

# Early Childhood Parents<sup>®</sup>

April 2018  
Vol. 22, No. 8

Watertown Preschool Collaboration  
and Family Resource Center

*make the difference!*



## Teach your preschooler about different cultures, traditions

**E**mbracing family traditions can enhance your preschooler's life and help him appreciate who he is and what he has. But as you share your family's heritage, also take time to point out and show your child that others may have different backgrounds and traditions.

To expand your child's appreciation for his origins and other cultures:

- **Show him photos** and keepsakes from your family's past. Children especially love to see photos of their parents and grandparents as children.
- **Prepare a dish** that represents your family's origins. Have your child help. Children are more likely to try new foods when they help prepare them.

- **Read books** about children from different cultures and countries. Discuss the books together. Point out similarities: "This boy likes to play soccer—just like you do!" Also point out differences: "He speaks a different language than we do."
- **Encourage your child** to make friends with children from other cultures.
- **Take advantage** of the cultural events in your community, such as performances, museum visits and festivals at cultural centers or houses of worship. Many of these are free to the public.

*Source:* K. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, Teachers College Press and Center for the Improvement of Child Caring.

## Help your child learn letters in creative ways



Recognizing letters is an important step toward reading and writing readiness. Thankfully, it can also be fun! To teach your child about letters:

- **Make them out of food.** Give her kid-friendly, tasty supplies to create letters, such as circle-shaped crackers and small, straight pretzels. Allow your child to break up foods to form letters, too.
- **Light them up.** In a dark room, use the light beam from a flashlight to draw letters on a ceiling or wall. Can your child follow the beam and figure out the letters you're writing? Give her a turn making letters, too.
- **Start with parts.** Draw a shape or line for your child, such as a circle or diagonal line. Let her add to it, eventually making a letter, such as T or N. Offer hints as needed. Then, switch roles and let her draw the first line.
- **Play letter match.** Write letters in uppercase and lowercase on a sheet of paper. Have your child draw lines from each lowercase letter to its uppercase match.

## Praising preschoolers for being smart can lead to dishonesty



Sure, you want to praise your child when he learns something new. But be careful *how* you do it. If you celebrate how smart he is, your good intentions could backfire.

Researchers believe that when young children hear “You’re so smart” all the time, they can feel pressured to *prove* they’re intelligent. That means they might be more willing than others to cheat at games and other activities.

This doesn’t mean that patting your child on the back for a job well done will turn him into a cheater. But it does mean you should pay attention to *how* you praise him—and *what* you praise him for.

To send positive messages when praising your child:

- **Avoid labels.** Resist the urge to tell him he’s the “smart one,” while his sibling is the “creative one” or the “athletic one.” When a child feels

his identity is tied to a label, he might try to preserve that label at all costs.

- **Focus on effort** instead of talent. Did he work hard on an art project? Congratulate him on his actions. “You really colored carefully!” Don’t chalk it up to some inborn ability by saying, “You’re always good at art.” If you do, he may indeed think he must always be good at it.

**Source:** L. Zhao and others, “Praising Young Children for Being Smart Promotes Cheating,” *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.

**“Continuous effort—not strength or intelligence—is the key to unlocking our potential.”**

—Winston Churchill

## Use jigsaw puzzles to increase your child’s attention span



Children don’t need too many toys, but jigsaw puzzles are worth investing in. Putting together puzzles builds fine motor skills and helps kids think logically and visually. Puzzles are also among the best toys for helping children extend their attention spans.

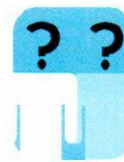
Working on a puzzle can:

- **Help your child** learn to concentrate quietly on a project. Once your child is in kindergarten, her teacher will expect her to sit and work independently for short periods of time.
- **Show your child** the progress she is making. She can see progress as the picture develops. She can also see

progress as she moves from a simple puzzle to a more difficult one. Start your child with puzzles of about eight pieces. Move up at her pace. Some older preschoolers surprise their parents by doing 50-piece puzzles.

- **Teach your child** to return to a project. Attention is not just about how much a child can learn and do in one sitting. Some tasks just can’t be done all at once, but they still need to be completed! Doing part of a puzzle one day, then returning the next day to work on it again, lets your child practice a skill that will help her study and do larger projects when she gets to school.

## Are you teaching your child to be kind to others?



If your child learns to care about people and things, she will be more likely to care about doing well in school, too. She’ll also be a better friend and classmate.

Are you helping your child become kind and caring? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you model** caring by thanking, helping and showing respect to your child and others?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you nurture** your child’s sense of appreciation by reminding her to thank others in person and by helping her write thank-you notes?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to do random acts of kindness, such as offering to share a cookie?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you taught** your child how to take care of something, such as a plant or a pet?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to think about others’ feelings?

### How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you are promoting caring and kindness in your child. Mostly *no* answers? Try those ideas in the quiz.

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

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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.

# Six ways young children can take responsibility for the Earth



Earth Day is April 22. And while protecting the Earth is a job for every day, you can use this special day to begin

or reinforce the habit.

Many activities that help the Earth are educational and free. And they are very suitable for young children.

Here are six ideas:

1. **Turn off the lights** and television when you leave a room and ask your child to do the same.
2. **Keep a cup** on the bathroom sink. Teach your child to fill it with water before he brushes his teeth. After he brushes, he can use the water in the cup to rinse out his mouth. Now there's no need to leave the water running during tooth-brushing.

3. **Consider drinking** filtered tap water instead of buying bottled water. Unless there is an emergency, such as a flood or other unusual situation, tap water in the United States and Canada is safe to drink.
4. **Recycle.** Have your preschooler help you sort recyclables into special bins.
5. **Plant something** with your child. Plant seeds outdoors if you can. If not, plant them in a container. Consider joining a tree-planting activity in your community.
6. **Participate in a clean-up day.** Many communities plan events to celebrate Earth Day. If you can't find one near you, rally neighbors to clean up a section of your own neighborhood or block.

# Let your preschooler practice responsibility and learn new skills



Responsibility goes hand in hand with independence—and both will make preschool easier.

To teach responsibility, put your preschooler in charge of doing some tasks on her own.

Here are four steps to take to help your preschooler master a task:

1. **Model the skill** for your child. If you want your child to become responsible for making her bed, for example, have her watch you do it a few times.
2. **Practice the skill** with your child. After your child is familiar with the process, make the bed together. You could pull up the sheet, while she pulls up the comforter and puts the pillow on top.
3. **Watch your child.** She should make the bed herself for a few days while you supervise. This step may be the longest in the process. Don't expect the bed to be made the way you would make it. The idea is not perfection. It is to develop your child's desire to do it and belief that she *can* do it.
4. **Work the skill** into your child's routine. Usually, performing a task for 21 straight days makes it familiar enough to become a habit. Another helpful idea is to perform the task at around the same time every day. If your child gets used to getting up, getting dressed and making her bed, in the same order, around the same time every day, you may not have to remind her about the task.

**Q:** My son is very competitive. When he loses a game or isn't chosen first, he gets so frustrated that he usually throws a fit. I sometimes let him win to avoid dealing with his behavior—which I know is wrong. How can I help my child learn how to better deal with disappointment?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Every child faces times when someone else comes in first or is chosen earlier. It's a difficult lesson, but it's important to help your preschooler learn to accept it and move on.

To prepare your child:

- **Talk about sportsmanship.** Don't assume he knows what it means to be a good sport. Tell him, "Being a good sport means respecting fellow players. It also means being a gracious (no gloating) winner and a mature (no pouting) loser."
- **Teach him how to lose.** A child who never experiences failure will expect to win all of the time. So, let your child lose sometimes, and then help him express his feelings. Tell your child to use his words to say how he feels.
- **Empathize with him.** Let him know that you understand his disappointment. Encourage him to say, "I'll try again another time." Then, have him switch to a different activity for a while.
- **Emphasize effort.** Tell your son that he can always feel proud if he gives his best, no matter the outcome—win or lose.
- **Focus on fun!** Remind your child that games should be played for fun. If he has a good time, then he has succeeded.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Communication skills promote peer connections



Shyness isn't a character flaw, so there's nothing "wrong" with being shy. Unfortunately, if your child is shy, it could

hurt his ability to make friends in school. That's because shy kids are often seen as less likable than more outgoing students.

Studies show that even shy kids with strong vocabularies may not say much around other kids. So, the problem may not be that your child doesn't know enough words to communicate well. "Word knowledge" doesn't always go hand in hand with good communication. Instead, it's communication skills themselves that lead to better connections with peers.

The solution? Show your child how to strengthen his communication skills overall! Here's how:

- **Role-play.** Practice having conversations with your child. Remind him to make eye contact when he speaks and to speak clearly.
- **Demonstrate different moods.** Pretend you're bored by what your child is saying. Does he notice? Nudge him! "Did you hear how I sighed when you kept talking? If someone does that, it probably means they're done listening."
- **Change topics.** While chatting, start talking about something else. Can your child make the switch to what you're now discussing? Being able to do so is an important part of communicating well with others.

**Source:** "Building social communication skills in shy children helps with peer likeability," Yale-NUS College, [niscw.com/ec\\_shy](http://niscw.com/ec_shy).

## Strategies to help your child overcome homework struggles

Your kindergartner loves going to school and coming home to play, but she isn't so interested in doing homework. While you understand, you also want to support her learning. That's why it's important to:

- **Keep in mind the purpose of homework.** It reinforces important skills, develops good habits and helps you keep up with your child's progress.
- **Talk with the teacher** about expectations. How long should homework take? How much should you help? Should your child correct mistakes before turning in work? Also discuss any concerns. If homework is frustrating or takes too long, look for solutions together.
- **Have a positive attitude.** Many kindergartners like homework and take pride in doing a "big kid" job. Promote this feeling: "You finished your homework. How grown up!"



- **Consider timing.** Some kids need time to relax after school before they focus on homework. Others prefer to finish it right away. Do what works best for your child.
- **Offer choices.** "Would you like to do reading or math first?" Having a say can boost motivation.
- **Establish routines,** such as working at the same time each day. When kids develop habits, they're more likely to follow through.

## Plan to celebrate Screen-Free Week with your kindergartner



April 30 to May 6, 2018 is Screen-Free Week—a week when families unplug from digital entertainment and replace it with family time.

Ready for the challenge? Here are some fun activities to help you and your child fill your screen-free time:

- **Dramatic play.** Act out familiar stories together. Or, use puppets.

- **Physical play.** Head to a park and run around. Or, create an indoor obstacle course.
- **Game play.** Board games, card games and jigsaw puzzles build sportsmanship and improve thinking skills.
- **Artistic play.** Collect art supplies, such as magazines, crayons, paint, brushes, glue, fabric, string, boxes and more. Brainstorm about what you and your child can make.