

# Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

January 2018



Early Childhood Programs

## KID BITS

### Testing little ears

It's normal for schools to do routine screenings at this age to make sure students can hear properly. You can also request a hearing test if you have a concern (*example*: your child has frequent ear infections and seems to have trouble hearing). If there's a problem, the nurse will suggest following up with your doctor.

### Backpack check

Make it a fun part of your youngster's routine to share what she brings home in her backpack each day. You could pretend the contents are a "treasure" to explore or that she's brought you a "gift" to open. Displaying excitement about her hard work shows you value her efforts at school.

### What do you do all day?

Give your child a peek at what you do on the job. You might read him a nice email from your boss or a compliment from a customer about a project you worked on. Or act out a typical day. If you're a cashier, give him play money, let him "shop" in your "store," and "ring up" his purchases.

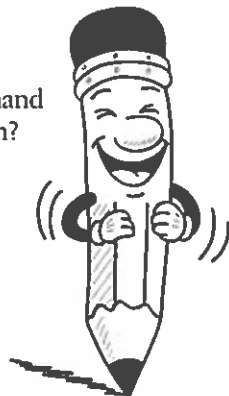
### Worth quoting

"The richness I achieve comes from nature, the source of my inspiration."  
*Claude Monet*

### Just for fun

**Teacher:** Which hand do you write with?

**Mary:** Neither, I write with a pencil!



## Read aloud every day

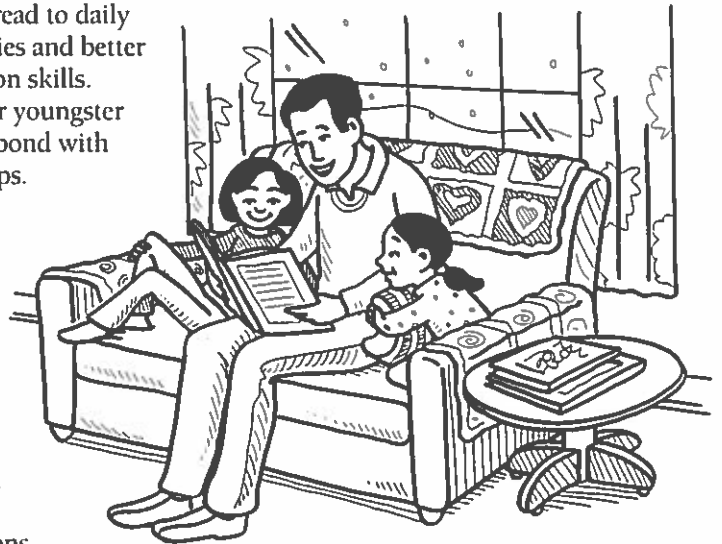
Children who are read to daily have larger vocabularies and better reading comprehension skills. Reading aloud to your youngster is also a great way to bond with her. Consider these tips.

### Add drama

Where the story calls for it, growl like a bear, wiggle your eyebrows, or use a funny voice! Hamming it up engages your little one's imagination and adds to the entertainment. Plus, your actions give words meaning. If you shrug your shoulders when the character does, your child gets an instant example of the word *shrug*.

### Inspire discussions

Ask open-ended questions about the book. You might invite your youngster to make predictions: "What do you think the bear will do when he sees the picnic?" Or ask her to think of similarities between the story and her life. She may say, "I've got a loose tooth just like the girl in the book!" This gets her



involved—and boosts her understanding of the story line.

### Offer a variety

Kids love to hear the same story over and over—it's comforting, and they like being able to recognize words. That's fine, but also include new books to expose your little one to more plots, facts, and vocabulary. Try varying the reading level, too. Listening to more challenging books—both fiction and nonfiction—will help your youngster grow as a reader.♥

## Building-block engineer

Although your child may not realize it, he thinks like an engineer every time he builds with blocks. You can help him use engineering skills to build his tallest tower yet.

Encourage him to experiment with different sizes, shapes, and arrangements of blocks. How can he create a sturdy base that supports a taller tower? Help him count the levels as he tries. How many floors can he stack before the structure topples?

When it does fall, it's time to redesign his tower and test it again. With each new design, your child will learn more about what makes a building strong.♥



## A stick-with-it kid

Perseverance is a big idea for a little one! These kid-friendly activities will help your child understand that sticking with a challenging task pays off.

**The “almost there” board.** Try this idea when your youngster is working toward a goal (say, catching a ball). Let him draw a row of 5 boxes on a sheet of paper and number them 1–5. Help him write one step toward the goal in each box, each a little harder than the previous one.  
*Examples:* “Catch a ball that someone rolls to me.” “Catch a



ball in the air with two hands.” He can check off each box as he masters the step.

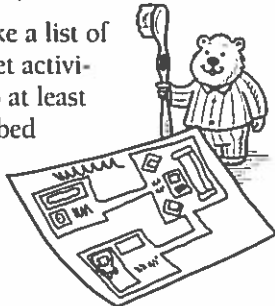
**“Can-do” badges.** After your child accomplishes something he’s been working on, such as learning all the letters of the alphabet, let him decorate a paper plate with a picture of his achievement. Display his “badge” on his bedroom door, and add more as he meets new goals. When the going gets tough, have him look at the badges and tell the story of how he earned each one. He’ll remind himself that he’s a “can-do” kid!♥



## Night-night: A bedtime routine

A regular bedtime ritual provides cues that help your youngster fall asleep and get the rest she needs so she can concentrate at school. Try these ideas.

**1.** Together, make a list of screen-free, quiet activities to switch to at least an hour before bed (color, do a puzzle). Choose one from the list each night.



**2.** Have your child draw a “map” for going to bed. She could chart her route to the tub for bath time, then to her bedroom for pajamas, and into bed for a story. Let her follow her map every night to keep the routine predictable.

**3.** Cap off bedtime with your youngster’s favorite way to say goodnight. Maybe she likes to snuggle while you sing a lullaby, or she might tuck in a stuffed animal before kissing you goodnight.♥

### PARENT TO PARENT

## Practice fine-motor skills

My daughter Brianna sees an occupational therapist to improve fine-motor skills she needs for tasks like using a pencil, tying her shoes, and zipping her jacket. Last week, her OT gave us a list of clever exercises to do at home.

Brianna’s favorite is the boat race. She puts two toy boats in a sink full of water and squirts them with a spray bottle to make them sail across the “pond.” Right now she needs both hands to squeeze the nozzle, but as her muscles get stronger, her goal is to use one hand.

To build finger coordination, Brianna enjoys threading pipe cleaners through the holes in a small colander. She also likes to link paper clips—so far she has made bracelets, necklaces, and even bookmarks.

Yesterday my other daughter asked to practice with Brianna. The activities are fun for both kids, and I figure the more fine-motor practice, the better.♥



### Q & A

## Too much computer?

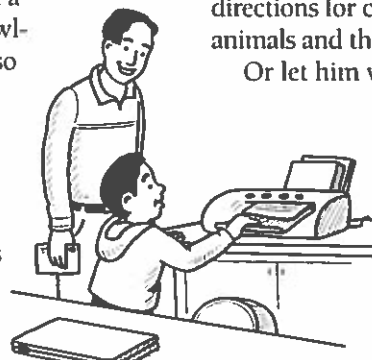
**Q:** My son Luke loves my laptop and wants to play on it instead of doing other things. How much is too much?

**A:** Your son is growing up in a world where computer knowledge is important. But he also needs to have non-screen experiences as well as time to run and play.

Try giving your child a specific limit: “You can use the computer until dinner is ready.” Consider making a rule about how many minutes he can have per day.

Also, you might encourage projects that your youngster can start on the computer and continue offline. Perhaps you could search the Internet with him to find directions for creating simple origami animals and then make some together.

Or let him write a letter and print it out to illustrate, sign, and mail. Doing hands-on activities like these will add learning to the time your child does spend on the computer.♥



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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 ISSN 1540-5567

# Winter investigations

Your backyard is the perfect science lab for your youngster. Here's how to explore science while enjoying outdoor winter fun.

**Mystery object.** Encourage your child to pay close attention to the *attributes* of natural items—their sizes, shapes, textures, and weights. First, secretly slip an object (say, an acorn) into a paper bag. Let her reach in and describe it without looking. “It’s *small and round*. Part of it is *bumpy*, and part is *smooth*.” Can she guess what it is? Let her pull it out to check. Now, have her put something in the bag for you to investigate.



child draw and label a picture of what she sees. Then, fill the jar with fresh water and pick a new *specimen* to examine.♥

## Magnified observations.

Fill a clear jar with water, and take it outside. Next, have your youngster drop in an object from the ground (evergreen needle, holly sprig). Replace the lid, and look through the side of the jar together. The combination of the water and the jar will magnify what’s inside. Suggest that your

## Q & A The backup plan

**Q:** My daughter becomes frustrated when things don’t go as planned. Last week, she had a meltdown when her playdate was canceled. What will help her to take changes in stride?

**A:** “Flexible thinking” lets kids adapt when the world doesn’t behave the way they’d like. You can help your daughter develop this skill.



When things don’t work out, invite her to come up with a backup plan. For a playdate that falls through, you might have her think of two or three activities to do instead.

Let her hear you talk through your own disappointing situations, too. “I wanted to go to the gym today, but Dad needed the car. So I’m going to do this workout video instead.” Over time, your daughter will automatically think of alternatives rather than being “stuck” on whatever didn’t go according to plan.♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER

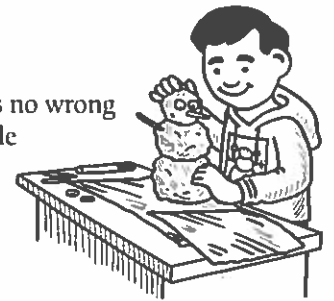
### Art explorer

When it comes to art, there’s no wrong way to do it. Allowing your little Picasso to squish, splatter, cut, and paste without a plan fosters creativity. It strengthens hand muscles, too. Consider this advice.

**Provide different materials.** Think beyond crayons, markers, and construction paper. You could offer your child cotton balls, aluminum foil, macaroni noodles, and toothpicks, to name a few.

**Offer tips.** It’s okay to give your youngster a creative nudge. For example, it might not occur to him to crumple aluminum foil into a ball to make a sculpture. Show him how, then step back and allow him to do his own thing.

**Ask about his project.** Instead of telling him what to make, or trying to guess what he’s doing, invite him to tell you about his creation. For instance, ask open-ended questions like, “If you gave your picture a title, what would it be?” or “How did you get the idea for your sculpture?”♥



## PARENT TO PARENT

### Holidays on a budget

Money is especially tight during the holidays, so I’m always looking for ways to save. This year, I decided to get my children involved so they would learn you don’t have to spend a lot to celebrate.

Instead of buying greeting cards, the kids designed a homemade one for each person on our list. Henry, who’s 4, drew pictures and added stickers.



Jess, who’s 6, wrote greetings inside, and then they both signed their names.

We also worked together to make gifts. The children and I enjoyed baking bread and framing family photographs for relatives. And we made gift bags by decorating brown paper sacks.

With everyone’s help, we’ll be able to stick to our holiday budget. And I think it will be more meaningful for the kids to give gifts and cards knowing they played a big part in making them.♥

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