family. They may seem very excited, then suddenly say they're sick or don't want to go.

For your child:

- How does he or she feel just before the bus comes or before getting out of the car?
- How does he or she say good-bye to you (if at all)?

Coming Home from School: Some children see school and home as separate worlds, while others freely mix them. Most children are very stimulated at school and have a hard time shifting gears when they get home.

Does your child:

- Tell you all about school, or put it out of his or her mind?
- Use newly learned skills from school in his or her play at home?
- How does your child react when 'shifting gears' from school to home?

The Individual Child

Getting up in the Morning: Children, like adults, vary greatly in how they react to each new day. However, there are definitely more preschoolers leaping out of bed with eagerness than adults on any given day!

Does your child:

- seem well rested when he or she wakes up?
- wake up bouncy, grouchy, groggy, or peacefully?
- approach morning the same way you do?

Dressing: The typical preschooler dawdles around when asked to get dressed, refuses to wear at least one item you have selected, and puts shoes on the wrong feet but doesn't want you to point it out and refuses to let you fix the problem.

Does your child:

- enjoy choosing clothes to wear or leave it up to you?
- like to dress him or herself or prefer to have you help?
- notice if his or her clothes are dirty, torn, or on wrong?

Mealtime: Most preschoolers cannot eat a lot of food at one time. They eat light meals, but burn the food up quickly, then get hungry between meals. They often like simple foods rather than mixtures or spicy treats, and most have strong food likes and dislikes.

Does your child:

- like to try new foods or stick to old favorites?
- like to help prepare food?
- ask for snacks between meals?
- sit through a whole meal or need to get up and move
- How does he or she react when something gets spilled?
- Do his or her moods and feelings affect his or her appetite?

Rest times: It isn't easy to tell from a preschooler's behavior that he or she is tired, but most do get tired during the day. It shows up when they get grouchy, demanding, and overly active.

For your child:

- How can you tell when he or she is tired?
- What activities seem to rest and refresh your child? (Some like stories, a snack, a bath, or TV; some will sleep)

The Individual Child

Play: Most preschoolers have several preferred play activities at home. They might build, play house, play with miniature people and machines, draw and color, or ride trikes and play outside.

Does your child:

- Like to play near you or in another room?
- Play differently when alone than when with others?
- How does he or she react when having trouble with brothers or sisters?
- What kind of play does your child spend the most time doing at home?

Bedtime: It is common for preschoolers, even when very tired, to dislike going to bed. Many are afraid of the dark, monsters, or bad dreams. Most children have a favorite habit that makes them feel secure: sucking their thumb, snuggling a blanket or stuffed animal, or masturbating.

Does your child:

- Have nighttime fears?
- Have security habits?
- How does he or she put off going to bed: resistance, doing things slowly, ignoring your reminders, asking for drinks, going to the bathroom many times?

Play with Parents: Many parents and children have special games they play together now and then, for laughter and fun. Once this starts, most children will want to play over and over until you are both exhausted. Common games include tickling, chasing, hide and seek, wrestling, playing ball, and telling jokes.

Does your child:

- Get silly and excited when you play?
- Know how to tell you to stop or stop himself/herself if it gets too rough?
- Enjoy physical contact with you in play?
- What are your "games"? How do they get started?

Educational Goals for Preschoolers

- ★ The child will develop a *positive image of self* as a unique and competent person. The child's culture, language, family, home and unique identity will be explored and valued in the classroom. Children will be treated with dignity and respect at all times, including when being corrected or disciplined.
- ★ The child will *expand and extend his or her knowledge*, learning about mathematics, science, literature, writing, concepts, and other people. Learning experiences will be active, hands-on, relevant, and full of exploration and discovery.
- ★ The child will develop *awareness of others and social skills*, so that he or she can work and play cooperatively and can establish relationships with peers and adults. The classroom will offer many opportunities for children to share materials, help each other, contribute to the group, and work on projects together.
- ★ The child will develop *communication skills*, so that he or she can use words to convey and understand thoughts and feelings. Children will be encouraged to talk to each other and to adults throughout the class day. Disputes will be settled using words and negotiation rather than authority or aggression.
- ★ The child will refine basic *gross and fine motor skills* in learning and in play. For most of the class day, children will be able to move about the environment. There will be opportunities for active play every day, and an organized program of motor development through music and movement will be provided.
- ★ The child will develop *learning strategies* so that he or she can learn in independent, small group, and large group settings. Concepts to be learned will be presented in groups as well as individually, and a multi-sensory approach involving eyes, ears, and whole body will be used.
- ★ The child will express *him- or herself creatively* with open-ended materials. There will be a rich assortment of materials for children to use, including art materials, construction materials such as cardboard, wood, and glue, and manipulative toys such as beads and blocks. Adults will not expect children to copy models.

Assessment

*Do these goals seem appropriate to you? Tell your child's teacher what you think.
Would you like to know more? Teachers will share their curriculum plans with you.
What are your educational goals for your child?*

Personal Safety Goals

Children can best be protected from dangerous situations through early education. We can teach children skills that may protect them from physical or sexual abuse.

The child will know what to do when threatened with physical or sexual abuse. This involves teaching them that they own their bodies, that they should get away from anyone who tries to hurt them or touch them in confusing ways, and that they should tell their parent or other close adult about it.

The child will know what to do if approached by a stranger. This means not accepting candy or bribes, keeping out of the stranger's reach, and remembering they have to ask permission from parent or caregiver before going with anyone.

The child will practice safe street crossing.

The child will know auto and bus safety rules and will use a seat belt.

The child will be able to distinguish between safe and unsafe products. (Lemon detergent is NOT lemonade!) Children can learn not to taste or use anything they aren't sure of.

The child will know what to do in case of fire. This includes home and school fire drills and also practice with "Stop, drop, and roll" and the 911 emergency number.

The child will know his or her first and last name, address or city and street, and phone number.

The child's parent will understand the value of listening to the child and taking seriously anything their child says that may indicate abuse.

Assessment

Personal safety often involves some "sex education" as well, such as names of body parts. How do you feel about this?

What role do you think schools should play in personal safety education?

Living With Your Child

- Making Rules
- When Children Fight
- Mealtime
- Going to School
- Bedtime
- Tough Times



Making Rules

Rules at home should be simple, few in number, and realistic for the child. They should relate mainly to safety. Examples of rules are:

- No hurting
- Cross the street only with a grownup
- Ask before you leave the yard
- The cleaning closet is off limits for playing
- Playdough, scissors and crayons can only be used at the table.

How to establish the rule about using playdough at the table:

- ① Find a place to keep the dough that is near the table.
- ② Set the dough on the table when you think your child would like to play with it.
- ③ When your child approaches to play, get his or her full attention (look at their eyes) and say, *"Listen. The playdough always has to be played with here on the table. It is not OK to play with it on the floor or in your room. It might get lost and it's hard to clean up. The rule is, use playdough on the table."*
- ④ Sit with your child and encourage playing with the dough. Have your child pick up spills right away.
- ⑤ If anyone leaves the table with playdough, stop the child and ask him or her to tell you the rule. If he or she doesn't remember, say it again.
- ⑥ Supervise closely like this for the first two or three times, then check only as children leave the table the next few times.
- ⑦ If you find playdough in the wrong place, get the child or children and show them the dough on the floor (or wherever). The child who made the mistake may not remember, so don't worry about who did it. Get sponges or rags and have everyone scrub the area and pick up bits of dough. Make this an elaborate cleanup and talk about it too: *"Playdough is wonderful stuff to play with, but terrible on rugs. You really have to work hard to clean it up."*
- ⑧ Next time the child wants to use the dough, ask him or her to tell you the rule and closely supervise again.

The consequence or "punishment" for the playdough on the table rule is having to spend time cleaning it up. This is exactly the reason why you are making the rule in the first place. No further punishment is needed. A consequence for a second mistake might be not being allowed to use the playdough for the rest of the day (not longer).

If, instead, you spanked your child for misusing the playdough, you would be teaching the child to obey the rule to avoid being spanked. This would work only when you were there to supervise, and your child would not develop an understanding of why the rule is necessary.

When Children Fight

Here are some things to avoid doing when the children fight:

- ◆ Don't ask who started it.
Generally both children are involved and no one is clearly at fault. They need to see that adults can control their anger and use words to solve problems.
- ◆ Don't try to stop a fight or argument from a distance.
Children in the midst of battle are not going to be able to switch it off when an adult orders them to, because the problem has not been solved. You need to go to the scene.
- ◆ Don't solve the problem for them.
If you want them to fight less, they must learn how to work it out themselves--with your help at first.

Disputes children have with each other can lead to some very important learning. All of us benefit from knowing how to be assertive and fair in dealing with others and how to negotiate or make a deal. Bear in mind these goals when you deal with children's fights.

- ◆ **Assertiveness:** insisting on your rights without resorting to aggression.
- ◆ **Fairness:** recognizing the rights of others.
- ◆ **Negotiation:** talking about possible solutions, giving and taking in order to be fair to all.

Let's assume that you hear screeches and yells coming from wherever the children are playing. Your Parent Intuition (a magical sixth sense parents everywhere have) tells you that *Trouble is Brewing.*

Step 1: Go to the scene.

Separate the children from each other and any toys. Do this without jerking on or hurting them and instead of yelling, don't say anything or firmly say, "Stop". Talk about the owies but don't talk about who is to blame.

Step 2: Define the problem.

Make a guess as to what the problem is. State the problem so that no one is blamed: not "Was he bugging you?" but "*You both wanted to play with that truck.*"

Step 3: Ask for ideas.

Ask the children (and any others who are available) for ideas about how to solve the problem. Make sure the first ideas come from children and not adults.

Step 4: Negotiate a solution.

No matter what the first idea is, accept it by saying, "*OK, that's one idea. What else could we do?*" Accept even silly or unfair ideas. If there is a very small or very shy child, you can speak for that child by saying what you think he or she would say. Usually after a few ideas there will be one which is clearly acceptable to all. If not, you may have to give suggestions--but if possible, let the children do it. Then help them achieve their solution.

Mealtime

Mealtime can be a positive adventure and a wonderful conversation time for families, but with young children it can also be a headache (or stomachache!). It's worth the trouble to try to have one sit-down family meal each day even if other meals have to be more informal.

Snacking:

Children need to eat more often than adults. They need a snack in mid-morning and another in mid-afternoon.

Children, like adults, are attracted to candy, pop, cookies, and chips. These things are hardly food--they contain little protein or vitamins and can be harmful to teeth and body if they make up too much of the child's diet. Sweets can make children irritable and overactive. Offer these treats with or after meals, and don't use them as between-meal snacks.

While you are not giving sweet snacks you will need lots of "approved" snack food available. Examples are: peeled and sliced carrots or celery, cubes or slices of cheese, fruit cut into small slices, applesauce, yogurt, and peanut butter.

One approach is to have "snack containers," one in the refrigerator and one on the counter, which you stock with approved snacks. Don't do all the work yourself: your preschooler will enjoy these foods more if he or she helps prepare them.

Not Finishing Meals:

It is amazing that adults often struggle to eat less, yet will try to force a child to eat more than he or she can hold. Children tend to get carried away when scooping food onto their plates. If you are serving, give the child about half of an adult serving and assure him or her that more is available. Remember that a child who has eaten very well at lunch will still get hungry and ask for a snack in a couple of hours.

To avoid the frustration of throwing plates of food away, teach the child to serve him or herself. Use soup-type spoons as serving spoons. allow the child to take one spoonful of each food, and encourage seconds after the firsts are gone.

Leaving the Table:

Sometimes this happens because the seating arrangement is uncomfortable for the child or the child has been waiting there a long time. Often the bouncy child begins by imitating a parent who dashes back and forth to the kitchen, so check your own sitting habits and plan to put everything you will need out before you all sit down.

If your child understands and is able to sit through a meal but doesn't, try removing his or her food after one warning: *"When you leave the table that tells me you are finished eating."* If you follow up by removing his or her plate the next time, the child will quickly get the idea. Although he or she doesn't get any more food at the meal, don't deny the next snack.

Mealtime

Picky Eaters:

As long as the child is healthy, you can be sure he or she will eat enough, though it may not seem like it to you. When a child does not eat very much, you have to be very careful to make sure the food he or she eats is good, healthy food.

Adults should avoid reacting strongly because then the problem escalates to a battle of wills between parent and child. Serve the child tiny portions, such as a tablespoon of each food, and an inch of milk or juice. Then expect the child to eat all of this before having any seconds. Don't force the child to eat, especially if he or she really doesn't like a particular food.

Having the child help cut up, peel, cook or mix the food can really spark his or her interest and appetite.

Robin's Menu

morning: toast & peanut
butter

snack: crackers & peanut
butter

noon: peanut butter & jelly
samich

snack: celery with peanut
butter

night: peanut butter and
honey rolls

dessert: peanut butter ice
cream

.....
no additions or substitutions
vegetables & fruit not allowed



Going To School

Going to school means leaving home, going to a very different environment which is not like other places the child has been, being surrounded by unknown people, and having to take care of yourself. It is exciting and makes a child feel grown-up; it is scary and makes a child feel small. It is normal for children to find separating from their parents upsetting, but this usually fades as they discover school is fun and that you or a familiar caregiver are there at the end of the day.

Separation Problems:

If your child is reluctant to go to school, try preparing him or her in advance for each school day. Remind the child the night before that tomorrow is a school day. He or she will probably say something like "I don't want to go." accompanied by tears or other signs of upset. Rather than argue or ask why, use a method called REFLECTING FEELINGS. Say something like, *"I can tell you're not happy about going to school tomorrow."* Listen to what your child says, and answer by reflecting the feeling. It may sound silly and you might feel like a parrot, but it lets your child know you understand. Bring the issue up two or three times the day before school, and reflect the feelings each time. This often makes the actual separation easier for your child because he or she has worked on the feelings in advance.

Don't make your child think the fun at home starts when he or she leaves for school. Let him or her know your plans in a matter-of-fact way.

It's important not to make them feel like you will be lonely and lost without them; after all, you should be able to handle the separation better than your four-year-old--or at least make the child think you can. Otherwise your child might spend the entire school day worrying about you and be unable to relax and enjoy school.

Some children complain about specific things that happen at school. Listen, ask how he or she felt, reflect feelings, and talk to the teacher about the incident. Regardless of whether your child tells a true (accurate) story, something has upset him or her, and you and the teacher need to work together to correct the situation.

Going to School

Homecoming Problems:

School is incredibly demanding, especially in the first month or two. There are many new people to get to know, many exciting activities to do, and children are expected to be quite self-sufficient.

Very few preschoolers come home and announce, "I'm tired, I'll go have a nap." More commonly they talk your ears off or dash madly around the house. They may cry or throw a tantrum the first time you correct them. In addition to being tired, when they arrive home they may suddenly realize how much they missed you, so their behavior may be quite babylike.

When possible, be ready for your child's homecoming. Give him or her a glass of juice and a snack if he or she wants it (they may have just eaten, but the ride home can be long). Talk about the day and look over all the things he or she brought home. Having a special place for art work lets your child know you think school is important.

A tantrum right after school should be handled very calmly. Gently but firmly (your knuckles should NOT be white) hold the child so that he or she can't hurt anyone and let the child cry it out. There's not much point in talking or arguing at this time, so just say soothing things like *"It's OK, you've had a big day, it's hard to change from school to home,"* etc. Then be available to snuggle and comfort when it's over. You'll probably end up with a snoring child.

This technique works well whenever a tantrum seems to be an excessive reaction to a very minor event.

Bedtime

Many, if not most, parents of preschool children have trouble at bedtime. Some children stay up as long as their parents do. Some watch TV until they drop off. Some get up many times in the night.

The ideal sleeping pattern for a four-year-old is 10 hours at night and an hour's nap in the afternoon. Children vary, of course, in their sleep needs, but there is no child who can get along without a good night's sleep.

Establishing a bedtime is not hard except that it takes consistency from the adults. Children actually feel more secure when bedtime is predictable and follows a set routine, although they will always resist a little. Here are some ways to head off sleeping problems:

Decide on a simple order of "getting ready for bed" routines. This can include getting clothes off and pajamas on, brushing teeth and washing or bathing, a snuggle with a story or TV, one last trip to the bathroom and off to bed. Make this a routine you can live with as you will be following it for many years. You can add picking up toys, putting clothes where they belong, laying out clothes for the next day, etc. later when the basic routine is in place.

For at least two weeks, do all of the routines with your child, and do them in the same order each night. This is more important than the exact time your child ends up in bed. Talk about each step, what you will do next, etc. Be right there next to your child even if he or she doesn't need your assistance.

Turn the TV off during these routines, so nobody feels left out or gets distracted.

As your child gets to know the routine, let him or her do small steps in the process alone. You might have the child get into his or her pajamas alone, but the first night or two, go and join the child when he or she is not quite finished dressing. This way you can praise him or her for progress. (*"Good! You're mostly undressed. I'll help with your pajamas."*)

It is important not to rush the child. You don't want it to seem like you're trying to get rid of him or her (though you certainly do deserve a break by this time).

Children have a natural desire to be independent and capable. They will be proud when they can take care of most of the bedtime routine. But they are also very small; they need big people to make sure they get to bed, and also to help them calm down and feel secure before they go to sleep.

Bedtime

Dealing with Nightmares and other Night Terrors:

Most preschoolers have some nightmares or other night fears, whether they tell you about them or not. Preschoolers often believe dreams are events that actually happen in their room rather than inventions of the mind. If you hear a screaming child in the night, react exactly the way you would like people to react to you if you woke up terrified after a bad dream.

Generally this means you should comfort the child, let him or her tell you about the dream if possible, and say, *"I guess that was pretty scary."* Stay with the child for a short time. If you leave too soon you will end up going back.

Children have extra trouble knowing what is real and what isn't. It is important not to say "There's no such thing as monsters," (the child just saw one) or "I'll scare all the monsters away" (you mean there really were monsters in here?). Listen and accept the feelings of fear, then offer the comfort only a parent can give.

Dealing with the Up-and-Down child:

This child gets out of bed every 15 minutes for two hours, or sleeps for a couple of hours (until you are asleep) then starts tapping on your shoulder.

Allow a bathroom trip. Some children do seem to fill up once they relax. As much as possible, let the child deal with this independently, but do let the child know that you know he or she is up and expect a prompt return to bed. If your child gets up much more than normal for him or her, check for illness--it almost always strikes at night.

The key to reducing the number of times a child gets up at night is to UNDER-REACT. Don't get mad, don't play with the child, don't punish or threaten, and above all don't let him or her stay up. If the child goes to the toilet and returns to you rather than to bed, this is child-language meaning "tuck me in again." Do so quickly but not in a rush.

Children who have severe problems with night wandering are in need of reassurance--that they are safe, that their parent will be there all night and in the morning, and that nothing terrible will happen overnight. Don't give these promises unless they are true. Any child can show a nighttime anxiety during stressful times, such as starting school, parents fighting, moving, etc.

Tough Times

A crisis for a parent is almost always a crisis for a child too. During a crisis, daily routines that make a child feel secure get disrupted. The parent is probably preoccupied with the crisis and gives the child attention differently. The child has to make an adjustment to changes such as moving, family members coming and going, etc.

Unable to understand all of the dynamics of a crisis, the child secretly wonders, "What will happen to me?" He or she may also wonder, "Is it my fault?" These worries will show up in your child's behavior. The following are guidelines for helping your child emerge from crisis stronger and healthier:

Talk About It

The most important thing you can do is talk about what is going on, letting the child talk about it too.

When you describe the problems try to define the problem rather than present it in a good guy/bad guy frame of reference. Present it as a problem that can be survived and lived through.

Put it in the child's terms, how his or her life will change and how it will stay the same: *"You'll still go to school after we move, but it will be a different center with a different teacher and different kids."*

Don't make promises you can't keep. If you aren't sure your child will get into another school, tell him or her you will try to arrange it.

Listen to the Child's Feelings

Young children express their feelings with actions. The stressed child may cling to you, become demanding, have trouble sleeping, whine, fight more with brothers and sisters, overreact to minor changes or owies, become more aggressive, become quiet and withdrawn, or become extremely active.

What is he or she feeling? Make a guess, then tell your child what you think. For example: *"You don't want to go to bed because you're afraid I might disappear like Daddy (or Mommy) did. But I'm not going to do that..." "You are whining because you are worried that you might not be taken care of. I will take care of you..."*

Tough Times

The most common response a four-year-old makes to these reflections of feelings is no response at all. But if you continue to do it during crisis times you will be preventing fears from developing and you may see a more relaxed look in your child's eyes.

Remain a Parent

When stress is very high, your behavior changes too. The work of raising children seems too much and not worth doing; you are preoccupied; you need support from adult friends. Changes in your behavior may result in changes in your child's behavior.

During upsets and depressions, some parents simply don't have the energy to make the child behave. Others want their children to take care of them. Most do less home teaching.

These reactions are natural, yet these are the times when it is very, very reassuring to a child to have the same daily routine, the same rules and limits--the feeling that his or her parent is there no matter what the problems.

There is nothing more frightened than a four-year-old who feels he or she must become the parent and solve problems he or she doesn't even understand.

There is no stronger person than a child who has come through a crisis secure in the knowledge that he or she is OK.