



Four ways to support learning and have some family fun

Any month is the perfect month to instill a love of learning in your preschooler. It's easy to do. One learning activity each day—just a few minutes daily all month long—can help your whole family get into the habit of learning.

Here are some activity ideas to help your family get started:

1. Have a family reading night.

Do this often, since reading is the foundation for learning. Let your child look at a favorite book while you read something you enjoy. After 10 minutes or so, ask your child to tell you about the book. Then read it aloud together.

2. **Practice math at mealtimes.** Place a raisin on the table and say to your

child, "Here is one raisin." Add two more raisins and ask, "Now how many do you have?"

Show how the two halves of a sandwich are rectangles (or triangles). What shape do they make when your child puts them together?

3. Create a weekly craft challenge.

Together, find things around the house to reuse for a project. Your child could cover empty cans (with no sharp edges) with paper to turn them into pencil holders. Your child could also turn empty toilet paper rolls into works of art.

4. **Exchange notes with family.** Your child can tell you what to write, then draw a picture. Family members can respond in writing.

Ask questions to boost problem-solving skills



When it comes to helping young children learn to think for themselves, the key may lie not

in what you *tell* them, but in what you *ask* them. Asking the right questions encourages kids to come up with their own solutions.

Here's how to use questions to help your preschooler solve a problem:

1. **Encourage your child to state the problem.** Ask questions such as, "What's going on?"
2. **Try to get your child to come up with solutions.** Ask, "What do you want to do about that?"
3. **Help your child think about consequences.** "That could work. What do you think might happen if you did that?"
4. **Ask about alternatives.** "Do you have any other ideas?" It's OK if your child doesn't solve the problem or come up with the "right" answer. The idea is to promote independent thinking first, rather than simply supplying the answers.

Source: M.B. Shure, Ph.D., *Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along with Others*, Gallery Books.

Introduce your preschooler to the joy of scientific discovery



The term *science* can be intimidating to some adults. But the goal of science is to discover how the world works, something children love to do all day.

To show your preschooler how fun science can be:

- **Talk about how things change.** Together, observe a nearby tree and take notes about how it looks. Plan to do the same thing in the winter, spring and summer. How does the tree change each season?
- **Test predictions.** Have your child guess how far you can throw a ball. Then measure and see how close your child's answer comes to the real distance. Switch and see if you can estimate how far your child can throw the ball.

- **Ask your child questions** that require thought: *Why do you think giraffes are tall? Why doesn't it snow in the summer? How do you think we could solve this problem?*
- **Begin a collection** of shells, rocks or leaves together. Each time you or your child add something new to the collection, talk about how it compares with the other items you've gathered.

"Every brilliant experiment, like every great work of art, starts with an act of imagination."

—Jonah Lehrer

Use music to help your child strengthen valuable skills



There is almost no limit to what your child can learn from music. And there are a wide variety of ways to incorporate music into daily activities.

Music can help your preschooler:

- **Identify emotions.** Some songs sound happy, others sad, still others calm and relaxed.
- **Strengthen language skills.** Learning lyrics introduces your child to new vocabulary.
- **Identify patterns** and recognize when the chorus will appear in the song.

To help your child get the most benefit from music:

- **Have at least one time** of the day when your child can expect to hear

music. It could be on the car ride to preschool, during playtime or just before bed.

- **Give your child opportunities** to move to music. This is even more fun for preschoolers if they have something to wave as they move. Long strips of fabric or scarves work perfectly.
- **Blend music** with other creative activities. For example, let your child listen to music while painting or drawing.
- **Expose your child** to rhythm. Demonstrate how to clap hands in time to the beat of some favorite songs.

Source: J.R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher: Insights for Parent Involvement*, Instructional Fair, TS Denison.

Are you helping your child respect property?



At school, students must respect others' belongings, such as books, toys, crayons and furniture. Answer *yes* or

no to the questions below to see if you're encouraging this behavior:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child places to keep belongings, such as a bin for blocks or a container for crayons?
- ___ **2. Do you make** cleaning up a habit? "Before we get out a new game, we need to put away the one we just played."
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about the benefits of respecting others' belongings? "If you treat Grandpa's piano gently, I'm sure you'll be able to play it again."
- ___ **4. Do you notice** when your child treats belongings with care? "Thanks for putting your books on the shelf. That will keep them in great condition!"
- ___ **5. Do you set** an example by caring for household items, including your child's belongings?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are building your child's respect for property. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Responsibility and autonomy are keys to academic success



When children behave and think independently, they are being *autonomous*. Studies show that this trait, combined with responsibility, leads to school success.

Children who have learned responsibility and autonomy are better adjusted. They tend to make friends more easily, too.

To help your child develop these important traits:

- **Assign regular chores.** Your child could take out the trash, feed a pet or set the table. Demonstrate how to do the chore first, and help your child the first few times.
- **Keep expectations realistic.** Try to see things from your child's point of view. A four-year-old cannot make complex decisions or handle

responsibilities that have more than a few steps.

- **Offer choices.** Within limits, let your child decide what clothes to wear, what chore to do or what book you'll read together.
- **Give reasons.** If you are met with resistance, explain why you want your child to do something. For example, it's important to pick up clothes to keep them clean and neat.
- **Avoid using bribes.** Don't say, "If you pick up your toys, I'll take you out for ice cream." Rather than teaching respect or responsibility, bribes encourage children to focus on what they can get.

Source: A.C. Vasquez and others, "Parent Autonomy Support, Academic Achievement, and Psychosocial Functioning: a Meta-analysis of Research," *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer Science+Business Media.

Strong motor skills prepare your child for school activities



Motor skills are the physical abilities people need to manipulate their bodies. Large (gross) motor skills require the development of large muscles in the legs, back and arms. Small (fine) motor skills involve the smaller muscles in the hands, wrists, fingers and eyes.

The more developed these muscles are, the easier it will be for your child to learn to read, write and participate at school.

To strengthen motor skills, have your child:

- **Put together** jigsaw puzzles.
- **Zip and button** clothing.
- **Draw, paint and color** with large crayons, pencils, paintbrushes and washable markers.

- **Cut with safety scissors** (under your supervision).
- **Pretend to be different animals.** Leap like a frog or hop like a kangaroo.
- **Squeeze and form clay** or play dough into shapes and letters.
- **Finger paint.**
- **Build with blocks.**
- **Roll and catch a ball.**
- **String beads on laces.**
- **Turn pages of books.**
- **Dress and play with dolls** and action figures.
- **Pick up pennies** from a table (under supervision, of course).

Be patient and let your preschooler attempt tasks independently. Notice and praise your child's accomplishments to build a sense of pride and self-confidence.

Q: When my son complains he doesn't feel well in the morning, I can't tell if he is really sick or if he is just trying to stay home from preschool. Often when I have let him stay home, by 10 a.m. he appears to be feeling fine. He spends the rest of the day playing and watching TV.

What should I do the next time he complains he's sick before it's time to go to preschool?

Questions & Answers

A: It's difficult to know what to do when a young child says he feels sick and doesn't want to go to school. If you aren't 100 percent sure that he is really ill, follow these tips:

- **Follow the school's COVID protocols.** If your child will have to stay home from school, explain that that means staying home in bed getting well. No videos or playing around the house.
- **Be sympathetic.** If your child really doesn't feel well, he deserves a bit of TLC. But don't overdo the attention and special services. The point is to create an environment where he can get well—not one that's so rewarding that he prefers being sick to going to school.
- **Be consistent.** If your son announces that he feels better an hour later and wants to get up, tell him you are delighted with the improvement, but he will have to remain in bed and continue recuperating.

Express your hopes that tomorrow he'll be completely healthy and ready to return to preschool. This will teach your child that staying home sick is different from staying home to play.

The Kindergarten Experience

Kindergartners need balanced schedules



As communities return to more in-person events and activities, you may be tempted to sign your child up for a bunch of them. And while many of them may have a positive effect on your child's development and academic experience, it's critical to strike a balance between structured and unstructured time.

- Experts recommend parents:
 - **Put family time first.** Set aside at least 20 minutes a day to spend together as a family. You could play a game, go on a walk or read together.
 - **Be realistic.** Set expectations that are reasonable for your child. Keep age and abilities in mind when signing up for activities.
 - **Set the right goals.** You may daydream about your child achieving a certain goal. But if that isn't your kindergartner's dream, let go of it. Focus on what motivates your child.
 - **Listen carefully.** If your child consistently doesn't want to do an activity, don't force it.
 - **Allow free time.** All children need plenty of unscheduled hours. However, downtime should not be screen time.
 - **Set an example.** Don't try to relive your youth through your child. Make time for your own interests and relationships.
 - **Be good role models.** Let your child see you balancing your time and activities.

Offer encouragement as your kindergartner practices writing

Any time children purposefully make marks on paper, they are developing their writing skills. Pay attention to your child's writing and offer encouragement through each stage. If your child is:

- **Scribbling**, say, "Tell me about your picture!" You may be surprised at the thought your child put into it. Write what your child says about it beneath the lines. Then read it together.
- **Writing letters** that don't make up words, say, "Tell me what you wrote." Write the words correctly below your child's letters.
- **Writing beginning** and ending consonants, such as "DG" above a picture of a dog, say, "Yes, D and G are sounds in the word *dog*." Then write the word correctly.



- **Writing real words**, read the words together and offer praise. (Misspellings are OK at this age.)

Strategies help distracted kindergartners regain focus



Your child has been in kindergarten for a few months now. What should you do if the teacher lets you

know that your child is having a difficult time paying attention in class? First, stay calm.

Sometimes, a few simple strategies can improve kindergartners' focus:

- **Change seats.** Ask if your child can be seated close to the teacher and away from the windows and doors. Sights and sounds from outside may distract your child.

- **Talk about the school day.** Ask the teacher for the class schedule and review it with your child each morning. Anticipating activities may help your child concentrate.

- **Work with the teacher.** Are there specific times your child tends to be distracted? Does your child tune out during long lists of spoken instructions, for example? By sharing information and working together, you will be able to help.

If you become concerned about your child's overall ability to focus, talk with your child's pediatrician.