

Take Learning Outside

Filled with plants, animals, and other wonders of nature, the great outdoors is an ideal learning lab for your youngster. Use the activities in this guide to inspire him to go outside and play while he builds skills that will help him in school.

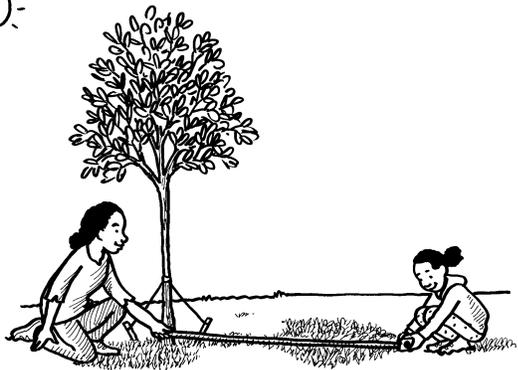


Read “on location”

Encourage your child to make connections between books and real life with this idea.

First, have him list outdoor places where the two of you can sit and read. *Examples:* A big rock alongside a trail at the park, a bench by the basketball court down the street, a picnic blanket under a shady tree in your yard.

Together, find books at home or in the library that fit each location. While sitting on a rock with you, maybe your youngster will read a story about a mountain-climbing expedition. Boost comprehension skills by asking him to think about what he'd need to pack for an adventure like the one in his book—perhaps trail mix, a water bottle, and a rain jacket. As your child reads in each place, let him check it off his list.



Measure a tree

How tall is that tree? On a sunny day, head outdoors with a measuring tape, and your youngster can use math (and shadows) to find out.

Stand in a sunny spot while your child measures your shadow's length (say, 52 inches). Tell her how tall you are, and have her divide your height (65 inches) by your shadow's length ($65 \div 52 = 1.25$).

Your height is approximately 1.25 times the length of your shadow, and at the same moment in time, the tree's height is also approximately 1.25 times the length of its shadow! To

find the tree's approximate height, help your youngster measure the length of its shadow, then multiply by 1.25. So if the shadow is 672 inches long, the tree is about 840 inches tall ($672 \times 1.25 = 840$ inches, or 70 feet).

Shadows change throughout the day, so what happens if she measures the lengths of your shadows at a different time? If yours is twice as long as your height ($65 \times 2 = 130$ inches), the tree's shadow will be, too ($840 \times 2 = 1,680$ inches).

Write haiku

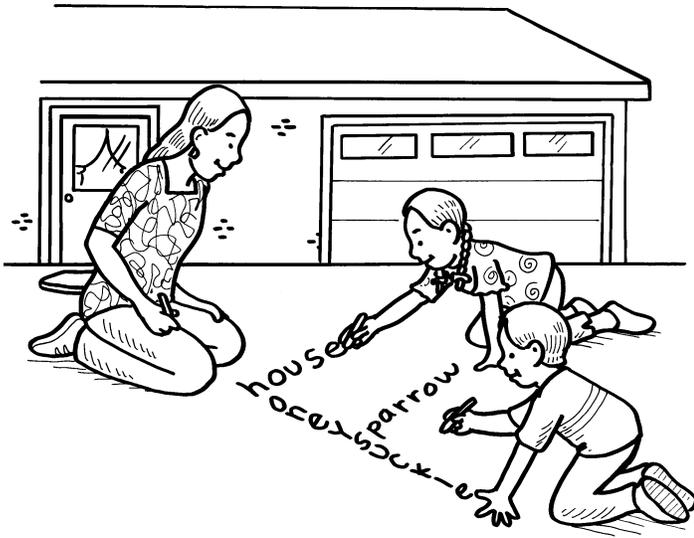
*Butterflies zip by,
playing a wild game of tag.
I wonder who's "It."*

For a fun way to practice writing, suggest that your child try his hand at *haiku*, or traditional Japanese poetry about nature. Lines one and three have five syllables each, and line two has seven.

Let him carry pencil and paper outside when you take a walk or go fishing, and look for inspiration. Maybe he'll spot butterflies chasing each other, clouds in the shape of a castle, or a field of bright yellow flowers. Have your youngster jot down details, then weave them into haiku poems.



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Make a crossword puzzle

Sidewalk chalk and pavement are all you need for this activity that boosts your child’s vocabulary and spelling skills.

Each person chooses a different color of chalk. The first player writes down something she spots (say, *honeysuckle*). The next person finds something that shares a letter with the previous word and writes its name crossword-style. She might write *sparrow* starting with the *s* in *honeysuckle*. The next player could use the *w* in *sparrow* to add *web*.

Keep adding words until no one can think of another one or you run out of space. Then, spot something else, and start a new crossword!

Observe animals

Let your youngster pretend he’s a scientist who studies animals. He’ll build observation skills and work on nonfiction writing by creating this field guide.

Sit outdoors together quietly, and have him choose an animal to observe. In a notebook, your child can write about its appearance and behavior. *Example:* “A squirrel has a bushy tail and munches on nuts.” Have him draw pictures and diagrams, and add captions to illustrate each entry.

Tip: Suggest that your youngster add to his field journal when he visits other places where animals live, such as the zoo or his cousin’s farm.

Design a play space

Natural materials like sticks and rocks make great “toys” for imaginary play. Suggest that your child gather outdoor objects and craft supplies to design a miniature play space. She’ll use engineering and creative thinking as she decides how to use the items.



For a pretend campground, she might duct-tape sticks together to build a tent, arrange pebbles in a circle for a campfire, and use twigs for people. Now encourage her to act out different scenarios. Maybe the people will sing songs around the fire or go for a hike. Next, she could make a beach, a construction site, or even an ancient civilization.

Outdoor games



The whole family can play outside together with these friendly competitions that stretch thinking skills.

Category catch. Choose a category of objects you might find outdoors (say, flowers). On each turn, a player tosses a ball straight up in the air. Quick! Name something in the category (*rose, daisy, tulip*) before you catch the ball! If you can’t think of one that hasn’t been named or if you don’t catch

the ball, you’re out. When one player remains, that person chooses the next category.

Triangle brainteaser. Each player should gather nine twigs that are roughly the same length. Then, compete to see who can arrange their twigs to form the most triangles. *Tip:* Look for ways to make triangles *inside* other triangles. Now try again with 12 or 15 sticks each.

ABC scavenger hunt. Have each person write the alphabet vertically on a separate sheet of paper. Then, set a timer for five minutes while everyone searches the yard for items that start with each letter. *Note:* Players can write an item only once, so they’ll need to decide, is that a *bucket* or a *pail*? The winner is the player who has listed the most objects when the timer goes off.



Say No to Bullying

Bullying is a complicated topic—in fact, educators are constantly learning more about ways to prevent and deal with bullying behavior. But what can parents do? A lot, actually! This guide tackles myths about bullying to help you understand what it is and how to help your child navigate different situations.

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Myth: Kids will be kids—bullying is just part of growing up.

Fact: Bullying has serious consequences for everyone involved. Children who are bullied can fall behind in school and develop depression and anxiety. Sometimes these issues continue into adulthood. And kids who bully are more likely to get into trouble at school and even break the law when they're older.

What to do: Take bullying seriously. If you suspect that your youngster is being targeted or is bullying others, call or email his teacher or school counselor. Also, talk to your child. You could begin by asking if he's aware of bullying at school. If he admits to being bullied or to bullying, work with the school to address the problem. And if he insists everything is fine, keep the lines of communication open so he's comfortable confiding in you about bullying.♥

Myth: Bullying is usually physical.

Fact: Bullying comes in many forms. In fact, the most common types are verbal (name-calling, threats) and social (spreading rumors, deliberately shunning others). When verbal or social bullying happens online, it's called cyberbullying. Keep in mind that all kinds of bullying have two things in common. First, the attacks are ongoing, and second, a child who bullies has more power than her target. She may be bigger, older, or more popular, for instance. *Note:* A one-time incident or minor teasing between friends usually isn't considered bullying.

What to do: Start a conversation with your youngster about the different kinds of bullying so she learns to recognize them. Together, brainstorm examples of each, along with ways she could respond. If your child spends time online, make sure she communicates only with relatives and close friends. She shouldn't chat or network with people she doesn't know in real life.♥

Myth: Children can handle bullying on their own.

Fact: Youngsters usually need adult help to deal with bullying.

What to do: If your child is bullied, let her know it isn't her fault and that you and other adults are there to support her. Ask when and where the bullying occurs. Then, contact the school, even if the bullying takes place off school property or online. That way, you can find out what rules are in place to protect your youngster. If your child witnesses bullying and feels safe intervening, she could give the person being targeted an escape ("The teacher needs to see us now"). If she thinks it would be dangerous to step in, she should quickly tell the nearest adult.♥



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Myth: I'd know if my child were being bullied or bullying others.

Fact: A youngster who is targeted may keep the situation a secret for fear that the person bullying him will get mad and harm him even more. He may also hesitate to tell an adult because he's ashamed or feels like the bullying is his fault. And children who bully usually do so when adults aren't looking.

What to do: Be alert for warning signs that your child is being bullied. *Examples:* Frequent headaches or stomachaches,

changes in eating or sleeping habits, withdrawing from family and friends, asking to stay home from school, damaged or missing belongings. On the other hand, a youngster who bullies may have discipline problems, behave aggressively, express a strong desire to be popular, and frequently try to talk his way out of blame.♥

Myth: If my child is bullied, she should fight back.

Fact: Your youngster could get hurt if she fights back. She may also be disciplined for fighting at school, even if she didn't start it.

What to do: Help your child practice safe ways to respond that won't give the person doing the bullying the reaction he wants. She could say something like "I won't hang around while you talk to me like that." Or she might simply walk away and join a group of friends. Regardless, she should let an adult know what's going on.♥

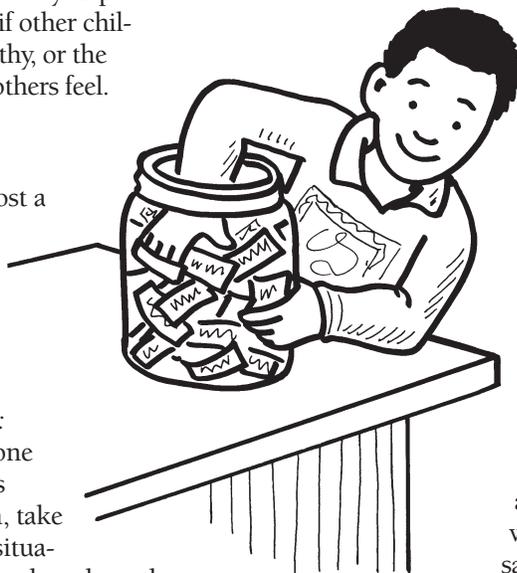


Prevent bullying with empathy

How can you make your youngster less likely to participate in bullying and more likely to step in if other children are targeted? Help him develop empathy, or the ability to understand and care about how others feel. Try these ideas.

Make an empathy jar

How would your youngster feel if he lost a favorite toy? This game will let him practice putting himself in someone else's shoes and recognizing emotions. On small slips of paper, have family members write down situations that would cause different feelings like disappointment, joy, anger, or excitement. *Examples:* "No one wants to play with you." "Someone laughs at your clothes." "Your lost pet has been found." Place the slips in a jar. Then, take turns pulling one out and acting out the situation. Others try to guess what's going on and say how the person feels (*examples:* lonely, excited).



Follow the golden rule

Remind your youngster to treat others the way she wants to be treated. What would she like to have others say and do for her, and what *wouldn't* she appreciate? For instance, she'd probably want to be invited to birthday parties. But it would hurt to hear friends deliberately bragging about parties she wasn't invited to. Anytime she needs to decide if something is a good idea, she can ask herself if she would want the same thing done to her. Say she's tempted to share embarrassing information about a classmate. She should consider whether she'd want the same thing said about her—if not, she should keep it to herself.

Q&As for Effective Parenting

What are your biggest parenting challenges? Discipline? Sibling rivalry? Maybe you want your child to be more independent or persistent. Here are answers to some of the most common parenting questions.



Encourage good behavior

Q: My daughter has been testing my discipline skills lately. How can I get her to behave better without nagging or yelling?

A: It helps to view discipline as teaching your youngster to behave, rather than about punishing her when she doesn't.

First, be sure she knows the reasons behind rules. She'll be more likely to follow them if she understands what they're for. *Example:* "You have to ask before you watch TV or play video games so I can make sure you don't have too much screen time."

When she breaks a rule, make the consequences logical. For instance, if she plays on your tablet without permission, she might lose screen time for the day.

Finally, let your child know you noticed when she follows a rule. You could say something like, "You remembered to ask—that was responsible of you."

Routines that work

Q: I know sticking to a regular routine is good for my son. But I work two jobs, and it's not always easy. What can I do?

A: Children (and parents!) function best when they follow a familiar pattern each day. Try putting routines in writing—that may help you establish and stick to them.



Help your youngster make a daily schedule to hang on the refrigerator. *Examples:* 7:30 a.m., eat breakfast. 8:15 a.m., go to school. 7 p.m., do homework. Then, encourage him to refer to it throughout the day.

Post your work schedule on the fridge, too. Your child will know what time you'll be home and which days you're off. Then each morning, go over your schedules so he knows what to expect. *Note:* Your schedules make a good reference for sitters and grandparents, too.



Help siblings get along

Q: It seems like my daughters bicker more than they get along. Help! Is there a cure for sibling rivalry?

A: Children may fight or pick on each other to get their parents' attention. One way to limit conflict is to step out of the role of referee and let them settle minor arguments themselves.

To head off future battles, give each child a little one-on-one time each day if possible. You could read bedtime stories to them separately, or play cards with one while the other is at soccer practice.

Finally, encourage teamwork to reduce competition between your girls. Instead of racing each other to complete a chore, they could race against the clock, for instance. Or play board games where the kids compete against the grownups rather than against each other.

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Build independence

Q: *I want my son to be more independent, but sometimes it's just easier and faster to do things for him. Where should I start?*

A: The first step is to help your son realize he's capable of taking care of himself. Pick a task you'd like him to be in charge of, such as making his own breakfast on school mornings. Find a time when you're not rushed (perhaps on the weekend), and go through the steps together. You might show him how to make a smoothie or peel a hard-boiled egg, for example.

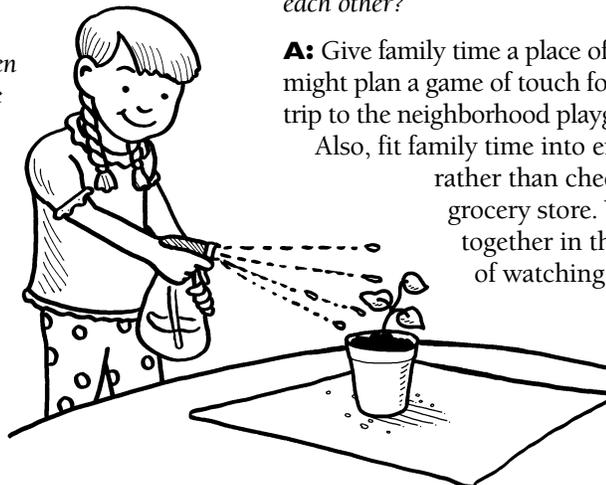
Another way to build independence is to let your youngster make more of his own decisions. Start with something small, like how to organize his belongings. Instead of saying, "Put your sports equipment in the hall closet," try asking, "Where's the best place to keep your gear?" Then, go with what he decides. You'll send the message that you believe he's capable of making good choices.

Promote persistence

Q: *My daughter tends to give up easily when a task is challenging. How can I help her be more persistent?*

A: Here's a secret: Kids who are persistent use problem-solving strategies when the going gets tough.

Say your daughter is struggling with her science project. Encourage her to think about what didn't work ("I poured too much water on my plants") and what she might try instead ("I'll use a spray bottle so the soil gets damp but not soaked").



Learning to brainstorm ideas will keep her reaching for new solutions rather than quitting.

Also, your child could think about times in the past when she overcame struggles. Maybe she had a hard time memorizing her lines for the school play, so she recorded herself rehearsing, then listened constantly—and nailed the performance. Remembering her successes can motivate her to persist.

Manage emotions

Q: *My son loses his temper when he gets angry. How can I help him control his emotions?*

A: To tame those temper outbursts, help your son learn to recognize the warning signs that he's becoming angry. Maybe he clenches his fists or feels like he's going to "explode."

Then, brainstorm strategies he can use to calm down when he feels himself losing control. He might close his eyes and count to 20 or walk away and do something quiet (like coloring) until he settles down.



Finally, have your youngster think of things he can say when he's angry instead of lashing out with words he might regret later. He could say, "I'm too angry to talk right now" and go in another room to calm down.

Find time for family

Q: *Life is hectic at our house. How can we make more time for each other?*

A: Give family time a place of honor on your calendar! You might plan a game of touch football on Saturday afternoon or a trip to the neighborhood playground on Wednesday evening.

Also, fit family time into errands. Tell each other jokes rather than checking your phone in line at the grocery store. Work on a crossword puzzle together in the dentist's waiting room instead of watching TV, or sing songs in the car as you drive.

Look for pockets of time at home, too. While dinner's in the oven, read your child a story or ask her to show you her dance routine.