

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

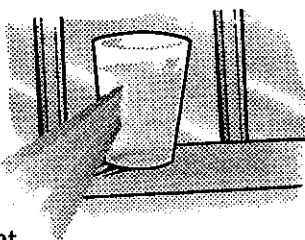
April 2006

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Easy experiments answer your child's questions about the world

It's good to answer your child's questions about the world. Sometimes it's even better to let her reach her own conclusions. For example:

- **How does a rainbow get its colors?** To see, fill a glass with water. Place it on a sunny windowsill. Put a large sheet of white paper on the floor below. The water acts like raindrops. It splits the white wavelengths of sunlight into their true colors. They appear on the paper.
- **What causes static cling?** Lay out tiny pieces of paper. Ask your child to rub an inflated balloon on her hair. Slowly lower the balloon to an inch above the papers. The balloon is negatively charged with electrons. They attract the opposite charges (protons) in the papers to lift them upward.
- **Why is there a face on the moon?** Splatter black watercolor paint onto white paper. Let it dry, and then cut out small circles. Tape these "mini-moons" on a door. Step back and describe them. The brain turns unrelated features into a known pattern, such as the "eyes" on the moon, which are really great plains.



Source: Kathy Wollard, "Secrets of the World Around Us," *FamilyFun*, February 2001 (Disney Publishing Worldwide, 1-800-289-4849, www.familyfun.go.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Turn over simple tasks gradually

Your child's teacher wants him to be more responsible in class, but you aren't sure how to go about it.

Sometimes, all it takes is a change in attitude. Think of a chore your child should be able to do, such as making his bed. Then:

- **List the steps he has to learn.** For example: *Tuck in sheet. Spread comforter on top. Make sure sides are even. Arrange pillows and stuffed animals.*
- **Practice together** as many times as your child needs. Review the steps together until your child is confident.
- **Let your child do the job** independently. Don't criticize if it isn't perfect! Compliment his work and responsibility.
- **Choose a new skill** for your child to master each month. Be patient as he learns.

Source: "Parenting Magazine: Building Responsibility in Children," www.wtvnews4.com/news/features/3/413102.html.

TALKING AND LISTENING

Exchange information about the day with your child

Instead of simply asking your child about his day, tell him about yours, too. This can encourage quiet kids to speak up. You might say, "I was so hungry at lunch today! I ate two sandwiches. What did you have?"

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Increase math abilities

Did you know that you can build your child's "math confidence"? Help her realize that math is important—and that she can:

- **Apply** math to real life.
- **Use** numbers easily.
- **See** different ways to approach problems.

Source: Patsy F. Kanter, "Helping your Child Learn Math," *KidSource OnLine*, www.kidsource.com/kidsource/Content/learnmath_index.html.



DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Learn by watching sports

Everyday activities are great opportunities for learning. Watching a sporting event is no exception. Help your child notice:

- **Questionable calls.** Pay attention to the calls by the official. There's sure to be one your child thinks is wrong. Have him describe why he feels this way.
- **Sportscasters.** What does the announcer say—and how does he say it? Turn down the volume and let your child do a mini-broadcast.
- **Sportswriters.** After the game, have your child write a story for an imaginary newspaper. What are the most important facts to include? The next day, read local coverage.



Source: Douglas B. Reeves, *20-Minute Learning Connection*, ISBN: 0-743-21171-5 (Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

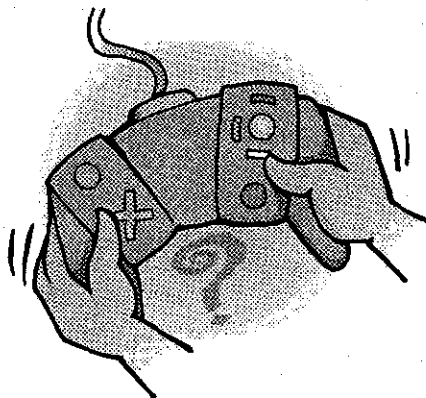
Should your child play video games?

Q: My child loves video games. But I'm worried about their effects on him. Should I ban them altogether?

A: Only you can decide if video games are right for your child. If you let him play, remember that games should:

- **Match your child's interests.** Maybe he loves sports, for example, or chess.
- **Teach positive lessons.** Some games emphasize math, reading or friendship.
- **Provide fun without violence.** Notice what games are rated—and preview them yourself.
- **Have respectable characters.** Watch out for games that put people in stereotypical roles.
- **Allow more than one player** if possible. This makes playing a social activity.
- **Not interfere with schoolwork and family time.** Set firm limits on video game use.
- **Suit your child's age.** Keep in mind that games rated "E for Everyone" still may be too hard or contain violence.

Source: "Video Games," Media Awareness Network, www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/video_games/index.cfm and American Psychological Association, <http://apa.org>.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you helping your child with writing?

Writing is an essential school skill. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging your child to develop it:

1. **Do you give** your child interesting writing supplies, such as cool pens?
2. **Do you help** your child plan ahead before starting writing projects?
3. **Do you suggest** that your child finish papers early so there is extra time to revise?
4. **Do you ask** your child's advice about things you write?

5. **Do you exchange** notes and emails with your child?
How did you do? Each yes answer shows that you're encouraging writing skills. For each no answer, find ways to change your answer to yes.

"Loving a child doesn't mean giving in to all his whims. To love him is to bring out the best in him, to teach him to love what is difficult."
— Nadia Boulanger

HOMEWORK

Plan ahead for homework

You want your child to get the most out of homework. So it's important that your child:

- **Understands** what the teacher expects.
- **Has** a quiet study spot.
- **Sticks** to a homework schedule.
- **Reviews** assignments with you.
- **Gets** his hard work rewarded.

Source: Lynn Liontos, "Parent To Do's: Help Your Kids Do Great in School," Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org/articles/251.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

You can ease 'test stress'

When kids have tests at school, parents can get anxious. They want children to do well and feel good. It's best to relax. This reassures your child that as long as she's prepared, it's okay. She can take the test without anxiety. No matter what happens, you'll support her proudly.

Source: "Help Your Child Improve in Test-Taking," Single Parent Central, www.singleparentcentral.com/childrenarticle22test.htm.

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Watch for reading problems

It's important to identify learning problems as soon as possible. If you're concerned about your child's early reading skills, ask yourself:

- **Does your child have** trouble reading simple words?
- **Does your child reverse** letters, such as b and d?
- **Does your child struggle** to understand stories you read aloud?
- **Does your child avoid** reading activities?

If you answer yes to any question, make an appointment to talk with your child's teacher about this issue.

Source: Margery D. Rosen, "New-Reader Roadblocks," Scholastic.com, www.scholastic.com/familymatters/read/grk_2/roadblocks.htm.



Helping Children Learn[®]

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Managing Editor: Patricia Hodgdon.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Amanda Blyth & Rebecca Miyares.

Writer: Susan O'Brien. Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter.

Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-Garcia.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1526-9264