

# Early Childhood Parents®

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*make the difference!*



## Physical activity improves your child's ability to learn

**E**xercise is good for the body—and for academic achievement, too. Several studies indicate that physical activity reduces boredom, improves focus, behavior and self-esteem.

Experts recommend 20 minutes of activity at least three days per week. To help your family reach that goal:

- **Schedule a regular time** for daily exercise and stick to it. Think about when your child is likely to have the most energy.
- **Keep an exercise log.** It's fun to look through it and see how committed your family is to good health.
- **Take turns** choosing the types of physical activity you do. If your child loves soccer, agree to play together at least once a week.
- **Get creative.** Make a list of active things you and your child could do. You could jump in piles of leaves, fly a kite or play hopscotch. On rainy days, you might make up a dance or build an indoor obstacle course.
- **Provide access** to active toys, such as balls and jump ropes.
- **Drive less and exercise more.** Could you walk to the library or to the store?
- **Use exercise rather than food** as a reward. "After you pick up your toys, we can go to that new playground down the street!"
- **Limit screen time.** Watching TV and playing games online doesn't require much physical energy.

Source: C.M. Di Liegro and others, "Physical Activity and Brain Health," *Genes*, MDPI.

## Model listening skills for your preschooler



Sometimes young children talk ... and talk ... and talk! And what they say doesn't always seem to make sense. Even so, it's important to pay attention.

When you listen and respond, you are helping your preschooler strengthen language skills and listening skills—which are crucial for school success.

To demonstrate that you are listening:

- **Remove distractions.** Offer your full attention and make eye contact with your child, even if it means putting down a book, turning off the computer or ignoring your phone.
- **Be patient.** When your child is talking to you, avoid interrupting. Preschoolers need time to put their thoughts into words.
- **Ask questions** after your child has finished talking. Restate what you hear to make sure you understand.
- **Pay attention** to body language. Take note of your child's tone of voice, facial expressions and behavior. Often, it's not *what* children say, it's *how* they say it.

## Autumn leaves are wonderful learning tools for your child



Seasonal activities make learning fresh. You can use fall leaves for some great learning activities with your preschooler.

Help your child:

- **Collect different kinds** of leaves. Count the leaves collected from each type of tree.
- **Sort leaves** by size, color and shape.
- **Match leaves.** Set out two or three of each kind of leaf. Let your child find the matches.
- **Make leaf rubbings.** Put a leaf under a sheet of paper. Rub the paper with crayon and watch a leaf appear.
- **Read picture books** and poems about trees and leaves.

- **Create hand leaves.** Trace your child's hands onto pieces of construction paper in fall colors. Cut them out to make fall leaves.
- **Have a leaf race.** Use straws to blow leaves across the table. See who can blow a leaf across the table first.
- **Play Leaf Hide and Seek.** Hide a leaf in the room and ask your child to find it. Say *hot* as your child gets close and *cold* when moving away.

**“Play is our brain’s favorite way of learning.”**

—Diane Ackerman

## New experiences boost your child’s skills and knowledge



Children learn all day long as they practice skills and experience new things. You can encourage learning

by introducing your child to a wide variety of activities.

Together you can:

- **Attend open houses** at your local fire station, police station or post office. Your child will enjoy meeting the employees and learning about what they do in their jobs.
- **Take a tour** of your neighborhood. Go on a walk and notice the people, pets, buildings and activities around you.
- **Sit outside** and look at the trees, clouds and landscape. What shapes and colors does your

child see? What sounds does your child hear?

- **Take a trip in a car,** bus or train. Talk about all the interesting things you pass along the way and the interesting people you see.
- **Get library cards** for the family. Visit the library regularly and attend special events offered for preschoolers.
- **Explore a new place.** Try to go somewhere your child has never been before—the zoo, a farm or a local museum.
- **Go to work.** If possible, take your child to your job to see what you do. Or make plans to visit a relative’s workplace.

**Source:** *The Little Things Make a Big Difference*, National Association of Elementary School Principals and World Book Educational Products.

## Are you helping your child deal with separation?



Separating from parents, even for a few short hours of preschool, isn't always easy for a young child.

But learning to adjust to a parent's absence helps build confidence and the ability to handle change—necessary components of childhood development.

Are you helping your child handle separation anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you acknowledge** your child's feelings by listening and saying that you understand?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you allow** your child to bring something familiar to preschool for comfort, such as a piece of a blanket?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you talk** about the exciting things your child will be doing in preschool while you are away?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you let** your child know when you will return—and then arrive on time?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you follow** a short goodbye ritual to avoid lingering?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child handle separation. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Use role models to highlight important character traits



Although you are the primary role model in your child's life, you don't have to be the only one. Here's how

to draw upon others to help instill positive character traits:

- **Talk about relatives, friends or celebrities** who show respect, responsibility, compassion or other desirable traits. Make it a point to say how much you admire them and why.
- **Read books** that build character. Introduce your child to story characters who demonstrate traits such as kindness, respect, perseverance, tolerance and honesty. Search online or ask a librarian for suggestions.

- **Share your heroes** with your child. Talk about people such as Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Sonia Sotomayor and Mother Teresa. Discuss the traits you admire.
- **Encourage your child** to draw pictures of role models. Heroes can be fictional—from books, movies or television—or people your child knows, such as an uncle who volunteers building houses for others or a grandmother who worked long hours to put a child through college.

At the bottom of your child's pictures, help your child list the character traits each person demonstrates. Hang them to create a wall of fame.

# Playing board games can help your child focus and follow rules



Most preschoolers are ready to start playing board games. These games are fun and can help your child

build skills such as concentration, cooperation and sportsmanship.

Yard sales are a great place to find board games, often for a dollar or less. To choose games that will keep your child's interest:

- **Check the box** for the appropriate age for players. Your child will get the most out of games that have simple rules and are geared to preschoolers' skill levels.
- **Look for games** with themes that will appeal to your child. Most preschoolers enjoy games about animals more than games about money, for example.

- **Encourage your child** to count as players move around the board or to name the colors on the game. Preschoolers like to show off what they know.
- **Boost thinking skills** once your child understands the game. "What do you think will happen if we draw this card?" "Which space should I move to now?"

To help your child be a good sport when playing:

- **Explain that rules** are important in games (and in life) and encourage your child to follow them.
- **Remind your child** that nobody wins all the time. Some children take losing very hard. So be sure to offer praise for playing fair, following directions and taking turns—not just for winning.

**Q:** The preschool teacher says my child has trouble interacting with other children during free play—arguing with them or avoiding them. What can I do to help?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Many preschool children need a little help to develop their social skills. To promote these skills:

- **Play with your child.** Aim for spending at least 10 minutes a day on the floor together with toys. When your child starts playing, join in and encourage interaction. Or, think of a pretend game to play together. For example, the toy animals are going to hop on the toy cars and go on an adventure.
- **Schedule playdates.** Before doing well in a group, a child must master one-on-one interaction. Invite a friendly child over to play with your child. Invite only one at a time, and keep the playdates short at first—one hour or two. Make sure there are enough toys for both children. Plan something special for the last 15 minutes, such as a puppet show or a favorite snack.
- **Talk about the experiences** once they are over. If your child says, "Max wouldn't play race cars with me," you could ask, "Did you and Max want to play with the same car?" If so, talk to your child about taking turns.

If Max wanted to play something different, talk with your child about first playing what Max wants to play, then suggesting something else to play. Consistent practice strengthens preschoolers' social skills. However, if you are concerned about your child's development, talk with your pediatrician.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Support your kindergartner's reading skills



Most children learn how to read between kindergarten and second grade. However, there are often a few advanced readers in a kindergarten class—which can make other students' parents anxious.

If your child isn't reading yet, don't worry! There are plenty of ways to support budding reading skills right at home. You can:

- **Have a daily reading time.** Read stories and poems together. Ask your child to retell a story from memory or act it out.
- **Use artwork** to promote reading. When your child draws a picture, ask for a story about it. Write down the story as your child tells it to you, then read it aloud.
- **Play word games.** Say, "I'm thinking of something that is red." See if your child can guess what you're thinking about. Or see who can come up with the longest list of rhyming words.

There are a few signs that a child may have reading problems. Talk to the teacher if your child isn't able to do these things yet:

- **Tell left from right.** It's important when following the text in reading.
- **Identify common shapes** like circles and squares. This is the same skill used to see the difference between the letter *d* and the letter *b*.
- **Recognize beginning sounds.** Say a word like *monkey* and emphasize the *mmm* sound. Have your child repeat the first sound.

## Help your kindergartner have a positive attitude about school

**W**hen children enjoy an activity, it's only natural that they will want to continue to participate in it. To promote a love of learning and school:

- **Ask your child** questions, such as "What do you like best about school?" Talk about how much your child is learning there.
- **Encourage your child** to respect teachers. Talk about how much you like them. Remind your child that teachers care about students and want to help everyone learn.
- **Help your child** develop meaningful relationships with school friends. Consider meeting a classmate at a local playground or park. Perhaps you could allow your child to invite a school friend



to join in one of your family activities.

**Source:** J. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Six strategies lead to effective parent-teacher conferences



A conference with your child's kindergarten teacher is an exciting opportunity to learn about how your child is doing in school and to share valuable information with the teacher.

To help things go well:

1. **Talk with your child beforehand.** Is there anything in particular your child would like you to discuss with the teacher?
2. **Arrive prepared.** Bring a list of questions and thoughts for the teacher. You are the "expert" on your child, and the teacher values your input.
3. **Be on time.** Conferences are often scheduled back-to-back. Arriving late may affect the amount of time you have with the teacher.
4. **Maintain a positive attitude.** You and the teacher are on the same team. If your child is struggling, solving the problem is easier when you and the teacher work together.
5. **Ask questions.** If you are confused about any elementary school terms or concepts, speak up.
6. **Set goals.** Ask what you can do at home to support your child's learning. Plan to keep in touch with the teacher about your child's progress.