

# Early Childhood Parents®

Watertown Preschool Collaboration  
and Family Resource Center

*make the difference!*



## Simple ways to develop your preschooler's thinking skills

Your preschooler builds thinking skills when she considers the relationships between things. To help her make connections, introduce your child to:

### 1. Similarities and differences.

Give her two items, such as an apple and an orange. Ask her to tell you how the items are different. Then, ask her to tell you how they are the same.

2. **Patterns.** Show her how to make a simple pattern. Draw a circle, then a square, then a circle. Ask your child what comes next.

3. **Classification.** Use toys to teach her how to group things that are alike. Ask her to put her books in one pile and her stuffed animals in another

pile. Or, she can group items by size or by color.

4. **Fact and opinion.** Make a statement, such as, "Broccoli is a green vegetable." Tell her that this is a *fact*. Then say, "I think broccoli is the best-tasting vegetable." Explain that this is an *opinion*. Then ask her what she thinks. Let your child know that everyone can have their own opinions about what they like best.

5. **Cause and effect.** Discuss how one thing happens as the result of another—and encourage her to make predictions. For example, say "I see a lot of dark clouds in the sky. What do you think is going to happen?"

## Help your child get excited about writing



Preschoolers are just starting to develop the fine motor skills they need to write letters and numbers.

At first, your child's writing may look more like scribbles—and that's OK. His handwriting will improve with practice.

To encourage your child's interest, keep appealing writing tools handy, such as crayons and washable markers. Then seize opportunities for him to write. You can:

- **Practice writing** familiar words. Help your child spell words he likes, such as *Dad*, *cat* and *me*.
- **Let your child contribute.** If you're making a grocery list or sending a card, have him write a few words.
- **Exchange letters.** Put a box by his bedroom door and "mail" each other letters. If your child can't write words, he can scribble and tell you what it says.
- **Weave writing** into other activities. Have your child dictate captions for drawings and help him write them.
- **Display** what your child writes. Hang his work on the refrigerator with pride.

## Increase your child's attention span with timing and interests



You may have noticed that your preschooler's attention span varies according to the situation. He may spend 10 minutes listening to a story, but only 10 seconds listening to your instructions! While this can be frustrating, it's normal.

To increase attention span:

- **Consider your timing.** Is your child tired or hungry? If so, it's probably not the best time to introduce a challenging activity, such as learning a new game.
- **Expand on interests.** If your child has a favorite television show, read stories about the characters. If he's excited about starting school, have fun playing school with him.

- **Plan "me too" activities.** Certain activities aren't likely to hold a preschooler's attention—such as watching a sibling's sports game. So involve your child in a related activity that requires focus, such as counting snacks for players.
- **Consult experts.** If you're worried about your child's attention span, talk to his preschool teacher or his pediatrician.

**"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."**

—Graham Greene

## Are you teaching your child how to handle change?



Preschoolers like doing the same things the same way. But changes, both large and small, are a part of life. Are you teaching your

child to adapt to change? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you follow daily routines,** so your child has an overall sense of security? Does she know what to expect in the morning and at bedtime?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you anticipate changes** and realize that even a small change could seem like a big deal to your child?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you talk to your child** ahead of time about an upcoming change?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you reassure** your child that change can be positive—whether it's moving to a new place or staying inside because it's raining?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you allow time** for transitions, such as by setting a timer for 10 minutes before dinner? When your child hears it go off, she knows she'll need to stop playing soon.

### How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child is on the way to dealing with big and small changes in her life. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

Early Childhood  
**Parents**  
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

For subscription information call or write:  
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

## Studies show that preschoolers prefer real-life tasks over fantasy



Fantasy play is a natural part of childhood. After all, what little one doesn't enjoy pretending she's a superhero or a princess?

Or that her stuffed animals can speak?

But studies show that when it comes to real-life tasks, young children prefer reality to make-believe. In other words, they may not enjoy pretending to do something as much as they like actually doing it. Why? Because kids—even preschoolers—want to have a meaningful role in the world.

Does this mean you should swap your child's plastic lawn mower for the gas-guzzling real thing? Of course not! But there are kid-friendly swaps that will make her "play" feel important to her. Here are three ideas:

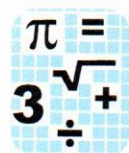
- 1. Cutting up fruit.** Your child loves using her rubber knife to mimic

chopping food, so why not give her an age-appropriate job in the kitchen? Handing her a steak knife is a bad idea, obviously. But what if you gave her a plastic knife and taught her to cut banana slices with it?

- 2. Using real objects.** Your child may have a bin of play tools and mini musical instruments. Consider letting her explore their real-life versions. She may get a greater thrill out of banging on a full-sized tambourine than a pint-sized tin one.
- 3. Gardening.** If your child's tiny pink shovel doesn't do much, give her your hand spade instead. Let her push it into the dirt and help you with your gardening. She'll get messy, but she'll also get a thrill from doing a real job!

**Source:** B. Bower, "When it's playtime, many kids prefer reality over fantasy," *Science News*, [nswc.com/ec\\_reality](http://nswc.com/ec_reality).

## Research reveals activities proven to boost math smarts



You may know that learning-rich activities build your child's math abilities in general. But did you realize some specific activities are now proven to make a difference? According to research, engaging your child in certain activities can have an impact on his number-knowledge in preschool and beyond.

Luckily, these math-rich activities aren't complicated—they're fun! So don't think of them as math lessons. Instead, view them as a way to spend carefree time together and boost your child's brainpower!

Here are some activities shown to sharpen kids' math skills:

- **Sorting.** Putting objects into categories helps your child grasp basic math concepts. To make it exciting for him, turn it into a challenge. "OK, let's see who can find five square shapes in the family room

first." Or, "How fast can you find six red things in the kitchen?"

- **Cooking and baking.** Every time your child scoops a half-cup of flour or hands you two eggs, he's exposed to mathematical concepts like *quantity* and *fractions*. It's educational, although he'll just think it's yummy!
- **Handling money.** When you're buying something with cash, point it out to your child. "This gallon of milk costs \$3.50. That means we need to give the cashier three one-dollar bills and two quarters."
- **Board games.** Rolling dice and moving pieces around a board offer hands-on lessons in counting. As a bonus, board games also teach your child how to be a good loser—or a gracious winner!

**Source:** B. Mutaf-Yildiz and others, "Frequency of Home Numeracy Activities Is Differentially Related to Basic Number Processing and Calculation Skills in Kindergartners," *Frontiers in Psychology*, niswc.com/ec\_numeracy.

**Q:** I have heard a lot about the importance of fostering healthy self-esteem in young children. What exactly does this mean and how can I do it?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** There are many misconceptions about self-esteem. Some people believe that self-esteem is a form of conceit. Or that people with high self-esteem think they are better or above everyone else.

*None of that is true.* Self-esteem has two main parts, both of which are important for success in school and in life:

1. **Competence.** This simply means that your child believes he can accomplish things. It's having a "can-do" attitude.
2. **Self-worth.** This means your child feels that he is a valuable person.

To strengthen your preschooler's self-esteem:

- **Tell him** often that you love him, just for who he is.
- **Listen to him.** When you are having a conversation with your child, give him your undivided attention.
- **Make your home** a safe, happy and cooperative place. Have fun with your child, but also share work with him. Chores are a great way to increase your child's sense of competence!
- **Praise him carefully.** If you only praise positive results, your child will get the idea that he has worth only when he does something right. Instead, praise your child when you see that he is putting forth his best effort.
- **Practice firm, fair and consistent discipline.** Proper discipline builds a sense of safety, love and self-esteem.

## Art projects boost creativity and teach children useful skills



Young children should have the chance to create art several times a week. It doesn't matter what your child makes or even if she finishes her project. What matters is that she uses her creativity—and that she enjoys making it.

While your preschooler is creating art, she is learning many things, including:

- **Problem-solving.** "I want to color the sun, but I don't have a yellow crayon. I think I'll use orange instead."
- **Making a plan.** "I know what I will make today. First, I will ..."

- **Taking risks.** "I'm going to try to make a new picture today!"
- **Experimenting.** "Look at what happened when I mixed white and red! I made pink!"
- **Dimension.** "I want to make the paper I cut out fit on this page, but it's too big. I'll have to make it smaller."
- **Independence.** "I can make my picture all by myself. I don't need help."
- **Self-satisfaction.** "Look at what I made! I'm proud of myself."

**Source:** "Better Kid Care: Children's Art," Penn State Extension, Penn State University College of Agricultural Sciences, niswc.com/ec\_art.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Maintain healthy balance in your child's schedule



It's natural to want to structure your child's life so she's on a path to success. But if almost every minute of your child's waking hours is scheduled with schoolwork, chores and extracurricular activities, your child is overcommitted.

Overscheduled children can become overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, discouraged—and ultimately unmotivated. These children eventually find it difficult to keep up in school.

The kindergarten year is the perfect time to review your child's schedule and make sure it's balanced. Here's how:

- **Help your child select** one or two structured activities that match her interests and abilities.
- **Schedule one to two hours** of free time a day for your child. And don't allow her to spend all of that time in front of a screen! Make sure she has access to art supplies, games, books, etc.
- **Expect some boredom.** Boredom is actually a good thing! It can motivate kids to listen to their inner voice. They tinker, write, draw and create.
- **Plan for "unrushed" family time.** Have days that are completely open to just putting around the house and yard together. Listen to music. Take a walk. Do anything you and your child enjoy that has no particular goal.

**Source:** B. Saavedra, *Creating Balance in Your Child's Life*, Contemporary Books/McGraw-Hill.

## Social skills are vital for your child's kindergarten success

**F**or most children, one of the most exciting things about kindergarten is spending time with classmates and teachers.

To make these experiences successful, work with your child on basic social skills, including:

- **Introductions.** Role-play with your child. Make eye contact, smile and say, "Hi! My name is Jack!"
- **Starting conversations.** Imagine your child wants to join a game. What could he say? "That looks like fun! Can I play, too?"
- **Understanding.** Discuss how other people feel. "You have crayons, and Lamar also wants to color." Practice sharing.
- **Manners.** Encourage your child to say *please* and *thank you*.



- **Solving problems.** "What if Will took the toy you were using?" Talk about how and when to ask for the teacher's help.
- **Apologizing.** Saying *I'm sorry* after making a mistake can foster positive relationships.

## Get the most out of your next parent-teacher conference



October usually means that it's time for parent-teacher conferences. You may be a little nervous, especially if you don't know what to expect, but take heart.

These meetings are valuable for both you and the teacher. They are an effective way to share information that will help your child.

To make your next parent-teacher conference a success:

- **Prepare in advance.** Think about questions you want to ask the teacher, or comments you'd like to make about your child.

Write them down and take the list with you.

- **Arrive on time.** The teacher will appreciate your promptness, and you'll be sure to get every available moment to discuss your child.
- **Listen.** The teacher will have some things prepared to share with you. Let her address these first. Then share your thoughts.
- **Ask for suggestions.** What can you do to help your child at home? Are there skills the teacher would like you to focus on?
- **Follow up.** Make sure the teacher knows the best way to contact you in the future.