

# Early Childhood Parents<sup>®</sup> *make the difference!*

Watertown Preschool Collaboration  
and Family Resource Center



## Books have the edge when it comes to building vocabulary

According to research, reading aloud to your preschooler may be the best way to build his vocabulary. What makes stories such a powerful tool for boosting young children's word smarts? Among other things, they offer:

- **Exposure to unfamiliar words.** Your child hears new words when you talk to him, but he'll encounter even more of them in stories. In fact, he's up to three times more likely to hear an uncommon term from a book than he is while talking with you.
- **Examples of new ways to use familiar words.** Chances are, you use the same words and phrases over and over when talking to your child. (It's only natural!) But stories give him the opportunity to hear even common words used in different or unexpected ways.

- **Clues to how grammar works.** Reading exposes your child to the "rhythm" of sentences. It also lets him see what words and letters look like on a page. That information will come in handy when he starts learning to read.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't bother having conversations with your child! There is no substitute for the warmth and comfort of heart-to-heart exchanges. Plus, by showing him how to speak with someone, you're helping him develop a valuable social skill.

But when you're focusing on sharpening your child's word knowledge, break out the books and read together!

**Source:** D.W. Massaro, "Two Different Communication Genres and Implications for Vocabulary Development and Learning to Read," *Journal of Literacy Research*, SAGE Publications, [niscw.com/ec\\_boost-vocabulary](http://niscw.com/ec_boost-vocabulary).

## Spend quality time with your preschooler



The beginning of preschool is an exciting time for both parents and children. It also

brings a busier schedule.

The school year typically comes with a longer to-do list. But spending quality time with your child is important—and necessary for her school success!

Together, you and your child could:

- **Start a project.** This can be a jigsaw puzzle, a family newsletter, a weekly baking session—anything you enjoy doing together.
- **Care for something.** If you have a family pet, feed it or walk it together. Or, put your child in charge of watering your indoor plants and tend to them daily.
- **Collect something.** Consider cards, stamps, coins or something from nature—such as leaves after they change color and start falling.
- **Volunteer.** Your child can help you bake cookies and deliver them to the local fire station. She can also help you collect clothes that no longer fit her and take them to a charity.

## Show your preschooler how to speak and act respectfully



When educators are asked about the most important thing for children to learn from parents, many give the same answer: respect.

That's not surprising. If children don't have respect for authority, peers, belongings and themselves, it's almost impossible for them to succeed in school or in life. To foster respect:

- **Eliminate back talk.** When you or your child's preschool teachers ask him to do something, he needs to do it. Back talk, such as "I don't want to," is not acceptable. Say, "When I ask you to do something, you need to do it. You may not say *no*."
- **Encourage patience.** Your child should wait for a person to finish speaking before he speaks. If your child needs to speak to the teacher, he should raise his hand.

- **Promote sharing.** Encourage your child to share his toys and other belongings with friends. Remind him to ask nicely if he wants to use something of theirs. And tell him he should take special care of it and give it back when he is done.
- **Inspire kindness.** Prompt your child to say nice things to his friends, such as, "Did you have fun with your grandma?" "I like the picture you drew." "That's a cool hat!"

**"It's not so much the journey that's important; as is the way that we treat those we encounter and those around us, along the way."**

—Jeremy Aldana

## Build reading readiness by connecting letters and sounds



The link between letters and sounds, which educators call *phonemic awareness*, is a key step toward reading. To help

your child make this connection:

- **Have your child say a few words**, such as *cat*, *lamb* and *snake*, while looking in the mirror. Show her how she uses her mouth, tongue and lips in different ways to make the various sounds.
- **Read nursery rhymes together.** Point out words that sound similar, such as *dog* and *log*.
- **Teach your child the sounds** some letters make. "The word *sky* starts with the letter *s*. It sounds like *sssss*."
- **Read a book of tongue-twisters** with your child. It's OK if she can't

say them herself. It is more important for her to hear the sounds and for you to tell her that many of these words begin with the same sounds.

- **Be silly with music.** Sing, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." After singing it correctly, change the first letter in the word *boat*. Now it's "Row your *coat*." What other silly songs can you and your child come up with?

As your child gets more familiar with sounds and letters, you can make the activities a bit more challenging. Give her three words, such as *man*, *mat* and *boy*. See if she can tell you which two words begin with the same sound and which word is the "oddball."

**Source:** J. Fitzpatrick, *Phonemic Awareness: Playing with Sounds to Strengthen Beginning Reading Skills*, Creative Teaching Press.

## Does your home environment support learning?



Parents are their children's first teachers. So that means your home is your child's first school. Are you

supporting learning in your home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk** to your child about things that interest you and about new things you've learned?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you notice** your child's interests and praise him when he tries something new?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you keep** a variety of reading material around the house, and let your child see you reading regularly?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you provide** learning tools, such as paper, crayons, building blocks, puzzles, safety scissors and paste?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you replace** screen time with learning activities, such as reading, talking and exploring each day?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* answer means you are promoting learning in your home. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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## Get moving with your child to set the stage for school success



You already know that exercise leads to better health. Among other things, regular physical activity reduces the risk of diabetes, obesity and some types of cancer. But did you know that staying fit can also help your child do better in school?

Studies show that, in addition to stronger listening skills, children who exercise have better motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance and focus. They may fidget less in class, too. When kids burn off extra energy by running, jumping and skipping, it's easier to sit still when the time comes!

But knowing the benefits of exercise and actually getting your child off the couch are two different things. And that's where *you* come in. A new study shows that preschoolers' activity levels are linked to their parents' activity levels. Your child takes his cues from

you, so if you want him to move more, you need to move more.

To add regular exercise into your daily routine:

- **Take walks together.** If the corner store is right down the block, ditch the car and walk to it instead.
- **Shut off the electronics.** Set a screen-free period each day, and your child may be more likely to go out and play. When he does, join him!
- **Change your after-dinner routine.** Rather than reaching for dessert, reach for a ball. Kicking a ball around outside is much healthier than eating a cookie!
- **Explore the outdoors.** When was the last time you visited a local park or playground? Slip on your sneakers, grab your child and get going!

**Source:** S.L. Barkin and others, "Parent's Physical Activity Associated With Preschooler Activity in Underserved Populations," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Elsevier, [nswc.com/ec\\_model-activity](http://nswc.com/ec_model-activity).

**Q:** My child started preschool a few days ago and she has suddenly become anxious. She tells me repeatedly she is not going back. I am confused because she was so excited about it this past summer. What could be going on and how can I help her?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Your daughter is not alone. Many children have a difficult time adjusting to preschool—even if they were originally excited to go. The good news: With your support, this will just be temporary.

Here are some ways to help your preschooler adjust:

- **Remove the drama.** Beginning preschool is a milestone. But casting it as a big deal can make an anxious child even more so. Instead, remind your child of other places she has made friends and had fun learning. Tell her that preschool is similar in many ways.
- **Encourage her to talk.** Sometimes there is just one aspect of preschool that a child fixates on and becomes anxious about. If your child can tell you what is bothering her, you may be able to ease her mind with an explanation.
- **Control your own emotions.** Many parents are teary-eyed when their "baby" goes off to preschool. If this describes you, do your best to hide the tears from your daughter. Put on a brave smile and she just might, too!
- **Work with the teachers.** Preschool teachers are well versed in helping children adjust to preschool. Share your concerns with the teacher and ask for additional advice if needed.

## Take note of these screen-time guidelines for your preschooler



It's important for parents to help young children develop healthy digital media habits.

In addition to offering guidelines on the amount of time children should spend in front of screens, the American Academy of Pediatrics encourages families to:

- **Choose wisely.** Research links educational games and shows like *Sesame Street* to verbal, math and school readiness skills. When possible, boost learning by watching and playing together. Discuss what you see.
- **Watch and play during the day.** Nighttime use of TV, computer

and video games can disrupt sleep. Bright lights and excitement aren't part of a calm evening routine. Instead, read favorite books, play soothing music, tell stories or have a quiet conversation before bed.

- **Limit exposure to commercials.** There are many ways to avoid ads that influence children's eating, viewing and other habits. Record programs (and skip the ads), borrow DVDs from the library, consider free "on demand" programming, and watch commercial-free networks.

**Source:** "Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers," American Academy of Pediatrics, [nswc.com/ec\\_healthy-digital](http://nswc.com/ec_healthy-digital).

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Why attendance in kindergarten really matters



Regular attendance for kindergartners tends to be lower than for students in later school grades. Yet regular

attendance may be more important in kindergarten than in any other year.

The first year of school is the time to instill the value and habit of attending school regularly. Research shows that kindergarten attendance affects future academic achievement. The only way your child can succeed in school is to be in class.

As a parent, it's your job to make sure your child attends school on time, every day, unless he is sick or there is an emergency. Here's why:

- **Early reading instruction** begins in kindergarten. This has an impact on how quickly and easily children will learn to read.
- **Teachers have an easier time** identifying students' strengths and weakness when children are in school every day. Then, they can support those strengths and provide specific help as needed.
- **Attending kindergarten every day** helps ELL students become fluent. Children whose first language is not English can benefit from hearing instructions in English. They gain fluency by speaking with classmates and teachers.

Let your child know that you expect him to go to school every day. If you tell him it's important to you, it will be important to him, too.

**Source:** The Absences Add Up campaign, *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, [nswc.com/ec\\_absences-add-up](http://nswc.com/ec_absences-add-up).

## Promote kindergarten success by providing support at home

Your child's success in school will depend to a large extent on what you do at home to support her learning.

Make it a point to:

- **Tell your child** that school is a top priority. Talk about how school was important in your life.
- **Establish routines** to make mornings stress free. Have your child prepare her clothes and backpack the night before.
- **Make sure your child** has a healthy breakfast before school.
- **Ask your child** what she learned in school every day. Talking about it reinforces her learning.
- **Show pride** in your child's schoolwork. Praise her efforts and new skills. Hang up her work.
- **Support your child's teacher.** Don't say things that undermine



her authority or your child's respect for her.

- **Encourage reading.** Read to your child at least 20 minutes a day. Let her see you enjoying your book or magazine.

## Establish an after-school routine to boost responsibility



The kindergarten year is a wonderful new time for your child—filled with new freedoms and responsibilities.

To help your child spread her wings and develop school-related skills, encourage her to:

- **Put away belongings.** When your child gets home, she should hang up her coat and put her lunch box in the kitchen.
- **Take care of her backpack.** Every day after school, sort through her backpack together—keeping

an eye out for notes to parents. Designate a spot for your child's backpack and encourage her to keep it there.

- **Do homework.** Some teachers assign activities for kindergartners to complete at home. This is a great way to help your child develop a homework routine. Pick a regular time and place for your child to do homework, read or focus on other fun learning-related activities.

Reminder charts with pictures can help your child get used to her new routines and responsibilities.