

Reading Readiness

Make library visits enjoyable for you and your preschooler

It is wonderful to have a home library stocked for your child, but many parents have neither the money nor the space for dozens of books. But with a weekly visit to the library, your child will always have a free, fresh supply of books.

Here's how to have the best possible experience when you take your child to the library:

- Help your child get his own library card. Having his own card will give him a sense of pride and make him even more excited to check out books.
- Let your child bring a tote bag from home. Now he will be able to carry the books he has selected to the front desk all by himself.
- Talk ahead of time about how many books your child can take home. This will help you avoid power struggles at the library.
- Teach your child respect for the library. Tell him, "We walk and use quiet voices so we don't disturb others who are reading."
- Introduce your child to the children's librarian. Encourage him to ask her a question, such as, "Do you have any books about animals?"
- Look at all types of materials. Most of the time, you will check out printed books. But your child may also enjoy audio books, CDs or videos from the library.
- Find a spot in the library to sit with your child, after he has picked out some materials. Let him look through them and make his final selections.
- Make sure your child returns the books. Talk to your child about the importance of returning books on time, so that other children can enjoy them, too.

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Wellness

Improve your four-year-old's memory with regular exercise

Active exercise makes your heart beat faster and increases oxygen to the brain. Research links this to improved thinking and memory.

According to leading fitness experts, active children get better grades. Children who engage in four hours of physical activity a week score higher on math tests.

Keep your child active by:

- Giving your child chores that get him moving. He could rake, pick up tree limbs or sweep.
- Doing something physically active with your child every week. Throw a ball back and forth. Go biking or take a walk.
- Showing your child you enjoy exercise. Let him see you exercising or playing a sport.
- Monitoring your child's passive activities—like computers and television. Balance that time with physically active play.

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Building Language Skills

Model and teach your child words of description

Your child's language becomes more advanced when he regularly uses adjectives, or words of description, in his conversations. Using adjectives now will help him form pictures of what he is talking about in his mind. This is a skill that helps in learning to read later.

Build this skill by:

- Encouraging your child to use his senses. If he walks into the kitchen and shouts, "Cookies!" ask him, "How do they smell?" If he doesn't know, give him a word to use, such as sweet.
- Using descriptive words for familiar things—a soft animal, a colorful book, a warm bath.
- Expanding the ways your child uses descriptive words. If he labels a fire engine as loud, ask, "What else is loud?" Help him think of some things, if he can't come up with any right away.

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Building Responsibility

Boost your child's responsibility for success in school

Encouraging your four-year-old to become more autonomous now will pay off later. It will help her become responsible.

A recent study concluded that children who have learned responsibility and autonomy are better adjusted. They make friends more easily and do better in school. Autonomous preschoolers end up having higher scores on reading tests.

To help your child develop these traits:

- Assign your child regular chores. Tasks such as taking out the trash, feeding a pet or setting the table are appropriate. Show her how to do these chores first, and help her the first few times.
- Keep expectations realistic. Try to see things from your child's point-of-view. A four-year-old cannot make complex decisions or handle responsibilities that require more than a few steps.
- Give your child choices. Within limits, let her decide what book you'll read to her, what clothes she wears, and what game or chore she would prefer.
- Explain why you want your child to do something she's resisting. For example, it's important to pick up her clothes to keep them clean and neat.
- Don't bribe. Avoid saying, "If you pick up your toys, I'll take you out for ice cream." Children may perceive this as controlling. It doesn't promote social adjustment or academic achievement.

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