

Early Childhood Parents

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make the difference!



Encourage your preschooler to talk about ideas & actions

When young children begin school, teachers will want them to talk about their thoughts, ideas and experiences. This type of communication is an important part of preschool and kindergarten.

To help your child develop strong communication skills:

- **Get the story** behind drawings. When your child draws a picture, ask about it. Then write your child's description underneath the drawing.
- **Talk about your day.** Say more than, "We're going out." Instead, try, "We are going to the store after lunch. I need to get some fruit and bread. You can help me pick them out."
- **Help your child** recount something in sequence to demonstrate how

one event follows another. For example, ask your child, "What are some things you do *after* dinner and *before* bed?" Offer a prompt if necessary: "You brush your teeth. Then what do you do?"

- **Ask about details.** If the class went out to the playground, ask questions that will help your child recall more of that experience: "What did you do on the playground? Did you like playing on the swings or on the monkey bars more?" "Who was playing with you on the playground?"

Source: N. Gardner-Neblett and K.C. Gallagher, *More Than Baby Talk: 10 Ways to Promote the Language and Communication Skills of Infants and Toddlers*, The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute.

Follow these teacher tips for school success



Preschool teachers want children's early school years to be the absolute best they can be.

Here are a few helpful suggestions from seasoned teachers:

- **Establish** routines at home. Children thrive when they have regular times to eat, sleep, play, read, etc.
- **Set limits on** recreational screen time. Excessive unsupervised screen activities negatively affect kids' language development, literacy skills and cognitive abilities.
- **Encourage** playing by the rules. Talk about the rules in your child's classroom. Never say that you think a rule is silly.
- **Stay up-to-date** on school news. Read the information the school and the teacher send home.
- **Tell** the teacher if something is going on with your child—both little things and big.
- **Be positive.** Don't say negative things about school or the teacher in front of your child.
- **Make** sure your child's schedule is balanced and includes time to relax with family.

Focus on four keys to teach your preschooler perseverance



Children need to have perseverance to learn and excel in school. Learning to stick with tough challenges gives

kids the confidence they need to succeed.

Keep these concepts in mind:

- 1. Motivation.** What makes your preschooler tick? What doesn't? Does your child love books? Is sitting still challenging? Match learning activities to your child's personality.
- 2. Practice.** Give your child practice handling obstacles. When kids have opportunities to push through challenges, they see that it's worth the effort.
- 3. Support.** Plan for success. Outline steps your child can take to reach

a big goal. When your child struggles or fails, keep cheering. Praise progress and encourage perseverance.

- 4. Modeling.** Set an example. You don't have to make everything look easy. Instead, show your child that you are willing to keep trying and finish difficult tasks. Send the message: "I'm going to give this my all, no matter what."

"Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

—John Quincy Adams

Use a variety of manipulatives to give math concepts meaning



Parents are proud to hear their preschoolers count to 10. But educators want children to do more than just recite numbers.

They want children to understand what numbers represent.

One way to give numbers and math concepts meaning is to use objects—what educators call *manipulatives*. Try these activities with your preschooler:

- **Count aloud while you work.** "One, two, three"—as you sort through the mail. Count the buttons on your child's shirt as you button them.
- **Ask your child to arrange** a set of objects from *biggest* to *smallest*. Then ask your child to arrange them from *smallest* to *biggest*.
- **Give your child cups** to play with in the bathtub or sandbox. Experiment with the concepts of *more* vs. *less*, *empty* vs. *full*, *all* vs. *none*.
- **Put some small objects** on the table. Ask, "How many are there?" Help your child touch each one as you both count aloud. Then mix up the objects, remove a few and count again.
- **Write the numbers 0 to 10** on index cards (one number per card). Ask your child to place the correct number of small stickers on each card. Then challenge your child to put the cards in numerical order.
- **Have your child sort buttons** or other small objects by size and shape, number of holes or color. Supervise for safety.

Are you raising a preschooler who is eager to learn?



Children are born with a desire to explore their world. They are curious, and it is important that they remain so if they

are to continue learning.

Are you keeping your preschooler's natural curiosity alive? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- 1. Do you model curiosity** by wondering about things out loud?
- 2. Do you encourage your child** to ask questions and then say, "That's a good question!"
- 3. Do you give your child** things to explore, take apart and put back together?
- 4. Do you help your child** use a small magnifying glass to examine things—bugs, flowers, newsprint, walls, carpet, dirt?
- 5. Do you take adventure walks** with your child to see how many new things you both can find?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're keeping your preschooler's spirit of investigation and wonder active. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Enriching experiences boost young children's intelligence



More and more research shows that children's intelligence—once thought to be fixed and determined by genetics—actually continues to develop throughout childhood and into adulthood. Parents play a critical role in that change—not just by passing on genes, but also by giving their children valuable experiences.

Keep these points in mind:

- **The brain develops significantly** during the preschool years. But this is not the time to overwhelm children with academics. Rather, it's the time to lay a foundation for learning. You can do that by having conversations and taking your child places with you. Read together, play games and encourage creative play.

- **Learning by doing is critical.** To you, sorting socks may be a boring chore. But when children do it, they are learning to compare and classify. Setting the table helps with pattern recognition. Measuring ingredients offers practice with key math skills. Feeding a pet fish boosts fine motor skills and a feeling of satisfaction in accomplishing a task.
- **Relationships matter.** A child who feels connected to other people is also likely to feel connected to learning. Demonstrate your love with words and actions. Offer your undivided attention and listen attentively. This will help your child feel secure and develop the self-confidence needed to take on learning challenges.

Source: A. Stuart, "Can You Boost Your Child's IQ? What makes kids smart may surprise you," WebMD.

Pretending to read boosts your preschooler's reading readiness



Children love to be read to. But they love it even more when *they* read to you. Although most preschoolers aren't able to read just yet, they can pretend.

Pretending to read helps children build recall skills, print awareness and confidence—crucial elements of reading readiness. Studies show that it also gives children authentic motivation to learn how to read and write.

To encourage pretend reading, follow these steps:

1. **Find a book** that features simple pictures and contains text with rhythm and rhyme.
2. **Read the book together often.** Your child will likely memorize all or parts of the book.

3. **Pause while you're reading.** Point to a picture. Ask your child to tell you what it shows.
4. **Stop before you say a word or phrase**—perhaps one that repeats or rhymes. See if your child can fill in the word.
5. **Omit more words and phrases** until your child is telling the story.
6. **Ask your child to "read"** the story to you. Help as needed. Remember, your child isn't really reading, so don't insist on the exact words. Once your preschooler becomes proficient "reading" one book, it's time to pick another book and start again.

Source: C.M. Cassano and S.M. Dougherty, *Pivotal Research in Early Literacy: Foundational Studies and Current Practices*, Guilford Press.

Q: I have heard that using consequences, rather than punishment, is a better way to discipline. I'd like to try this with my child, but I need help. How exactly are consequences different from punishment?

Questions & Answers

A: Great question! At first, punishment and consequences seem similar. But when you look deeper, you will see some important differences.

Punishment:

- **Often happens in anger.** "You broke my vase! Go to your room!"
- **Often comes with a lecture.** "How many times have I told you not to run in the house?"
- **Does not always relate** to what happened. How does going to the bedroom relate to breaking a vase?

Consequences:

- **Involve empathy.** "I know you feel bad about running in the house and breaking the vase."
- **Focus only on the behavior** at hand, without bringing up past mistakes. "You were running in the house, which is not allowed."
- **Relate directly** to the misbehavior. "I won't be able to buy you that book at the bookstore today because we need to use that money to replace the vase."
- **Result in your child's learning** an important lesson: If I run in the house, I may break something that needs to be replaced. Replacing things costs money that could be used for doing something fun.

If you make reasonable consequences the cornerstone of your discipline, you and your child will both benefit.

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance is critical for your kindergartner



Attendance rates for kindergartners are lower than for students in later school grades. And the pandemic did

nothing to improve those numbers. Yet attendance in kindergarten is essential. Students who attend school consistently are more likely to have academic success.

To develop the habit of regular attendance:

- **Let your child know** that attending school is not optional. If you say school attendance is important to you, it will also be important to your child.
- **Remain calm** if your child doesn't want to go to school. This is normal for kindergartners. Just tell your child that staying home is not an option.
- **Keep your child home** in case of illness or fever. Simply being tired, however, is not a valid reason to miss school.
- **Don't make staying home** seem like a treat. A sick child should be resting, not playing on a digital device or watching television.
- **Schedule medical** appointments outside of school hours.
- **Schedule family vacations** during school breaks.

In addition, help your child get to school on time. When students arrive late, they may miss important instruction. Late arrival also disrupts the whole class. So be sure your child gets to school before the bell rings.

Source: "10 Facts About School Attendance," Attendance Works.

Form a partnership with your child's kindergarten teacher

Studies consistently show that when parents play an active role in their children's education, their children do better in school. That's one of the reasons it's so important to develop a positive relationship with your child's kindergarten teacher.

Here's how:

- **Attend events for families** at school. Be there to meet the teacher and find out what your child will be learning this year.
- **Schedule conferences.** Make the most of one-on-one time with the teacher. Bring a list of topics you'd like to discuss.
- **Keep an open mind.** If the teacher mentions areas in which your child needs improvement, try not to be defensive. You and the school are on the same "team."



- **Stay in touch.** Let the teacher know about any changes that affect your child, such as a divorce, a new sibling or a move. Ask about ways you can support your child's learning at home.

Build your child's social skills for success in elementary school



Teachers consistently say that social skills are more important for kindergarten success than being able to read or hold a pencil. They also report that many students don't have these skills.

Kindergartners with strong social skills get along well with others, have self-control and are confident—all of which allows them to focus on learning.

While students have many opportunities to practice social skills at school, you can also help your child build them at home.

Encourage your child to:

- **Play and cooperate with others** in a group. Invite school friends over or take your kindergartner to a playground.
- **Share with friends and family.** Encourage your child to take turns, let others play with toys and offer to share treats.
- **Empathize with others' feelings.** Understanding how others feel will help your child become more caring. When reading, stop and ask questions, such as "How do you think this character felt after losing the contest?"