

Offer your child a couple of options in a decision that is coming soon, such as tomorrow's clothes.

Your child will practice considering his options before making a decision.



Why this is important

Your child will feel more independent when you provide a series of experiences that offer him a choice, such as choosing his own clothes and dressing himself. He can be more independent and successful in many activities if you help him to think and plan ahead before they happen. He will use planning skills later in life while, for example, preparing meals, taking a test, and spending money.

What you do

- Talk with your child before bedtime about an event happening the next day.
- Invite him to choose clothing that will be suitable. Help him lay out the clothes so he can put them on by himself in the morning.
- Guide him to see what options are reasonable so you will not have to veto his choices: *If you're going on a walk around the neighborhood, will you want to wear your comfortable shoes?*
- Think with him about alternatives in case of rain or changed weather. Lay out his raincoat and let him decide in the morning if he needs it.
- Make fewer decisions for him as he progresses toward independently choosing and dressing himself.

Another idea

Use this method for other activities that require planning, such as preparing a snack, selecting a book to read tomorrow, or making a gift for someone.

Turn an ordinary job, such as putting toys away, into a relay game for your child and a few family members.

By being a member of a fun team, your child may develop a positive attitude about cooperating.



Why this is important

You can provide your child with chances to accomplish tasks cooperatively with other children. Many enjoyable activities, such as team sports, are possible only when groups of people work together. Enjoyable group experiences at age 4 can help your child gain a positive, confident attitude toward later cooperative activities.

What you do

- Create a fun relay game for your child that accomplishes an ordinary task. For example, several children can cooperate in carrying toys to an outdoor sandbox.
- Offer instructions that involve your child and a couple of family members. Assign each child a task in the process of getting the toys to the sandbox. *Let's pretend these sand toys are very big and that you can only carry one at a time. Jeri, you start. Let's pretend that Jeri can only carry a toy from here to the table. Grandma will stand at the table to take each toy when Jeri gets it there. Then Grandma will carry each toy from the table to the door, where Gene is. Then Gene will carry each toy to the sandbox.*
- Observe and comment as the children cooperate: *Jeri, it was a good idea to wait for Grandma until she got back to the table. Then she was ready for the next toy that you brought.*
- Talk about the game when the children are playing in the sandbox. Help the children remember each person's role.

Another idea

Use a relay game for giving a snack out for a picnic, putting away toys, or moving tricycles to the shed.

Prepare for a holiday or exciting event with your child by talking and reading about it in books and then enjoy the special time when it arrives.

Your child's advance knowledge of the holiday will heighten his enjoyment, and he will see that books are one good resource for information.



Why this is important

Your child will learn that useful information can be gained through reading. He can learn about family and culture through celebrating holidays and special events. These special, recurring family rituals give children a way to mark the passage of time and the security of knowing that a familiar event will return.

What you do

- Talk as a family about an upcoming holiday or special event.
- Encourage your child to participate by asking questions and helping with preparation. He may be able to help with food or decorations.
- Explain that not everyone observes this holiday or participates in the event but that it means something special to your family.
- Use books to research the holiday with your child. Learn about how other cultures celebrate the same holidays that you do. For example, you and your child could read about Christmas in Sweden, or Diwali in India.
- Point out to your child how useful books can be for finding information. Use what you find to plan your own celebration.

Another idea

You can research new holidays with your child, too. Answer your child's questions honestly as you both learn about the holiday: *I'm not sure why they make piñatas in Mexico. Let's look at the library's website and see if we can find out. Or, Let's look on the Internet to see why some Japanese families make kites that look like fish.*

Recite a series of rhyming words, and ask your child to say *Stop!* when he hears a word that does not rhyme.

Your child will practice focusing on the sounds that occur at the ends of words.



Why this is important

Your child will practice hearing rhyme patterns and eliminating words that do not fit. Recognizing rhymes is another step in understanding how words are put together. Games that help your child focus on the individual sounds of language also help him to develop skills that will be useful in learning to read and spell.

What you do

- Invite your child to play a rhyming game with you. Begin by repeating words he has heard in a nursery rhyme or favorite book such as *"Hey Diddle Diddle:" Dock, clock, tock. All those words rhyme. Now I'm going to say more words. But one won't rhyme with the others. When you hear that word tell me to stop. Are you ready? Dock, clock, rock, lock, apple.*
- Repeat the words if he does not tell you to stop at *apple*.
- Use nonsense words occasionally to make the game more fun.
- Place the non-rhyming word at different points in the sequence so that your child will not expect it.

Another idea

Invite your child to be the leader and list rhyming words and one that does not rhyme.

Use your fingers, objects, or motions to add fun as your child counts to 10 or higher. Our number system is based on 10, so it is useful to get plenty of practice using these important numbers.



Why this is important

Counting games offer your child practice using the words from 1 to 10 (or more, if she is ready) in sequence. The numerical system in our country is based on 10. When a child masters 10s, it is a good start on the whole system.

What you do

- Use a fingerplay song to help your child practice numbers from 1 to 10:

Sing

*One, two, three, four, five,
I caught a fish alive.
Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
I let him go again.*

Play

Close the fingers on one hand to make a fist.
Enclose your first fist with your second hand.
Open up the fingers of your second hand.
Put your hands together and move them back and forth
to look like a swimming fish.

- Practice counting with pegs, crayons, or clothespins. You can also use motions such as walking up stairs, hopping on one foot, or clapping your hands to count.
- Say the number clearly as you illustrate it. Encourage your child to say the number during the action.

Another idea

Pay attention to your child's progress with counting. Add more numbers when you think she is ready.

When a problem arises, help your child first to name the problem and then to think of two or three possible solutions to try.

With your guidance, your child will learn the basic steps of problem-solving.



Why this is important

Your questions will enable your child to define a problem, identify two possible solutions, and evaluate the alternatives before acting. Simple, systematic problem-solving is the foundation for later solving the complex problems of older childhood and adult life.

What you do

- Use these three steps to help your child work through a problem:
 1. Name the problem.
 2. Think of possible solutions.
 3. Choose the best possible solution and try it.
- Focus on everyday situations and guide your child by asking questions that will help him identify and describe the problem. For example, suppose that your child's truck damaged Amy's sandcastle. Prompt: *Amy seems unhappy. I wonder what the problem is.*
- Listen as your child tells you about the problem. Then prompt him again: *It sounds like the sandbox is crowded. What can we do to solve that problem?*
- Give your child enough time to think about solutions. Prompt him with questions only if he needs help: *Do all these activities have to be done in the sandbox?*
- Wait for your child to suggest a few possible solutions before asking, *Which of those ideas do you like best?*
- Encourage your child to try the solution and observe to see whether the problem is solved. If the problem reoccurs, suggest that he try one of his other possible solutions.

Another idea

Talk with your child about a previous problem that could have been solved in more than one way. Talk about what the options were and which option your child chose. This may help him solve a similar problem in the future.

Play a follow-the-leader game with the rule *Always do what you hear, not what you see*.

This gives your child practice focusing on verbal directions while not being distracted by other information.



Why this is important

Giving conflicting verbal and visual messages gives your child practice in paying attention to the correct direction. The messages we receive are seldom perfectly clear. Sounds or actions often intrude to take attention away from what is most important. Children in school will need to be able to attend to the message from the teacher while other children are talking or other interesting things are happening around them.

What you do

- Invite your child to join you in a new version of the game “Simon Says.”
- Explain the new rule: *Always do what you hear, not what you see*. Tell him that sometimes you will say and do the same thing, but at other times you will say one thing and do another. Start slowly and pick up speed as the game progresses.
- Make your actions match the words until the third or fourth direction. As you say, *Simon says stand on tip-toe*, bend over instead.
- Continue to play, giving directions that contain all the action and space words your child knows: *touch your nose, jump up and down, spin around*, etc.
- Compliment him on his good listening skills when he catches you doing the wrong motion.

Another idea

Encourage your child to be the leader and share the game with other family members.

Give directions to your child and a sibling or other family members to make marks or place color cards on a piece of paper that has been divided into four parts.

Your child will gain experience in following directions working with materials he will use in school, such as paper, cards, and crayons.



Why this is important

In this game he will practice listening to directions that can be carried out on paper. A child who knows the word *red* may be temporarily stumped by a complex question that has the simple answer *red*.

What you do

- Use the colored squares from *LearningGames* 188, “Color and Number Cards.” Add a sheet of paper folded into four parts.
- Number the four squares on the folded paper from one to four.
- Give your child a paper and a set of color cards.
- Provide directions that call for actions, and ask questions that call for words. For example:

Put a color in each square.

Put colors in the bottom squares only.

What color is in square number three?

Where is the color orange?

- Respond with encouragement when your child answers correctly: *I see you chose the red card.*

Another idea

Change the game by using crayons instead of colored cards. Your directions could be *Draw a green circle in the top square, Make an X in each of the bottom squares, and Turn the circle into a happy face.*

Say some pairs of words and let your child tell you if their beginning sounds are the same (as in *mouse* and *mat*) or different (as in *tall* and *pan*).

Through repeated playing, your child may begin to pay more attention to the important sounds that come at the beginnings of words.



Why this is important

By playing this game your child will practice focusing on the beginning sounds in words and she may begin using the words *same* and *different* in describing sounds and words. Hearing the beginning sounds of words is an important step in understanding that a word is made up of a series of sounds. The skill of hearing the individual sounds in words will be used later by your child in spelling and reading.

What you do

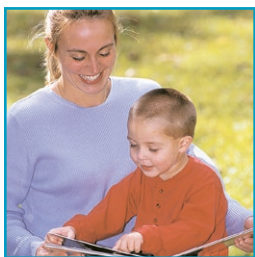
- Invite your child to join you in a word game. Say, *Listen to these words. Do they sound the same at the beginning? Or do they sound different? Mouse, mat.*
- Repeat the words if your child seems unsure. Exaggerate the beginning sound: *Listen again. Mmmouse, mmmat.*
- Comment positively on your child's successes. *Yes, they are the same beginning sound!*
- Practice with one sound (such as *m*) until you feel your child fully understands the game.
- Add more words to the groupings as you play.

Another idea

Play this game throughout the day such as while riding in the car, taking a walk through the neighborhood, or while taking a bath.

Emphasize and point to words that are repeated in books and then encourage your child to say and point to them.

By playing an active role during reading time, your child will begin to notice how repeated words sound and look.



Why this is important

Four-year-olds are typically beginning to show interest in the words as well as the pictures in books. Your child may be learning to recognize a few words by their shape and by the places they are found. Children who live in a home where reading and writing are important activities usually start school with a greater interest in reading. Being a skilled reader is essential to success in school and life. Reading skills also give children lifelong access to entertainment, information, wisdom, humor, and the comfort of books.

What you do

- Choose a book at reading time that contains a simple story and often-repeated words. Read the book with your child.
- Ask questions about the story, pausing and waiting to give him time to respond to your questions: *Where is the cat on this page? What is he holding?*
- Find a familiar word that is repeated often, such as *cat, boy, fish, foot*, etc.
- Draw your child's attention to the word each time it appears by emphasizing the word with your voice. Point to the word as you say it.
- Encourage your child to point to the word when he sees it on another page.
- Vary the game by reading the wrong word such as *hat* instead of *cat*. Congratulate him when he corrects you.

Another idea

Repeatedly draw your child's attention to a particular road sign, say the word to him, and ask him to say it, too. When you see it again, say, *There's a red sign. I think we've seen it before. Do you know what it says? Can you tell me?* Think of other common words that appear throughout his day and use them in this game.