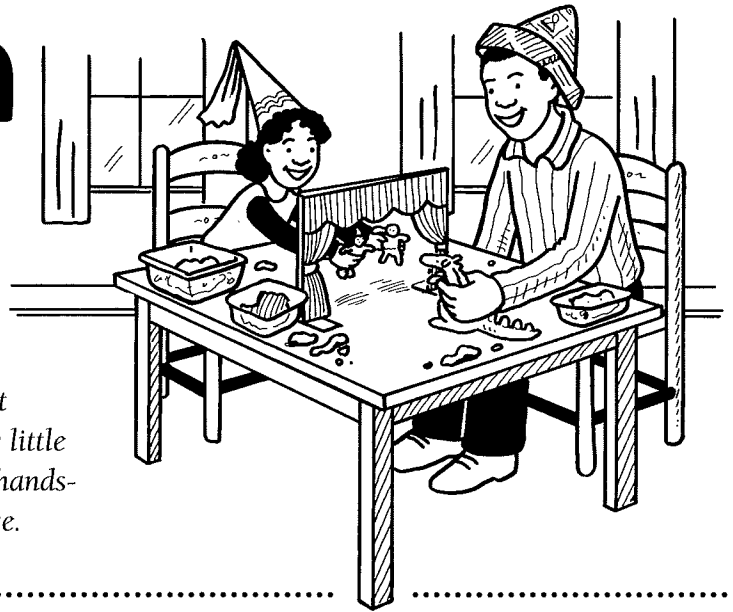


Hands-On Learning

Have you ever watched your child examine a rock or a leaf while turning it over in her hands? Or use clay or paint to make letters, numbers, or shapes? She's learning the way little ones often learn best—by touching and creating. Here are hands-on activities that let her explore language, math, and science.



PLAY DOUGH

This childhood staple is ideal for squishy learning fun. Use store-bought dough, or make your own. For each homemade batch, help your youngster mix together 1 cup flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup salt, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water. She could add food coloring to make different colors. Then, try these suggestions.

Storytelling sculptures

Make up a story together, and create play-dough characters and props to go with it. Your child might begin a story about a cookie-eating dragon and make cookies and a dragon out of dough. You could add another dragon and ask her what happens next. ("The dragon makes friends by sharing his cookies.") You'll encourage creativity and sharpen language skills that will come in handy when she writes stories.



Number "snakes"

Your youngster will practice recognizing and using numbers with this activity. First, have him roll dough into "snakes" and shape them into numbers, 0–9. Then, point to a number (4), and ask him to make that number of objects (say, 4 balls). He can count the items as he sculpts them. Take turns until you have the correct number of objects for each play-dough number.

FINGER PAINT

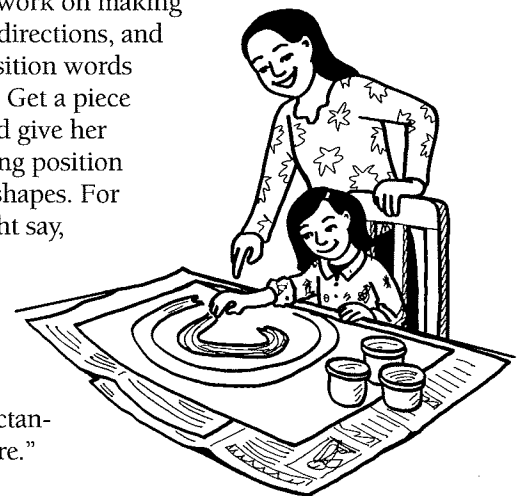
With finger paint, your child can not only paint pictures, but also write letters and words and experiment with shapes. Invite him to get his hands messy with these activities.

Bathtub "graffiti"

Let your youngster finger paint on the sides of the bathtub to practice writing his ABCs. He could write a letter (*b*) and draw a picture of something that starts with that letter (*bas-ketball*). Also, encourage him to try writing simple words like his name or words he has seen many times (*cat, stop*). *Note:* Always supervise your youngster in water.

Shape paintings

Your child can work on making shapes, following directions, and understanding position words with finger paints. Get a piece of white paper, and give her instructions—using position words—to paint shapes. For example, you might say, "Paint a big circle. Now, paint a triangle *inside* the circle. *Next* to the circle, paint a square. Add a rectangle *under* the square."



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NATURE'S BOUNTY

There are new things for your child to touch and explore every time she goes outside. Whether she plays with mud or collects seeds, rocks, or leaves, here are ways nature can help her build skills.



Magnificent mud

Let your youngster play in the mud! She can use science and math to make the best mud pie. Go outside with a pitcher

of water, measuring cups, and measuring spoons. She could combine different amounts of water and soil, squish the mud in her hands, and shape it into patties. When she has a pie that's just the right consistency, she can serve it to you. Also have her think of other ways to play with mud—she might dig a “road” for toy trucks or write with mud on the sidewalk, for instance.



Pattern play

Making patterns with objects will help prepare your child to use number patterns. Gather items outside, and lay them in a pattern for him to complete (3 pebbles, 1 stick, 3 pebbles, 1 stick). Ask him what comes next (3 pebbles). Then, have him collect items and start a pattern for you. *Idea:* Try a “growing” pattern like 1 acorn, 1 blade of grass, 2 acorns, 1 blade of grass, 3 acorns, 1 blade of grass. (He should put down 4 acorns next.)

LOOSE PARTS

What kinds of treasures are in your junk drawer or scattered around your home? Let your child fill a container with tiny household objects, such as old keys, washers, bolts, leftover party favors, corks, beads, and other small items. Suggest these ideas to help him learn from his collection.

Alphabet hunt

Help your youngster label 26 cupcake liners from A to Z. Tell him to search through his objects for ones that start with each letter and then look around the house for more. He might use a rubber band for R, a quarter for Q, and a button for B. He can name the item as he drops it into the correct liner.



What belongs?

Build your child's science skills with this classifying and comparing game. First, name a category (things made of wood). Ask her to pick out items from her box that belong in it (toothpick, craft stick, golf tee). Then, let her choose a category for you. *Idea:* After a few rounds, have her use two or more characteristics to make a category (things that are silver *and* round).

Early Years

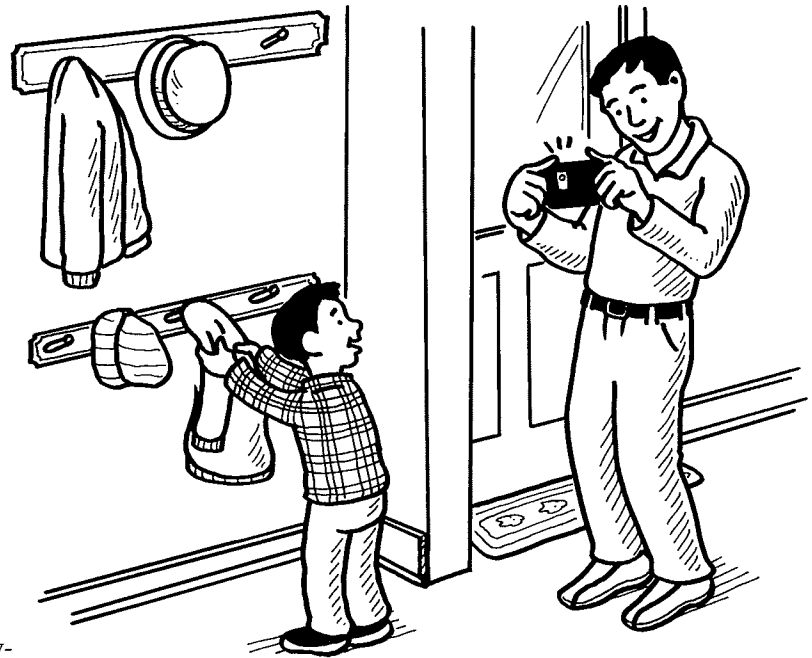
Self-Control for Little Ones

It's no secret that children who have good self-control behave better—even when grown-ups aren't watching. Use these strategies to help your child be in control of his behavior.

Be clear about boundaries

One of the first ways to improve your youngster's self-control is to be specific about what you expect. Routines and rules can keep him on track.

- **Create daily routines.** Take photos of your child doing tasks that you expect him to do without being reminded. Examples might include hanging up his jacket, putting away his backpack, and washing his hands. These tasks give your youngster everyday opportunities to be in charge of his behavior. To help him remember the routine, print the pictures, and let him glue them onto a poster to hang in his room.
- **Make a family rule book.** Together, think of rules and write each one on a page in a notebook. Try to keep the rules positive. For instance, if your child suggests, "Don't make a mess," you could write, "We clean up after ourselves." Let your youngster draw a picture for each page. She'll gain a solid understanding of what she is supposed to do.
- **Reap the rewards.** This caterpillar project shows your child the benefits of self-discipline. If he does a nice job of taking



charge of himself, help him write about his behavior—and the result—on a circle of colored paper. ("I got ready for bed all by myself. We had time to read an extra story!") On a bulletin board, hang the circles in a row to form a caterpillar. As he adds new circles and his caterpillar "grows," read the old ones together to celebrate his accomplishments.

Set your child up for success

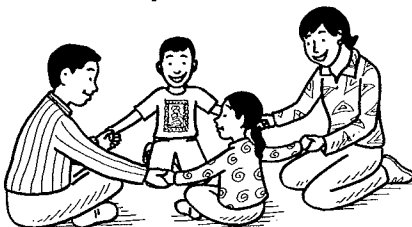
When children have a plan for staying in control, they are more likely to succeed. Here are tools your little one can use to exercise self-discipline in everyday life.

- **Give a sneak preview.** Before heading into a situation, let your youngster know what will happen. "We're going to the bakery to pick up your brother's birthday cake. We aren't buying anything else today." Knowing ahead of time that she won't get a cookie may make her less tempted to ask for one or to throw a fit when you say no.



Pass the squeeze

Here's a fun game that teaches little ones to control their impulses. Hold hands in a circle—the more the merrier. One person gently squeezes the hand of the next player. That person squeezes the next player's hand, who squeezes the next person's hand, and so on...until the squeeze goes around and around the circle. The

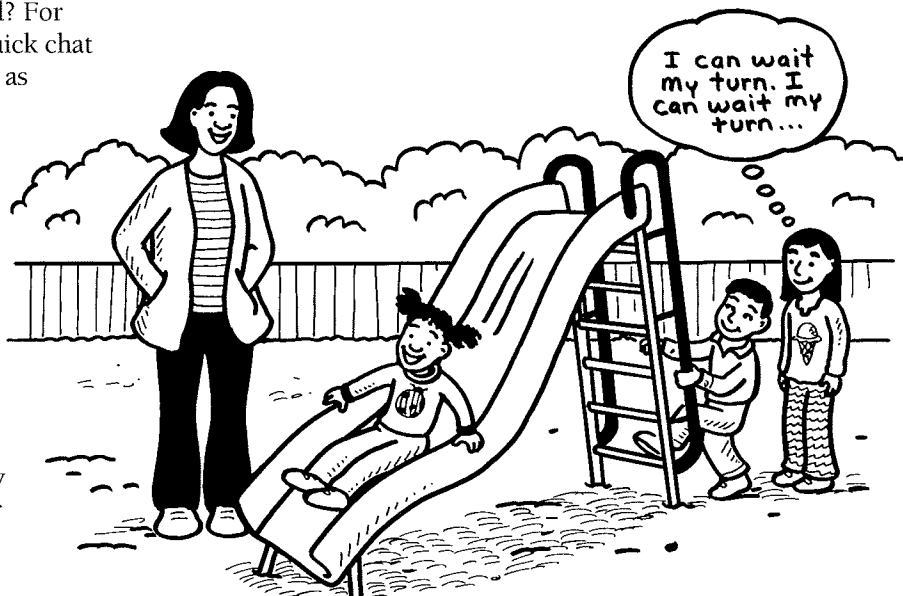


trick, of course, is waiting until it's your turn to squeeze!

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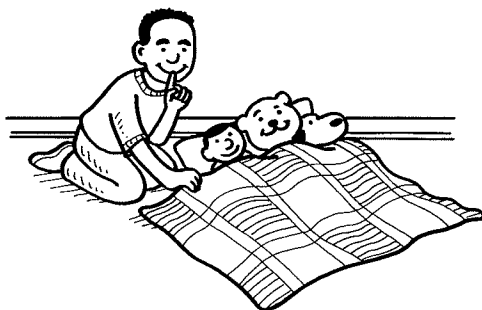
● **Brainstorm “replacement” activities.** What could your child do in place of something that’s not allowed? For example, if you’re going to a museum, have a quick chat about ways to avoid touching the displays, such as putting his hands in his pockets or practicing counting on his fingers. Or if he has watched enough TV for the day, help him come up with alternatives like riding his bike or drawing a picture.

● **Teach self-talk.** Have you ever repeated a reminder to yourself to buy milk or lock the door? The same strategy can help your youngster remember to behave. If she’ll need to wait her turn to go down the slide, for instance, tell her to think of a can-do phrase to whisper. (“I can wait my turn. I can wait my turn.”) She may find that self-control pays off and she enjoys her turn on the slide more!



Practice during playtime

Children learn many skills through play, and self-discipline can be one of them. Consider these ideas.



stuffed animals nap. On a pretend train ride, the passengers need to stay seated and wait to arrive at their stops. Or play

● **Let’s pretend.** During imaginary play, look for opportunities to encourage self-discipline. For instance, if you play house with your child, you could talk quietly while

school, and the student has to raise his hand and speak only when the teacher calls on him.

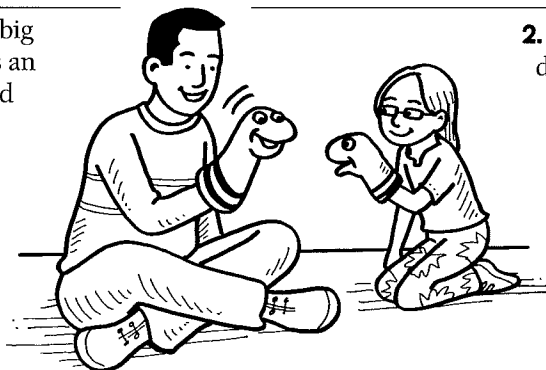
● **Enjoy games.** It takes self-control to do well at games like Simon Says or Freeze Tag—your child must listen carefully and follow commands. During Simon Says, give instructions like “Simon says do a leap. Spin around.” Your youngster will have to keep herself from spinning around because Simon didn’t say to do that.

● **Try activities.** With these ideas, your youngster will build self-control without even knowing it! Get bubble solution and a wand, and challenge him to blow the biggest bubble possible. He’ll have to resist the urge to pop the bubbles so he can see how big they’ll get. Or ask him to count animals at the park—he can feel proud of himself for sitting quietly as the birds and squirrels come closer.

Temper, temper

Getting angry or frustrated can cause big blow-ups for little ones. If your child has an outburst, wait until she is calm again, and then try these steps to help her keep her cool next time.

1. Talk about the physical signs that show a person is angry. You might point out characters in book illustrations—what does your youngster notice? *Examples:* clenched fists, narrowed eyes, gritted teeth.



2. Help your child name ways to calm down when she starts to feel mad. Her list might include taking a deep breath, counting to 10, or walking away. Now when she struggles with anger or frustration, she’ll have a plan for dealing with it.

3. Use puppets or stuffed animals to role-play being angry and trying out ideas from your youngster’s list.

Early Years