

Early Childhood Parents®

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Title I Program

make the difference!



Make family meals a time for fun & encouraging learning

Sharing family meals with your preschooler is a great way to help him learn. Experts say children who regularly eat at least one meal a day with their families are healthier and have better grades. Family mealtime is even more important than playtime, story time and other family events to increase vocabulary.

Try these mealtime tips:

- **Plan for meals.** Let your child help you make menus for the week and create a grocery list.
- **Let your child help** with meal preparation. He can measure ingredients and stir. Show him how to set and clear the table.
- **Make mealtime fun.** Put dinner in a box or bag. Spread out a blanket inside for a picnic.

- **Teach manners**—napkins in laps, chew with mouth closed, etc.
- **Keep talk positive.** Avoid negative topics or criticism. Have each family member tell one good thing about his or her day.
- **Start traditions.** You might make pancakes on Saturday mornings or eat soup and sandwiches on Sunday nights.
- **Be creative.** If your family can't eat dinner together, gather for another meal, such as breakfast. You could even schedule a virtual meal with extended family using a video chat program.

For more tips and information on the importance of family meals, visit The Family Dinner Project at <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org>.

Expose your preschooler to reading variety



Children love to hear their favorite stories over and over again. Don't abandon these

cherished books, but don't stick exclusively to them, either. Your child will be best prepared for reading if she becomes familiar with all different types of books.

Introduce your child to:

- **Make-believe.** Reading about characters and situations that exist only in an author's imagination encourages children to be creative. Talk to your child about the difference between *real* and *pretend*.
- **Myths and fables.** You may already know such tales as "The Lion and the Mouse," one of Aesop's Fables. They teach preschoolers important life lessons and values.
- **Poetry.** Look for poems that rhyme. They show kids that language is fun. Rhymes also encourage them to listen for sounds that are different and alike.
- **Nonfiction.** These books show preschoolers that reading can help them discover and learn new things.

Sleep is critical for your child's brain growth and behavior



You probably know that sleep is necessary for your child's growing body. But did you know that sleep actually helps his brain work better, too?

When your child gets enough sleep, he is better able to control his emotions, pay attention and remember material with accuracy.

To support healthy sleep habits:

- **Develop a sleep schedule.** Have your child go to bed and wake up about the same time each day. Try to keep the same schedule on the weekends, too.
- **Enjoy physical activity** outside. Studies show that exercise and fresh air help children sleep better.

- **Follow a bedtime routine.** Take a bath, put on pajamas, brush teeth and read a story. Talk about something positive. Then, lights out.
- **Make him feel safe.** Put a night light in your child's room. Tell him you will check on him.

Source: D. Thompson, "Poor Sleep in Preschool Years Could Mean Behavior Troubles Later," *HealthDay*, nswc.com/ec_sleep.

"Children three to five years old should get 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours."

—*The American Academy of Pediatrics*

Turn your child's screen time into a positive learning activity



Many families spent much more time in front of screens during the COVID-19 pandemic—and that's OK. Watching movies and playing video games gave kids a sense of normalcy during a frightening time.

The good news is that there are ways to make your child's screen time more productive. Research shows that children whose parents watch programs with them (it's called "co-viewing") are not only more focused on the program—they also get more out of it.

This may be because kids feel a program must be more "important" if Mom or Dad is watching, too. Or, it might simply be that kids enjoy the company. Whatever the reason, your participation in screen time makes a difference.

To help your child get the most out of co-viewing:

- **Don't use screens** as babysitters. Resist the urge to leave the room and do other things the moment your child turns on a show.
- **Choose quality programs.** Since you know she's watching closely, pick something age appropriate that your child can learn from. Nature shows and documentaries are great, but cartoons that teach values are a good option, too!
- **Interact with your child.** If you are looking at your phone instead of watching the program, your child will notice! Pay attention and talk to your child about what you see.

Remember: The American Academy of Pediatrics still recommends that parents set reasonable limits on recreational screen time.

Source: Texas Tech University, "Parents' presence when TV viewing with child affects learning ability," *ScienceDaily*, nswc.com/ec_view.

Are you building your preschooler's vocabulary skills?



The years between three and five are critical for your child's language development. Are you doing the kinds of things that will develop your preschooler's vocabulary? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you use specific words** to name things in your environment when talking with your child?
- ___ **2. Do you build on words** your child already knows by using synonyms—different words that mean the same thing—and descriptive words? For example, when he says "big bird," you could say "large green parrot."
- ___ **3. Do you read aloud** and look at pictures with your child? Do you explain words and images?
- ___ **4. Do you play word games**, such as showing your child an object and having him name it?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to use words like *happy* or *angry* to describe his feelings?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're enhancing your child's vocabulary. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Five strategies build your child's skills and promote learning



Studies show the more parents engage with and nurture their children at home, the better those children do when they

start school. Here are five simple ways to build important skills and promote learning:

1. **Play together.** Don't ignore the value of having fun! Spend time playing games and solving jigsaw puzzles. Dress up in old clothes and put on a silly show together. Stack a tower of blocks. Crank up the tunes and sing.
2. **Be creative.** Activities like squishing clay, coloring and finger-painting aren't just fun—they're educational! So let your child get messy sometimes. It could boost his school smarts.
3. **Cuddle.** Hugs and snuggles are more than a cozy way to bond.

They're also a way to make your child feel loved and safe. The more secure he feels at home, the more confident he's likely to be when he heads to school.

4. **Get active.** Healthy bodies nourish healthy minds! Go on walks with your child. Play catch outside. Go down the slide at the park. Skip rope. And when you're finished, share a healthy snack and chat about how much fun you had.
5. **Connect.** Introduce yourself to your child's preschool teacher or day care provider. Ask your child questions about what he is learning and doing every day. The more he knows learning matters to you, the more it will matter to him!

Source: K.L. Bierman and others, "Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children," Social and Emotional Learning, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Simple discipline methods lead to better behaved preschoolers



Children need and want to have limits set for them. In fact, children who have been disciplined in a loving

manner generally do better in school than those who haven't.

Here are a few simple and effective discipline methods to try:

- **Enforce reasonable rules.** Make a few key rules and stick to them. Consistency makes it easier for preschoolers to cooperate.
- **Allow give and take.** Your child has opinions, and it's helpful to hear him out. But stand your ground when it really counts.
- **State things positively.** When possible, tell your child what *to do* ("Put your hands in your lap.") instead of what *not to do* ("Stop grabbing!").
- **Set a good example.** Demonstrate the behaviors you want to see. Be honest, fair and responsible. Remain calm when you are angry.
- **Criticize carefully.** Talk about your child's behavior, not your child. Say, "That comment was rude" instead of "You are rude."
- **Focus on success.** Notice what your child does well and comment on it. Give specific compliments. "You put your art supplies away. You're taking good care of your things!" Positive reinforcement results in better behavior.

Source: B. Martin, Psy.D., "The 5 C's of Effective Discipline: Setting Rules for Children," Psych Central, nswc.com/ec_effective.

Q: I've read articles about critical thinking and that many children grow up lacking this skill. I'd like to help my daughter develop this but it sounds complicated. I'm not sure I'm qualified.

Questions & Answers

A: Of course you are qualified! Critical thinking may sound like a fancy term, but much of it has to do with imagining, figuring and questioning. Most children do these things every day, naturally. So, all you have to do is encourage your child a bit.

To promote critical thinking:

- **Don't rush in to fix everything** for your child. For example, your child has put her shirt on inside-out. Put her in front of the mirror and say, "Uh-oh. Isn't there supposed to be a picture of a flower on your shirt?" Give her a chance to realize what went wrong and take care of it.
- **Take a few extra minutes** with story time. After reading, ask your child questions about the story and the characters. Questions that inspire critical thinking start with phrases like, "How do you know that ..." or "What would happen if ..."
- **Ask questions** about your child's work. Ask, "What is the girl doing in your picture?" or "Why did you decide to draw her with a dog?"
- **Give your preschooler time** each day to play alone with simple toys such as blocks. This type of play gives your child an opportunity to be creative. It also lets her experiment with new approaches. For example, if her block tower falls down, she can think about a new way to rebuild it.

The Kindergarten Experience

Teachers share back-to-school tips for success



What's the secret to making sure your kindergartner has a successful school year? Seasoned teachers

from around the country weighed in to share their best back-to-school advice. Here's what they had to say:

- **Follow routines at home.** Children thrive when they have a regular time to eat, sleep, play, read, do chores, etc.
- **Create daily rituals.** Start school mornings eating breakfast together. Ask about school every evening. And end the day with a bedtime story.
- **Encourage playing by the rules.** Know and talk about school rules. Never tell your child you think a rule is silly.
- **Stay up-to-date on school news.** Read everything that the school and your child's teacher send you.
- **Inform the teacher** about any changes at home, such as a new living arrangement or new baby.
- **Don't say negative things** about the teacher or the school in front of your child. Make it clear that you and the teacher are on the same "team."
- **Support homework success.** Establish a regular time and place for homework. Be there to support your child.
- **Monitor screen time.** Know what your child is watching and playing on those digital devices.
- **Don't over schedule your child.** Organized activities are great, but all children need downtime to daydream, create and relax, too.

Fun ways to reinforce your kindergartner's writing skills

Your kindergartner is learning how to write letters, words and sentences. To reinforce her emerging writing skills at home, try some of these fun ideas:

- **Create a special writing box** and fill it with writing tools and different types of paper. Include crayons, pencils, washable markers, lined paper and plain paper. When your child is in the mood to write, pull out the box and let her get started!
- **Use food to form letters.** Give your child some cooked pieces of spaghetti. Once they've cooled, show her how to use them to form the letters in her name. What other types of food can she use to write? What about pretzel sticks?
- **Make word art.** Help your child use glue to write words on bright pieces paper. Shake glitter or sprinkles on top.
- **Decorate the sidewalk.** Head outside with some sidewalk chalk. Encourage your child to write her name and draw some pictures around it.
- **Make a letter scrapbook.** Write a letter on each page of a scrapbook. Then have your child add pictures of things that start with each letter.



Partner with the school to support kindergarten learning



When your child starts elementary school, you join a community of people who support his learning. And the more involved you are, the better!

Studies consistently show that when parents are engaged in their children's education, kids perform better academically.

To be an effective partner with the school:

- **Tell your child's teachers** about his likes, dislikes, strengths and challenges. Find out what your child will be learning this year and how you can reinforce those skills.
- **Get involved.** Join the parent-teacher organization. Ask about any volunteer tasks you can do from home. Communicate with teachers regularly.
- **Review the school calendar.** Write down important dates, such as back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences. Plan to attend as many as you can.