

# TOP

## Tips on parenting



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## PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL

by Micheal J. Kessner

Teachers and administrators welcome volunteers and tutors who will assist them in educating children, and there are many ways parents can assist in their children's education at school and at home.

### *Volunteering*

If your schedule allows, find time to volunteer at your children's school. An hour a week or one day a month can benefit children and teachers. Talk to your children's teachers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), or the school's administrators to see how you can help. Schools need volunteers to assist in the workroom making copies, laminating, cutting, stapling, or other activities that can support teachers. Ask teachers if they would like a volunteer to read to their students or spend time reviewing or tutoring one-on-one or small groups of students. If you have an interesting job, trade, or craft, see if you can share that with the children, or volunteer to be a chaperone for class field trips.

If your schedule does not allow you time during the day to go to your children's school, attend Parent Teacher Association meetings to learn what is happening at the school and view programs performed by children. Talk to teachers and administrators to see if you can cut out, copy, assist in making bulletin boards, or make crafts at home to send to school.

Check if you can make special snacks or crafts that teachers might need for special lessons, activities, units, or events.

### *Working with your child at home*

Parent involvement in school does not always mean you have to be at your children's school. Showing your concern for your children's education and assisting the teachers in that education can be as meaningful as how you work with and react to your children at home. Assisting children at home is an important component of your children's education. Helping with homework and reviewing skills at home helps reinforce what is being taught at school. Even if your schedule does not allow you to visit the school on a regular basis, your children will realize how interested you are in

Helping with homework and reviewing skills at home helps reinforce what is being taught at school.



## Parent Involvement in School

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what they are doing at school by the way you interact with them at home.

Talk to your children's teachers early in the year to learn when graded papers or a weekly folder is sent home. Give your children and the teachers the benefit of one day leniency, but if you do not see those papers or folder, ask the teachers. Also find out if a weekly newsletter goes home that can help keep you informed on what is being taught or upcoming events.

### Assignments

Talk to your children daily about their day or about what they are doing and learning in school. Show your interest in their education by asking to see assignments on a daily basis. This helps not only to see what they are learning, but also to check for understanding. If your children keep an assignment book or planner, check to see that it is filled out and if the work is being done and completed. Question your children about what is written and ask them to explain what was done in class and/or on the assignment.

### Graded Papers

When your children's teachers send home graded papers, review and look over each individual graded assignment. On failing papers or on papers done in subjects in which they are struggling, have your children reread or redo the missed problems or questions to review skills even if the teacher did not ask for the work to be redone. Ask your children questions about each paper to see if they know and remember the skill.

### Basic Skills

Review and check for understanding of basic skills daily. Assist your children in practicing skills they have already learned or mastered. To get your children to start thinking about how things work or why things happen, ask them why or how questions about their surroundings or interesting topics. Review math skills by asking addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division problems. Keep flash cards in the car to use when you have the opportunity. Work on problem solving by asking math questions in word problem form—"We have two cans of corn, but we need five. How many more cans do we need?" "We need 20 napkins, but they are sold in packages of eight. How many packages do we need?" "We have fourteen pieces of candy. You and your brother must share them. How many do each of you get?"

As your children learn to read, have them read to you daily

When driving or in stores, turn the trip into an educational experience. Have your children estimate how long it will take to get to the destination in miles or minutes, and then discuss the children's answers as well as the real answer. When selecting groceries, have your children get involved. Your children may not know about best deals and prices per ounce, but you can teach or explain this. Assisting in cooking allows children to become familiar with different foods, reading recipes, selecting the ingredients, and measuring.

### Reading

Find time to read to your children. Although twenty minutes a day is recommended, five to ten minutes a day will make an impact. Not only will your children hear the flow of the words and sentences, but they will also hear tone and voice. When possible, let them see the words as you read. Show or explain to younger children how words are arranged on the page and how you read. To get older children to start thinking about and comprehending the story, ask them questions about the story, plot, setting, characters, etc. as you read. Ask questions that begin with who, what, when, where, why, and how. Read various types of material, including magazines and newspapers as well. As your children learn to read, have them read to you daily, but continue reading to them.

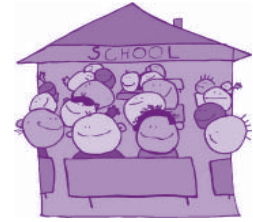
### Make Time

Find time to ask questions about school and your children's interests. Everyone is busy today, but asking how your children's day was shows them that you care and are interested in what they do. Use the time traveling between extra curricular activities to practice skills and to make important connections with your children. It is never too early to work on reading, math, and problem solving skills.

### Conclusion

Being involved in your children's education does not mean that you have to be at the school on a daily or weekly basis. Being interested in what your children are doing at school shows how important you think education is.

~Micheal J. Kessner, 6th grade Science teacher at Moss Elementary in Mesquite, Texas, is working on her Doctorate in Supervision, Curriculum, and Instruction at Texas A&M University--Commerce.



## question corner

My son goes to kindergarten in the fall. What should I be doing to prepare him?

--Jane in Oklahoma

You can help prepare your child for kindergarten by providing him with opportunities to expand his knowledge and skills through play. Reading to your child is one of the most important ways you can help your child become successful once he is in school. You can create an environment that fosters language and literacy development by providing the child with ample space and materials for reading and writing. Reading should become part of your child's daily schedule and a variety of books should be available for the child to read with you and to explore on his own. You can also enhance the child's ability to discriminate the sounds that are used in reading by encouraging your child to learn nursery rhymes and play rhyming games. The child can develop his skills in writing as he is given opportunities to use crayons, markers, pencils, pens and different types of paper. You can support your child's exploration of writing by creating a space to display his writing and drawings and by answering his questions about writing. You can also encourage your child to read his writing to you and allow him to create his own spellings for words. Another way to expose your child to literacy is to model writing yourself and to make signs for labeling objects in your child's room or other rooms in the house. You can also encourage the child to read by pointing out print in the environment (signs, cereal boxes, restaurants).



Literacy is only one aspect to consider when preparing your child for kindergarten. Children also need practice in counting. They can practice their counting skills by counting objects around the house including plates and silverware when they help set the table for dinner or count the number of crackers they can have for snack. Children also need opportunities to practice physical skills by playing with balls, jump ropes, tricycles, and other outdoor playground equipment. It is also important for children to understand how to participate in a group. Children need to be provided with opportunities to become familiar with other children. You can help your child develop social skills by allowing your child to participate in a preschool classroom or a play group. Through these interactions the child will learn how to take turns, make compromises, and obey those in authority. If you would like to learn more about the skills needed for kindergarten readiness, ask your local school district for a kindergarten readiness checklist. Several school districts also have their checklists available on-line.

~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

*question corner* features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to [eejcenter@cc.usu.edu](mailto:eejcenter@cc.usu.edu) or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University, 6705 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6705.



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## Book Review

## And the Award Goes To...



by Sylvia Read

Every year the Caldecott Medal, which was named in honor of nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott, is awarded by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children.

The 2005 Medal went to Kevin Henkes, the author and illustrator of *Kitten's First Full Moon*. Kevin Henkes may be familiar as the author and illustrator of *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, *Chester's Way*, and *Wemberly Worried*. *Kitten's First Full Moon* features illustrations done in gouache (opaque watercolors) and colored pencil. The overall effect is a dreamy nighttime feeling because of the mostly black and white illustrations, tinged with pink. In the story, Kitten mistakes the moon for a bowl of milk, goes in search of it, and is frustrated, but upon coming home finds exactly what she went looking for. It's a comforting thought that what we're looking for is back home in a safe place.

This year, three Honor books were named by the committee. *The Red Book* by Barbara Lehman is a fascinating wordless book. In a snow bank on a city street, a girl finds a red book, which zooms in on an island where she sees a boy, who has just found a red book in which he can see her. The illustrations are simple, beautiful watercolors that reveal how, through the magic of books, we can visit far-away places. Wordless books are excellent for building children's oral language and comprehension as they talk about and explain what they think is going on in the pictures.

Young children will definitely enjoy *Knuffle Bunny*, written and illustrated by Mo Willems, who has written for Sesame Street. *Knuffle Bunny* uses photographs overlaid with cartoon drawings to tell the story of how Dad and Trixie lose Trixie's favorite stuffed animal, Knuffle Bunny. Parents will find Trixie's attempts (including "going boneless") to tell her father that Knuffle Bunny got left behind at the Laundromat. Humorous and children will be satisfied with a happy ending.

*Coming On Home Soon*, illustrated by E. B. Lewis, has watercolor paintings that beautifully enhance the story, written by Jacqueline Woodson, of a girl whose mother has gone to Chicago during World War II to find work. The girl

lives in the south with her grandmother and together they fill the time while the mother is gone writing letters to her and taking care of a new kitten. Through his effective use of light and tones, Lewis's paintings convey the complex emotions of the girl and her grandmother as they wait for letters from the mother and long for her eventual return.

~Sylvia Read is a former 1st and 2nd grade teacher who now teaches language arts and children's literature classes to preservice and inservice teachers at Utah State University.

## activity corner

### An Ocean in a Bottle

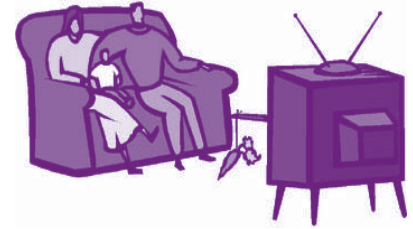
#### Materials:

- 2-liter clear plastic soda bottles
- Baby oil
- Water
- Food coloring
- Duct tape



#### Directions:

Fill one half of the soda bottle with water. Add drops of blue and green food coloring to create the color of the ocean. Then fill the remainder of the bottle with baby oil, but leave 3 inches of air at the top to reproduce the rolling waves. The waves will form because the baby oil and water will not mix. If you would like to add more dimension to the activity, you can put colorful plastic beads or bits of Mylar in the bottle. Be sure to screw the lid on very tight and secure it with heavy duct tape so it will not leak. This toy does require adult supervision. This activity can be expanded upon by visiting the ocean or a local wave pool.



# TELEVISION: A TOOL TO EDUCATE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

by Saramma T. Mathew, PhD

Television is one tool that can be used for teaching preschool children (ages 3 – 5). American Academy of Pediatrics (1999) recommends that exposure of young children to television should be limited. They suggest that until the age of two, children watch no television and after that age, no more than one to two hours of quality programming daily. Young children in the U.S. watch a lot of television, an average of 36 hours of television a week in 1990 (National Center for Children Exposed to Violence, 2001). According to Huston (1992), if a four-year-old child watches television (cartoons, Sesame Street), on the average of 3 hrs. per day by the time he/she is 18 years old, the child would have spent three years watching television. Television can have positive influence on children’s development by presenting interesting educational programs, increasing their general information about the world beyond their immediate environment, and giving models of pro-social behavior (Clifford, Gunter, & McAleer, 1995).

Sesame Street, the most popular TV program for preschoolers, viewed by 85% of 3-to-5-year-olds, was designed and unveiled in 1969 to help preschoolers better prepare for school. The style and curriculum of Sesame Street was not developed as a substitute for an educationally sound Nursery program or Head Start (4:1 child-teacher ratio) but was developed as an ingredient for educational diet for the millions of 3-5 year olds who do not have the opportunity to attend

preschool including children from low income or minority families (Bogatz & Ball, 1972).

Bogatz and Ball (1972) found that preschoolers who watched Sesame Street regularly were more proficient in academic skills compared to preschoolers who watched infrequently. Sesame Street includes exercises in recognizing letters, discriminating numbers and letters, ordering and classifying objects, building vocabulary and solving simple problems.

According to Liebert and Sprafkin (1988), watching Sesame Street helped improve preschoolers’ cognitive skills such as reciting the letters of alphabet through rote memory and writing their names correctly. Those who watched the program more than five times per week improved their cognitive skills more than those who watched four to five times, two to three times, or rarely watched.

The effectiveness of Sesame Street was confirmed when Rice and colleagues (1990) conducted a two-year long study comparing three groups of 3-and 5-year-olds, those who watched the cartoons/other programs, those who watched the same amount of Sesame Street, and those who watched little or no television. It was found that children who watched Sesame Street had significantly larger vocabulary than those who watched other programs or those who watched no television. It was also interesting to find that children who watched the program frequently at age 3 showed richer vocabularies at age 5 than those who watched the program infrequently. According to Rice and her

colleagues another educational program, “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood”, consisting of simple language, repetition, elaboration of word meanings, and recast, can enhance vocabulary of young television viewers.

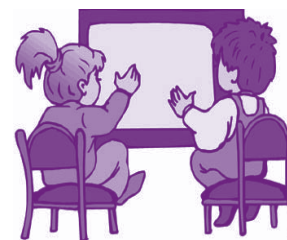
Sometimes parents use television as “video picture book” and engage in verbal interaction with preschoolers stimulating their cognitive skill through language learning (Lemish & Rice, 1986). In an attempt to investigate if television can function as a vehicle for improving vocabulary, Rice and Woodsmall (1988) exposed three and five-year-olds to twenty new words in an animated television story for 15 minutes.

After an exposure of two viewings both groups showed gain in comprehension. Three-year-olds learned one or two new words and five-year-olds learned four to five words in such a short period demonstrating the power of educational television in learning language.

There are other programs developed by Children’s Television Workshop that are found to be useful to educate preschoolers. According to Fisch and McCann (1993), certain TV programs improved children’s academic skills. For example, Electric Company taught reading skills, 3-2-1 Contact focused on science and technology, and Square One TV taught mathematics. Other public television programs that improve academic and social skills are:

1. Reading Rainbow (introduces children’s books)
2. Where in Time is Carmen SanDiego? (teaches history)

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## Television: A Tool to Educate Preschool Children

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### 3. Bill Nye the Science Guy ( makes science fun)

The early fun experience in mathematics, science, and history through television can stimulate their curiosity to help structure the preschoolers' general knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

"The All New Captain Kangaroo" starring John McDonough as the new "captain" was aired nationwide in September 2003. Part of this program is portrayed as the "butt of Mr. Moose's knock-knock jokes" which rains down ping-pong balls on children (Hopkins, 1997).

An example:

Knock, knock,.....

Who's there?

Doris.

Doris who?

Doris closed. That is why I knocked.



Learning jokes are important for linguistic awareness and cognitive development of young children (McGhee, 1979). In addition, using jokes will help children interact with others to improve social skills and self-confidence.

The educational television program, "Barney's Kids", which consists of activities like games, stories, art and music, help improve the academic skills, social skills and imagination of preschoolers. It may also transmit rules and conventions of culture to them.

Campbell (1982) stated that watching educational programs like Sesame Street can improve pro-social behavior like helping, sharing, and cooperating. Watching educational programs will improve the imagination of children since they are exposed to a variety of events which they are unable to experience personally. Television programs like Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, Dragon Tales, and Teletubbies promote positive messages in solving social and personal problems (Honig, 2004/05). Research (Tower, et. al. 1979; Huston & Wright, 1998) supports the notion that children who watch Mister Roger's Neighborhood are more likely to behave pro-socially compared to those who do not. Calvert and Cocking (1992) found that television can be used to promote good health and nutrition habits of children.

In spite of the various positive influences of television on the development of young children, television is criticized because it can also have negative influences such as taking

the child away from homework, replacing interactions with parents, peers, and siblings, causing children to become passive listeners rather than active learners of knowledge, teaching them stereo-typical beliefs, providing them with violent models of aggression, and presenting them with unrealistic views of the world (Honig, 2004/05; Santrock, 2004). Developmental psychologists (Singer & Singer, 1983) cautioned that watching television including "Sesame Street" may cause children to become emotionally aroused and inattentive due to the unrelated and fast-paced format of the program. Some other limitations of preschoolers' television literacy are due to the fact children do not understand the plot of what they are viewing and the children do not separate fantasy from reality.

Television is constantly criticized because of its link to the vicarious learning of aggression, which applies to Sesame Street as well (Fitch, 2001). Those who are against violence on TV argue that children observe violence and imitate what they see. Steus, Applefield and Smith (1971) conducted an experiment using two groups of randomly assigned preschoolers to study the effect of watching violent Saturday cartoons. One group watched television shows taken directly from violent Saturday morning cartoons on eleven different days, and the other group watched television cartoons with all violence removed. The researchers concluded that exposure to TV violence caused increased aggression in children compared to the control group. Thus, several researchers determined a connection between children's viewing violence and their aggression and many changes have been made in the educational programs to reduce violence.

A review of existing literature indicates that educational television programs are effective in improving academic skills, social skills, health habits, etc. of preschool children, but adults have to be careful and judicious in the use of television to educate children (Honig, 2004/05; Fitch, 2001). Some programs are pro-social in nature and provide messages to handle impulsiveness or unpleasant feelings whereas other television programs are incubators for teaching violent means of solving social problems. Also, allowing children to watch television as a baby-sitter is like using a narcotic to keep the child still. Despite criticism, educational television has the possibility of expanding the horizon of preschool children.



To take advantage of the benefits the following suggestions are made for parents:

1. Parents should serve as good gatekeepers in choosing children's TV programs that are appropriate and support self-reflexivity and positive solutions to social problems.
2. Parents should encourage their preschoolers to watch educational television programs regularly.
3. Parents should select age appropriate educational television programs for their children and monitor the time children watch the program (no more than two hours daily).
4. It is advisable that parents watch the programs with their children. Then, they can explain certain things and answer questions their children might have.
5. Also, parents can ask the children questions related to the program during and after they complete watching the program.
6. Parents should scaffold (assist) the preschoolers to recite the ABC songs/rhyming songs, count, and tell stories they learned from TV.
7. Parents should encourage children to say the educational television jokes with others to improve their social skills and build their self-confidence.
8. When children tell stories they learned from TV, parents should ask them questions to help them elaborate and remember the theme.

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~Dr. Saramma Mathew is a professor of Educational Psychology at Troy University, Troy, Alabama. She has been teaching Child/Developmental Psychology since 1988. She has a special interest in children and their learning.





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