

Solutions at Home, Success in School

Alex wants to play with his brother's toy, but he grabs it instead of asking for a turn. Sarah knows how to put on her own clothes, but she whines for her mother to dress her.

You can use everyday situations like these to help your children learn self-control, independence, and other skills that will help them at home and at school. Try these tips for handling common parenting challenges.



Challenge: To teach your youngster to be independent

Solution: Showing your child how to do things for himself will make him more self-reliant and save you time later. Write "I can do it!" in big letters at the top of a piece of paper. When he asks for help with a task (hand washing), walk him through

the steps (wet hands, pump soap, scrub, rinse, dry). Once he can do it

on his own, he gets to put it on his "I can do it" list. The next time he wants you to wash his hands, you might remind him, "That's on your list!"

Challenge: To discourage whining

Solution: Everyone's day will go more smoothly if your youngster asks for what she needs in a pleasant tone of voice. First, explain what whining is by pointing it out when she does it. Then, show her how to ask in a nice tone. ("Mommy, can I please have a snack?") By not responding until she asks in a regular voice, she'll see that whining doesn't work. *Note:* Since children tend to whine when they're tired or hungry, you can help prevent it by making sure your youngster gets enough sleep and has regular meals.

Challenge: To get your youngster to do chores

Solution: Helping around the house can teach your child responsibility. Try letting him decide which chores are his.

Give him a few possibilities to choose from: "Do you want to be in charge of folding towels, setting the table, or feeding the cats?" You could have him stick with the same jobs for a week so they become a habit. While his work might not be perfect, try to avoid redoing it, or he may get discouraged. *Idea:* Take a photo of your youngster doing each job. Post the pictures on the refrigerator. When he sees them, he'll remember his chores—and he will feel a sense of pride and responsibility.

Challenge: To encourage your child to share

Solution: When your child wants a toy that a sibling or friend has, help her think of ways they can both play with it. For instance, one person might fill a dump truck with sand, and the other can empty it. Then, they can switch roles. Or you might suggest that your youngster offer to trade something for the toy ("I'll give you my red crayon for your blue crayon when you're done"). If they frequently fight over toys, try using a timer so each child gets the toy for a certain amount of time (say, 15 minutes).



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Challenge: To help your youngster develop self-control

Solution: Knowing how to handle feelings like anger and jealousy will help your child have fewer meltdowns or outbursts. Self-control can also keep her from hitting or pushing others. Teach her the names of specific emotions. (“It seems like you’re frustrated. What could you do to feel better?”) Also, try using stuffed animals to talk about her feelings. If she’s upset about losing a game, you might pretend that her teddy bear says, “I feel sad when I lose, too.” Encourage your youngster to pick another stuffed animal and have it talk to the one you’re holding. (“Me, too. I really wanted to win.”)



Challenge: To help your child adjust to a new baby

Solution: When a sibling arrives, your youngster might feel insecure about having to share your attention. Try setting aside time for just the two of you (say, while the baby naps or when another adult is in the house). You can also help him adjust by involving him in the baby’s care. If he reverts to younger behavior, like using baby talk, try not to make a big deal out of it. You might hold him on your lap and sing a lullaby. Then, show him how much fun it is to be a big kid by doing an activity together that the baby can’t do yet (make cookies, play a game of marbles). If he misbehaves more than usual, try to avoid bending the rules. He’ll feel more secure if you are consistent.



Challenge: To limit tattling

Solution: Children often tattle to get attention. When your youngster runs to tell you, “She threw a ball in the house!” you might calmly say, “Okay. If I see a problem, I’ll take care of it,” and go back to what you were doing. That way, she feels heard, but she learns that tattling doesn’t get her anywhere.

Note: Let her know it’s important for her to tell you if someone is hurt or in danger—that’s not tattling.

Challenge: To teach your child to solve problems

Solution: Your youngster will gain confidence by solving his own problems. When he’s struggling with something, try to avoid rushing in with advice. Say he’s building a fort, and the blanket keeps falling. You could ask, “Can you think of a way to fix it?” or “Do you see anything you could use to hold the blanket on the chairs?” Then, let him try out his ideas, even if you don’t think they’ll work. He will learn from trial

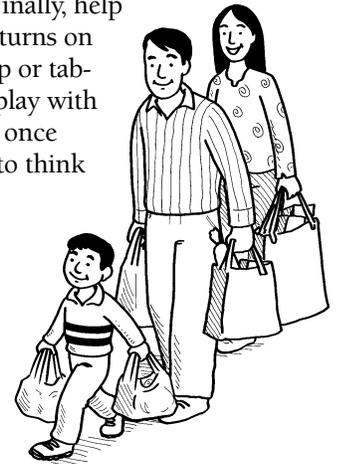
and error. **Tip:** Provide a box of household items that your child can use in different ways. For example, a paper-towel tube could become a microphone or a telescope. Being creative will help him become a good problem solver, too.

Challenge: To discourage screen time

Solution: If your youngster constantly asks to watch TV or play games on your phone, it might sometimes seem easier to just give in. But helping her learn to occupy herself in other ways will encourage her to be more creative and more active. Together, set up her play area so that it is inviting. Keep a fresh supply of library books in a basket, fill a shoebox with play dough and cookie cutters, and stack puzzles and games so she can see what’s available. Also, let her keep balls, a jump rope, and other outdoor toys where she can easily grab them on her way outside. Finally, help her plan ahead. Before she even turns on the TV or asks to use your laptop or tablet, say, “What are you going to play with today?” You might discover that once she is occupied, she’s less likely to think about movies and video games.

Challenge: To help your child cooperate

Solution: Working with others to accomplish a goal will teach your youngster about teamwork. When your family has a job to do, like cleaning the family room or putting away a lot of groceries, have him pitch in. During a cleanup, he could organize the board games or put away DVDs. Or when you get back from grocery shopping, he could carry in lighter bags while you get the heavier ones. **Idea:** When your child plays with siblings or friends, encourage them to do group projects. They might make clay food for a pretend restaurant or create dance moves for a song.



Early Years

ABC & 123

Exploring Letters and Numbers

Letters and numbers are the building blocks of reading and math. Your youngster must learn not only to recognize them, but also to understand what they mean. With letters, that means learning the sounds they make in words. When it comes to numbers, it means realizing that each number stands for a quantity.

Here are some activities you can use each day to help your child recognize and understand letters and numbers.



Letters

Read alphabet books. Check the library for alphabet books, such as *Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book!* and *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault. These books feature letters on each page, with words and pictures to go along with them. As you read, have your youngster think of other words that begin with each letter.

Provide alphabet materials. Gather stickers and stamps with letters on them. Give your child some paper, and encourage him to make words with the letters. He can spell his name, family members' names, or other words he knows. Some other word-building materials you may already have around the house include magnetic letters, alphabet blocks, and letter tiles from board games.

Identify letters and sounds. Together, make a list of words that start with the same letter as your youngster's name. Or when you're traveling, help her look for signs with words that begin with her name's first letter. Another idea is to write your child's name vertically on a piece of paper and let her try to think of a word that begins with each letter.

Sort words. Write a different letter of the alphabet on each of 26 Styrofoam or plastic cups. Then, cut words out of newspaper or magazine headlines.

Have your child sort the words by their first letters and put them in the appropriate cups. Do some cups have a lot of words? Which cups have very

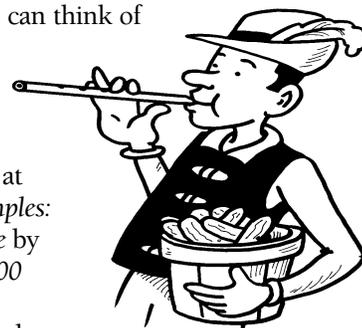


few, or none at all? Explain that some letters are more common at the beginning of words ("b," "r," "t"), and others are not as common ("q," "x," "z"). Challenge your youngster to find words beginning with uncommon letters in magazines and newspapers.

Explore sign language. Learning sign language can help your child learn letters and sounds. Visit deafblind.com/asl.html for drawings of the signing alphabet. Point out that some of the signs represent the written letters, such as "v" and "l." Help your youngster work on spelling her name and a few simple words. Once she has those down, she'll probably be eager to learn more.

Practice with tongue twisters. Try writing a tongue twister with your child. Pick a letter, and make a list of as many words as you can think of that start with that letter.

Together, write a sentence or two using only the words on the list. Or look for tongue twister books at the library or bookstore. *Examples: Rufus and Friends: Rhyme Time* by Iza Trapani, and *Just Joking: 300 Hilarious Jokes, Tricky Tongue Twisters, and Ridiculous Riddles* by National Geographic Kids. You can find more tongue twisters online at enchantedlearning.com/rhymes/Twisters.shtml.



Play alphabet memory. Fold 26 index cards in half. With your child, write an uppercase letter on one half and



its lowercase version on the other. Continue until you have all the letters of the alphabet. Cut the cards apart, put them facedown on a table, and mix them up. Take turns drawing two cards and trying to make an uppercase-lowercase match. As your youngster learns to recognize the letters, you can also talk about their sounds. Each time he turns a card over, have him name the letter, say the sound it usually makes, and think of a word that begins with it.

Make the most of mealtime. Use letter-shaped cookie cutters to cut out cookies, pancakes, cheese slices, and even mini-sandwiches. Or look for alphabet-shaped cereal, soup, noodles, or macaroni and cheese to serve your child. Have her say each letter as she eats it: “I just ate an A.”



Numbers

Sing counting songs.

Songs with numbers in their lyrics are terrific for practicing counting. Some ideas are “This Old Man” or “Five Little Monkeys.” While you’re singing, hold up the appropriate number of fingers for each verse so your youngster can see what the

numbers mean. *Tip:* You can find the words to these songs and more at bussongs.com/counting-songs.php.

Read counting books. Most counting books have a number on each page and a picture with that number of objects. To get the most out of these books, count the objects, pointing to each one with your finger, and have your child do the same. Try *One Hundred Hungry Ants* by Elinor J. Pinczes, *Over in the Meadow* by Ezra Jack Keats, or *Anno’s Counting Book* by Mitsumasa Anno.

Count everything! Suggest that your youngster count the number of stairs in your house, spoonfuls of yogurt as she eats, or how many times the phone rings before you can answer it. Ask her to see how few steps she can take to get from the car to the house or down the hall. When you’re standing in line or sitting in traffic, she can count the number of people or cars in front of you.

Count different ways. Help your child practice counting by having him choose a number between 1 and 10. For example, if he chooses 5, he would start at 5 and count to 10, without first saying “One, two, three, four.” Then, challenge him to count backward from 10. Teach your youngster to skip-count as well (by 2s, 5s, or 10s). To practice, pick a number and say, “Start at 6 and count by 2s.”

Point out how numbers are used. Identify the numbers on your house or mailbox, telephones, clocks, and the remote control. Encourage your child to notice numbers all around her. For example, ask her to look for a license plate with her age on it.

Play games with dice and cards. Take turns rolling two dice and adding them together. Write down the total for each roll. See who has the highest total after 10 turns. Or play a game of cards.

Have each person draw one card and turn it over. The player with the highest number keeps both cards. Continue playing until you’ve used the whole deck. The winner is the person with the most cards.

Play a number guessing game. Pick a number between 1 and 10. Have your youngster guess your number by giving him clues like “bigger,” “smaller,” “higher,” and “lower.” He will learn to put numbers in order and compare them.



Early Years

Bringing Out Their Best

Parents want their children to be polite and respectful, tolerant and honest. How can you teach your youngster to be the best she can be? Try these strategies to build good character in your little one.



Random acts of kindness

Take on the kindness challenge. Encourage everyone in your family to do something nice for someone else every day. Explain to your youngster that kindness can be as simple as lending a crayon to a classmate or smiling at someone who looks sad.

At dinner, share your kind acts with each other. Maybe you got lunch for a busy coworker, or your child told the bus driver that he's a good driver. Ask your youngster how she felt when she was being kind—and how she thinks the other person felt. On your

kitchen calendar, have your child write or draw a picture about the kind act she does each day.



Creative tolerance

Help your child develop tolerance by teaching him to accept others as they are. Ask him to think of a classmate who is different from him. Does he know someone who is taller? Or who has a different skin color? Talk about what he has in common with this classmate: Does he like to sing songs or catch bugs, too?

Then, try this art project. Have your youngster draw three people and vary how they look (differently shaped eyes, long or short legs, wearing glasses). Then, help him cut the drawings into three parts: the head, body, and legs. Encourage him to mix and match the pieces to make three unique people. He can glue them onto new sheets, give them names, and tell a nice story about each person he created.

Responsibility poster

Help your child be responsible in his daily routines. Cut a sheet of poster board in half. Label one half "Morning" and the other half "Evening."

Let him illustrate his responsibilities on each one. For example, his "Morning" poster could have pictures of clothes (getting dressed), a toothbrush (brushing teeth), coat and school bag (going to school). You can help him write "clothes," "teeth," and "coat and bag" under each picture. His "Evening" poster might include "bath," "teeth," and "pajamas."

Encourage your youngster to look at his posters while he gets ready for school and bed. Pretty soon, he may be able to take care of these things without any prompting from you.



Politeness points

Celebrate politeness when you see it in your home. Start by brainstorming polite words and phrases with your youngster. *Examples:* "please," "thank you," "you're welcome," "excuse me," "I'm sorry."

Keep a bag of tokens (such as bingo chips) handy. Each time someone in your family uses a polite word, give that person a token. At the end of each day, the person with the most tokens gets to hand them out the next day. Try this for a week or two, and watch politeness become a habit for your child.



Honest characters

Read books about telling the truth and being trustworthy. Talk with your youngster about the characters' actions and what it means to be honest. Here are two books to try:

■ In *A Bargain for Frances* by Russell Hoban, Thelma tricks Frances into buying her tea set. Frances then teaches her friend a lesson about friendship and honesty. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *Sam Tells Stories* is about a preschooler who tells his classmates that Martians came to his house for dinner. Sam soon learns that he can't make friends by telling lies. A book by Thierry Robberecht.

As you read, ask your child why she thinks the character lied and what that person could have done differently. Also, ask her how she thinks she would act in a similar situation.

Generous volunteers

Raise a child who is willing to give to others by teaching her to volunteer. Explain that volunteering often means helping people she doesn't know and that her generosity will mean a lot to them.

Here are a few things you can do to get started. Ask your youngster to choose 10 items (gently used books and

toys, clothing she has outgrown) to give to a charity thrift store or homeless shelter, and go there together. Have her make cards and pictures for sick children in a hospital or residents in a nursing home. Or take part in a clean-up day at a nearby park.

For more ideas, check with your child's school or your local United Way (www.unitedway.org/take-action/volunteer).

Time for patience

Waiting patiently can be tough for little ones, but it gets easier with practice. Plan ahead for times when your youngster will have to wait. Together, come up with "waiting" activities he can do when you're in a restaurant or at the dentist's office.

Let him write and draw a picture of each idea on a separate index card. *Examples:* Whisper the alphabet forward and backward. Find five things the same color as my shirt. Rub my head and pat my stomach at the same time. Count how many different sounds I can hear.

Punch holes in the top left corner of each card, and use yarn to string together two decks of "waiting cards." Leave one deck at home and the other in the car. When your child has to wait, let him select a card and do the activity.

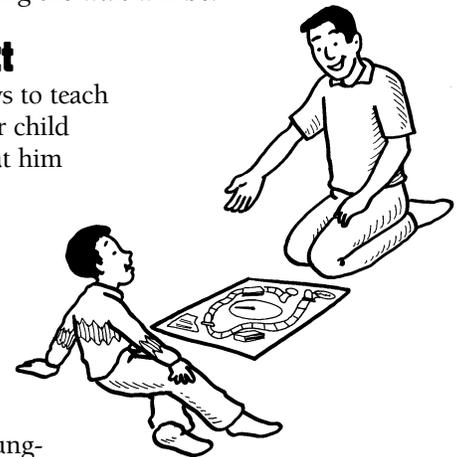
Tip: Waiting is easier if you can give your youngster a realistic idea of how long the wait will be.

Showing respect

One of the best ways to teach respect is to show your child what it looks like. Treat him with respect by using nice words and speaking calmly. Also, you can model respect by how you act toward your spouse, relatives, and friends.

Explain to your youngster that treating people with consideration means sharing, taking turns, and cooperating. For example, if you're playing a board game, say, "You go first this time, and I'll go first next time." Follow the rules, and expect him to follow them, too.

Before a playdate, remind your child of the things you've taught him. "Remember how much fun you and Jake had playing together last time? You shared the blocks so nicely. I know you can do it again today."



Early Years