

# Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

January 2009

Kids' Discovery Days

## KID BITS



### Breaking habits

When your youngster bites his nails or sucks his thumb, suggest that he do something else with his hands. He can draw or sing a song with hand motions ("The Itsy-Bitsy Spider," "Where Is Thumbkin?"). The distraction might help him break the habit.

### Provide supplies

As a new year begins, your child's teacher may need to restock classroom supplies. Send her a note to see if she wants pencils, erasers, glue sticks, or tissue boxes. Or perhaps you could recycle household materials (empty juice cans, milk jugs) for use in art projects.

### Manners, *s'il vous plait*

How many ways can your youngster say "please" and "thank you"? Introduce her to other languages by looking up the words in French, Hindi, and Japanese, for example. Find bilingual dictionaries at the library, or visit [www.elite.net/~runner/jennifers](http://www.elite.net/~runner/jennifers). She'll be so eager to practice, you won't need to remind her to be polite!

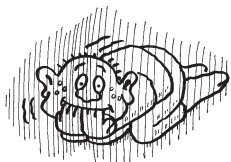
### Worth quoting

"You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."  
A. A. Milne

### Just for fun

**Q:** Where was the monster when the lights went out?

**A:** In the dark.



## Read together

What's better than just cuddling up with your child and reading a good book? Knowing that you're teaching him the skills he needs to read by himself! Make the most of story time with these ideas.

### 1. Get ready

Choose a book that repeats the same phrase on each page, such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Bill Martin Jr. Before you start, read the title and look at the cover together. Ask your youngster what he thinks the story is about. Making a prediction and having a general idea of the plot will help him understand it better.

### 2. Enjoy the book

Read the story several times to help your child become familiar with it. Emphasize the refrain by reading it in a rhythm. When your youngster picks up on the pattern, he can read along with you. After a few readings, you might pause to let him fill in the words by himself. Being able to "read" a book,



even if it's from memory, will give him confidence.

### 3. Talk about it

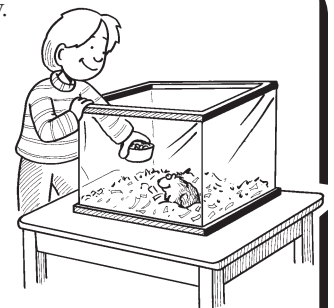
After you close the book, ask your child questions about it ("What did the teacher see?" "Which animal was your favorite?"). You'll help him connect with the story, which will improve his reading comprehension.

*Tip:* Vary your read-aloud routine by introducing your youngster to a variety of reading materials. Try poetry, non-fiction, and magazines.♥

## Helping with pets

Caring for an animal is a big lesson in responsibility. If you have a pet, your youngster can do a lot to help. She might:

- ▲ Feed him. She can put food in a gerbil's dish or sprinkle flakes into a fish tank.
- ▲ Play with him. Let your child toss a Frisbee to a dog or use a toy mouse to play with a cat.
- ▲ Keep him clean. Ask her to brush a dog's coat or help change the water in a fishbowl.



*Tip:* Remind your child that pets need love, just like people do. As she takes care of her pet, she'll learn about compassion.♥

## Traditions big and small

Traditions are an important part of family life. They give your youngster a sense of belonging and security, and they promote strong family ties.

**A tradition can be simple.** Say “I love you” in sign language every morning when your child boards the school bus. Sing songs as a family when you’re in the car together. Observe the first day of each month by turning to a new calendar page and deciding on a way to celebrate (craft project, family outing).



### A tradition can be comforting.

Hold a weekly pizza-and-movie night. Let your youngster help make the pizza by sprinkling her favorite toppings on the dough. After dinner, change into pajamas, grab pillows and blankets, and get comfortable in front of the TV.

**A tradition can be exciting.** Plan a spirit day when your local high school football team is playing or a family member has a soccer game. Have everyone wear team colors, and let your child help you decorate signs. “Tailgate” with healthy foods such as turkey wraps and fruit kebabs. You might make up cheers and root for your team.♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Home puppet theater

Stage a puppet show with your child to build his dramatic-play and speaking skills.

**Materials:** old socks, glue, felt or construction paper, buttons



Choose a story your youngster knows, such as “Little Red Riding Hood,” and help him make a puppet for each character. He can carefully cut the felt or construction paper into shapes (white triangles for the wolf’s teeth, a rectangular red cape for Red Riding Hood). Have him glue the pieces on the socks and add button eyes. Let the glue dry.

Then, slip a hand in each puppet and tell the story together. Encourage your youngster to use a different voice for each character (a high one for Red Riding Hood, a gruff one for the wolf).

**Tip:** After you’ve practiced a few times, invite friends or family to a performance.♥

## Q & A

### Ready for kindergarten?

**Q:** My daughter is the youngest in her preschool class. Should I send her to kindergarten next year or wait a year?

**A:** Start by talking to her teacher. Because children develop at different rates, the youngest child isn’t necessarily the least mature.

Find out if your daughter seems confident and happy in school. Does she play with classmates, listen to stories, follow two-step directions, and help herself in the bathroom? Making steady progress in those areas probably means she’ll be ready for kindergarten.

If you decide to wait a year, see if your public school system offers a pre-K class. If not, check into community, private, or religious schools. Look for a class with children who are the same age as your youngster. Take her to visit, and talk with her about the fun things she’ll do there. That way, she’ll feel better about waiting a year for kindergarten.♥



## PARENT TO PARENT

### Smoother mornings

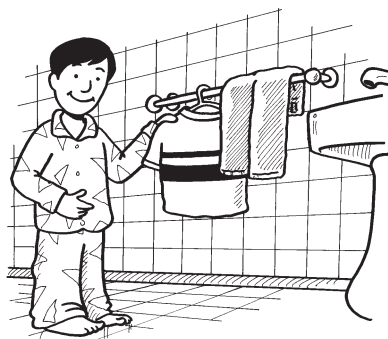
Getting ready for school used to take my son a long time. I couldn’t keep Isaiah from dawdling. I mentioned the problem to my mother, and she shared a few tricks she had used with me.

She said I should help Isaiah pick out his clothes at night and put them in the bathroom. That way, he can dress without toys to distract him. She also suggested that I put

his toothbrush and toothpaste in the downstairs bathroom so he wouldn’t have to go upstairs after breakfast.

Finally, she told me to use a timer—if Isaiah beat the clock, he could do something special before school.

I tried my mom’s ideas. Isaiah was very excited about the timer. By the end of the first week, he was ready before the buzzer, and he had time to play with his train set before we left.♥



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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a division of Aspen Publishers, Inc.  
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630  
540-636-4280 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com  
www.rfeonline.com  
ISSN 1540-5567