

Want to enhance your child's creativity, improve his coordination, and get him primed for school? Jill Norris, author of the Play and Learn With Your Child series (Evan-Moor Publishers), offers these simple lessons.

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

At breakfast, give your child a handful of Cheerios and a large chenille stem. Fold one end of the stem over to create a loop. Then count together as your child strings Cheerios onto the straight end. This exercise may seem simple, but it takes lots of coordination—and concentration.

OUT AND ABOUT

Turn a walk around your block into a treasure hunt! Search for leaves, sticks, rocks, and flowers. After you pick them up, spend time discussing what each object looks and feels like—it's a great way to introduce vocabulary words.

EVERYDAY BRAIN BOOSTERS

BACKSEAT LEARNER

Use your time in the car to play guessing games. Give your child an old pillowcase full of mystery items, including toys from fast-food restaurants, snacks, and small blocks. Her problem-solving and language skills will be put to good use as she picks an object from the pillowcase and tries to describe it without telling you what it is. Your job: to guess correctly what she's holding.

LINE TIME

The next time you're stuck in a long line at the grocery store or bank, try doing a shape hunt. Look around you, then name a shape, such as a rectangle. Work with your child to point out all the rectangles he can see—from the magazines at the store to the drive-through window at the bank. Or try searching out special colors, letters, or numbers.

NO CHORE'S A BORE

Setting the dinner table is a manageable responsibility for your 4-year-old—and will help build her dexterity, concentration, and familiarity with patterns. Get started by arranging a single place setting together. Then let her do the rest. Together repeat the name of each item as she puts it on the table in its proper spot.

TUB FUN

Build your child's math and problem-solving skills while he gets clean. Put an aluminum-foil pie pan in the water in front of him. With younger kids, start adding plastic animals or bath toys to the pan, counting together with each one. For older children, let them try to guess how many tub toys can fit in the pan before it starts to sink. —Robin Immerman