

Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

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UMES Child & Family Development Center

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KID BITS



Handwriting help

Try this fun activity to strengthen your child's handwriting skills. Cover the bottom of a baking dish with a thin layer of pudding, yogurt, or whipped cream. He can use his pointer finger to write his name and words in the food. He'll practice forming letters—and enjoy licking his fingers!

Early to bed

When winter break ends, get your little one back on schedule by easing her into school-night bedtimes. Tuck her in at her regular time a couple of days before school resumes. Also, start waking her earlier in the mornings rather than letting her sleep late—she'll fall asleep more easily at night.

Safe medicines

It's never too early to talk to your youngster about the dangers of taking drugs. Tell him he should only take medicine from you or, with your permission, from a babysitter, school nurse, or relative. Explain that taking medicines when he doesn't need them can make him sick.

Worth quoting

"The whole world opened to me when I learned to read."

Mary McLeod Bethune

Just for fun



Q: What does a snowman wear on his head?

A: Ice caps!

Winter science mysteries

Why don't animals need winter clothes? What makes snowflakes sparkle? Why do we sprinkle salt on icy sidewalks? Help your child discover the answers with these experiments.

Animal blubber

Cold-water animals like polar bears and seals have a layer of fat ("blubber") to stay warm. Show your youngster how this works.

Let her dip her hand quickly in a bowl of ice water. Then, coat the inside of a plastic bag with "blubber" (solid vegetable shortening). Have her put her hand in the bag and then in the water—she'll realize that her bare hand felt much colder.

Crystals

Water forms crystals when it cools—snowflakes are a beautiful example. Your child can make crystals indoors with this activity.

Fill a glass with warm water, and stir in $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar. Then, tie a paper clip to a piece of string several inches long. Tie the other end of the string around the middle of a pencil. Lay the pencil across the glass so the paper clip hangs in the water. In a few days, crystals will appear!

Slippery ice

Salt helps ice melt. To demonstrate, fill a tin pie plate with water, and freeze.

Sprinkle salt on half the ice, and wait two



minutes. Give your child several stones, and let her slide them on both halves of the ice. She'll see that the salty side is less slippery. ♥

Calm down

You are at your grandmother's 88th birthday party. Your youngster is getting irritable, and you sense a meltdown coming. Use these suggestions to help him stay in control:

- Stay calm and speak in a soft voice.
- Distract your child with a funny face or silly song.
- Pull a healthy snack (cereal, raisins) or a quiet activity (paper and pencil) from your bag.

If a tantrum erupts, excuse yourselves to another room. When your youngster settles down, help him use words: "I'm mad because I want to go home and play." Acknowledge his frustration and explain: "I know we've been here awhile. This party is important to our family." ♥



Globe-trotting

Encourage your youngster's interest in other cultures—and build early math skills—by visiting foreign countries in your own home.

Russia

Read James Haskins's *Count Your Way Through Russia*. Your child can make his own matryoshkas, or nesting dolls. Have him decorate three boxes—small, medium, and large. He'll learn about size and sequencing by fitting each box inside the next.

India

After reading Prodeepta Das's *I Is for India*, help your youngster practice



shapes by painting designs in the Mehndi tradition, an Indian skin decoration. On a piece of paper, trace around your youngster's hand. Put red paint in

an empty ketchup bottle. Then, have him gently squeeze paint into different shapes on the drawing of his hand.

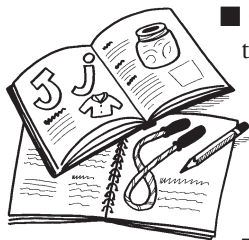
Guatemala

Read *Abuela's Weave* by Omar S. Castañeda. Let your child enjoy the ancient art of weaving—and practice patterns—by making a placemat. Have him choose three colors of construction paper. Fold one in half, cut slits an inch apart (starting on the fold and stopping an inch from the edge), and unfold. Cut the other two sheets into long strips an inch wide. Your youngster can weave the strips through the slits, alternating colors, to make his placemat. ♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Dictionary fun

"How do you spell 'house'?" When your child asks questions like this, she's noticing that letters spell words. Encourage her interest by exploring dictionaries. Here's how.



■ **Check it out.** Visit the library to look at dictionaries. Try to find a picture version to show your youngster, as well as an adult one.

■ **Make one.** Using a spiral notebook, help your child write a letter (uppercase and lowercase) at the top of each page. Explain that every word on the "Aa" page will begin with "A," and so on. Together, write names of family members and other words she knows (cat, house) on the correct pages.

■ **Look it up.** Encourage your youngster to use her dictionary. For example, say she draws a picture of a house. Have her turn to the "Hh" page in her dictionary and copy the word "house" below her drawing. ♥

Q & A

Too much computer?

Q: My son Jack loves the computer and wants to play on it instead of doing other activities. How much is too much?

A: Your youngster is growing up in a world where computer knowledge is important. While his favorite activity will teach him valuable keyboard and mouse skills, you don't want him spending all his free time at the screen. Try giving your child a specific time limit: "You can use the computer until dinner is ready." Consider keeping his computer time down—perhaps to 30 minutes a day.

Also, you might encourage activities that your youngster can start on the computer and continue offline. Perhaps you could search the Internet with him to find directions for creating origami animals and then make some together. Or let him write a letter and print it out to illustrate, sign, and mail. Spending time with you and doing hands-on activities will add more fun and learning to your child's computer time. ♥



PARENT TO PARENT

How others feel

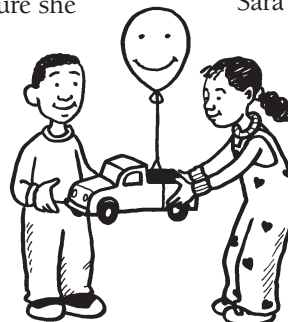
"Say you're sorry," I told my daughter when she pushed her cousin. Sara apologized, but I wasn't sure she meant it. When I mentioned it to her teacher, she told me young children can't always understand others' feelings. She gave me some tips to help Sara develop empathy.

The next time Sara needed to apologize, I was specific: "We say, 'I'm sorry'

if we make someone feel bad." I asked her to consider her friend's feelings and think of ways to make him feel better.

Sara said she could ask him to play with her.

The teacher told me that learning to put yourself in another person's shoes takes time, but Sara is improving. Each time my daughter tries, I let her know I'm proud of her efforts. ♥



OUR PURPOSE

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

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