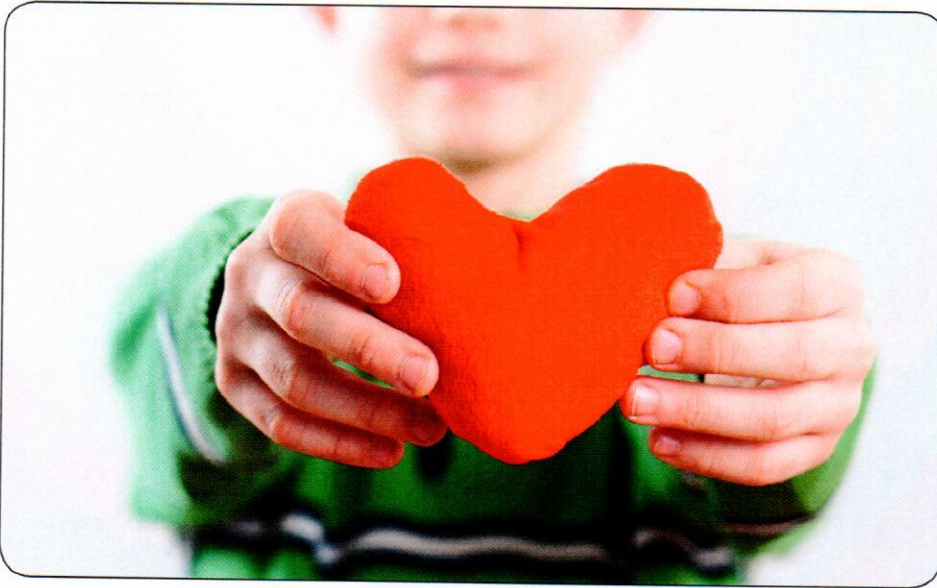


Early Childhood Parents®

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Watertown Preschool Collaboration
and Family Resource Center

make the difference!



Valentine crafts boost your child's skills and creativity

Valentine's Day offers a great opportunity for you and your child to spend time together—making valentines! Preschoolers benefit from making valentines because the process is creative, works fine motor skills and teaches the social skill of doing something nice for someone else.

Consider these valentine crafts:

- **Handprint valentines.** This is a perfect activity for the youngest valentine-senders. Help your child cut out several large hearts from construction paper. Dip his palm into a nontoxic paint, then help him make a handprint on each heart. Write a message such as "Love goes heart in hand." Have your child sign his name.
- **Cookie valentines.** Heart-shaped cookies are fun for your child to make and give. Let him help with the measuring and baking. Then, together, decorate them any way you wish.
- **Heart puppets.** Cut out a heart shape from an old cereal box. Let your child decorate the heart using crayons, glitter or paint. Have him glue on scraps of fabric, ribbon, sequins or beads. Then help him glue it to the end of a craft stick to create his very own puppet.
- **Pipe-cleaner hearts.** Help your child thread beads along the length of a pipe cleaner. Then, shape it into a heart, twisting the ends tightly together.

Teach your child about the five senses



Children learn about their world through seeing, touching, tasting, hearing and smelling. To help your child appreciate what she can do with her senses:

- **Play 1-2-3 Look and See.** Put five items on the table. Ask your child to cover her eyes. Then, take one item away. When she opens her eyes, can she guess what's missing?
- **Make a "feely" bag.** Place a variety of small items in a paper bag. Have your child close her eyes, reach her hand in the bag and pick up an item. Can she guess what it is?
- **Have a taste test.** Have your child place salt on the tip, side and back of her tongue. Then, repeat with sugar and lemon juice. Discuss which part of her tongue is more sensitive to which taste.
- **Have a listening minute.** Stand outside in the dark with your child. Have her guess the sounds she hears in the night.
- **Take a smell walk.** Lead your child around your house with her eyes closed. See what smells she can sniff and name.

Chores build responsibility and foster a sense of importance



One of the best ways to teach your preschooler responsibility is to give her chores at home. Doing chores teaches your child that maintaining a home is a family effort and that she is an important part of the family.

If your child is at least three years old, she can do things such as:

- **Set and clear the table.** Have her start with the forks, spoons and napkins. Gradually expand the job to include plates and cups.
- **Feed dry food** to family pets and give them fresh water.
- **Clean using simple tools**, such as a feather duster, a small hand broom or a lightweight handheld vacuum.

- **Help with laundry.** She can put dirty clothes in a laundry basket or put clean clothes in drawers.
- **Help with simple cooking jobs**, such as stirring ingredients and pouring liquids.
- **Bring in mail or newspapers**, unless this requires going out on the street.
- **Pick up toys.** Have her pick them up on a daily basis before bedtime.

“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”

—Denis Waitley

Regular attendance is key to your child’s academic success



Even if you don’t consider preschool to be “real” school, the things your child learns there can have a very real impact on his future. This is why it’s vital that he not miss too many days.

Studies show that when young children are absent just 10 percent of the time, their math and literacy skills can suffer. In addition, they also lose out on valuable chances to build social skills and develop friendships.

So make your child’s attendance at preschool a priority! Here are three tips for helping you do it:

1. **Take it seriously.** Since you know how necessary preschool is for your child, commit to getting him there on time every day. Read the papers he brings home each day and make sure he has all of the supplies he needs. The better

prepared you are, the better prepared he’ll be.

2. **Create a “night before” routine.** Help your child get his bookbag or tote ready each evening before preschool. (It may put him in a “school frame of mind.”) Lay out his clothes, and tuck him into bed on time. After you’ve read a bedtime story, chat for a moment about all the fun things he will do in school tomorrow.
3. **Stay involved.** Get to know your child’s preschool teacher. Ask questions about what’s being taught. Volunteer in the classroom occasionally (if you can). Think of yourself and the teacher as partners in your child’s education. Your positive attitude toward school will serve your child well in the years to come.

Source: “Help Your Child Succeed in Preschool: Build the Habit of Good Attendance,” Attendance Works, niswc.com/ec_attend.

Do you know the basics of effective discipline?



Disciplining children is one of the toughest parts of parenting. Are you practicing effective discipline

at home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you choose** just a few important rules—and explain them in simple words your preschooler understands?
- ___ 2. **Do you enforce** household rules consistently so your child always knows what you expect?
- ___ 3. **Do you set** expectations that are appropriate for your child’s age? This prevents rules from being too lenient or too tough.
- ___ 4. **Do you react** carefully and calmly when your child misbehaves, providing her with a good behavior role model?
- ___ 5. **Do you celebrate** your child’s good behavior much more often than you notice her mistakes?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you’re using an effective discipline method. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Family routines increase your child's social-emotional health



There's nothing boring about routines. In fact, they can help your child succeed in preschool and beyond!

According to research, children who follow at least five positive family routines have stronger social-emotional health (SEH) than those who don't. And the better your child's SEH, the better able he is to form relationships, grasp emotions, and do well in school.

Routines help young children feel secure and figure out their place in the world. They also provide kids with structure. Routines don't need to be complicated. Simple, steady rituals are all it takes.

Here are three common routines that may benefit your child:

1. **Eating together.** Sharing daily meals with your child is the most basic household ritual you can adopt. It

doesn't have to be dinner, either. If breakfast or lunch fits your schedule better, make that your daily shared meal. It's the routine—not the menu—that matters most.

2. **Sharing stories.** Whether it's a fairy tale at bedtime or a picture book each morning, start a reading routine with your child. In addition to improving his emotional health, it will boost his word smarts, too.
3. **Playing.** It doesn't matter what you play—just that you play regularly. From "weekend puzzle night" to Tic-Tac-Toe Tuesday, find a playtime routine that works for your family and follow it. Who knows? You may end up loving it as much as your child does!

Source: E.I. Muñoz and others, "Family Routines and Social-Emotional School Readiness Among Preschool-Age Children," *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Teach your child the importance of doing the right thing



When children are young, they behave well to earn parents' approval and avoid negative consequences.

As they get older, they need to show good behavior for its own sake—simply because it's the right thing to do.

To instill the desire to do what's right in your preschooler:

- **Give her unconditional love.** Children who are secure in their parents' love almost always behave better than children who are not.
- **Be a role model.** Your child is watching you *all the time*. If she overhears you speaking in a disrespectful tone to people, she will be more likely to speak that way, too. However, if you always speak to others with respect, chances are, she will, too.
- **Correct her misbehavior.** Say things like, "In our family, we use kind words and we don't hit." "We ask to borrow things that don't belong to us. We don't take them."
- **Encourage her to make amends.** If your child has hurt someone's feelings, she should apologize and ask what she can do to fix it.
- **Cue her to think of others.** If someone in the family drops something on the floor, say to your child, "Look on the floor. Do you see something that Dad dropped? Let's pick it up and give it to him." Praise your child when she follows through.

Q: My son isn't very physically active and I'm worried that he isn't getting the exercise he needs. How can I encourage him to move more?

Questions & Answers

A: Regular exercise helps children build strong muscles and bones, develop motor skills and boost self-esteem. It's never too early to start integrating exercise into your child's daily life.

Here are a few family fitness tips:

- **Schedule regular times** for exercise and stick to them. Think about when your child is likely to have the most energy.
- **Take turns choosing** the activity. If your child likes soccer, for example, agree to play at least once a week.
- **Plan activities** that make your child feel successful. Don't play sports that require too much agility or are too hard for him.
- **Keep an exercise log.** It's fun to look through it and see how committed your whole family is to good health.
- **Drive less and exercise more.** Brainstorm with your family about when driving is unnecessary. On a nice day, could you walk to the library or the store?
- **Think of creative ways** you and your child can exercise. You could build a snowman or play a game of tag. On rainy or chilly days, you might build an indoor obstacle course or make up a dance.
- **Use exercise** rather than food as a reward. For example, "After you pick up your toys, we can go to the park."
- **Limit screen time.** Watching TV and playing computer games doesn't require much physical or mental energy.

The Kindergarten Experience

Teach your child how to listen and speak in turn



Listening to others and waiting for a turn to speak are essential skills for school. If 25

students were always talking at once, children could never learn!

If you encourage and model polite talking and listening skills at home, your child will be more likely to use them at school, too.

As a family, you can practice these valuable skills:

- **During mealtimes.** Family meals offer the perfect opportunity for your child to learn conversation skills. Give family members a chance to tell something about their day. Do not allow others to speak while someone else is talking.
- **During story time.** You know it's important to read with your child. It encourages him to learn to read. But it also teaches him to listen and pay attention. Ask questions about the story. "Can you tell me which part you liked best in the story?" "Does this story remind you of any other stories we've read?"
- **During playtime.** Games such as Simon Says have been around forever because they are fun and they teach young children to listen carefully. Many board games encourage talking, listening and taking turns. You can also sing your child's favorite song using the syllable "la" instead of singing the words. See if your child can listen carefully and guess the song.

Reinforce the concept of size with three simple activities

There are lots of ways to help your kindergartner explore the concept of size. Encourage her to notice and compare the things around her. Use words like *bigger*, *smaller*, *shorter* and *longer* to describe them.

Then, try a few of these activities:

1. **Read the fable** "The Lion and the Mouse." Discuss the sizes of the characters. How big are their ears? Their paws? Their voices? Then, compare other animals you see, such as a cat and a dog. Which animal is smaller?
2. **Make pancakes of all sizes.** Put them in order from smallest to largest. Which one does your child want to eat? The smallest pancake or the biggest one of all?
3. **Compare lengths.** Ask your child to measure and then compare the lengths of different items. For example, "This crayon is four inches long and that banana is eight inches. The crayon is four inches shorter than the banana."



How to stay involved with school throughout the year



Your child has been in kindergarten for a few months now. Have you found ways to stay involved and engaged?

Here are some strategies to try:

- **Visit.** Take advantage of chances to get comfortable with the school. Volunteer in class, for example, and introduce yourself to staff. Attend school events, such as field trips and workshops.
- **Communicate.** Keep in touch with your child's teacher through email and notes. Tell her about any changes in your child's life. Continue to make parent-teacher conferences a priority.
- **Read.** Stay updated on your child's progress and school events by reviewing the papers he brings home every day.
- **Socialize.** Meet other parents of kindergartners. Keep in touch through social media or group texts. The bonds formed in kindergarten can last many years—for kids and parents!
- **Lead.** As your schedule allows, consider leadership roles, such as organizing class events, joining the parent-teacher group or working on the school improvement plan.

Source: H. Kreider, "Getting Parents 'Ready' for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education," Harvard Family Research Project.