

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

EARLY CHILDHOOD



October 2021

Use six strategies to help you balance your preschooler's day

When you want your child to do well in school, it's tempting to pack his days with activities that will teach him new things and help him develop new skills. Programmed enrichment activities can be great, but it's also important to strike a balance between structured and unstructured learning time.



To balance your child's day:

1. **Set aside time for family.** Plan to spend at least 20 minutes a day having fun together. You could blow bubbles, go on a walk or read stories.
2. **Keep his age and abilities in mind.** Set expectations that are reasonable, and choose activities that are in line with them.
3. **Focus on what motivates him.** You may dream about having him reach a certain goal. But if he isn't interested, let go of the dream for now.
4. **Listen to him.** If your child regularly objects to an activity, don't force it.
5. **Allow free time.** Being a kid shouldn't be a job. All kids need plenty of unscheduled hours for exploring, creative thinking and relaxing. Free time shouldn't be screen time, however.
6. **Be a good role model.** Let your child see you balancing your time and activities. Make time for your own interests and relationships. Don't try to relive your childhood through your child.



Build your child's social awareness

Social awareness skills help children interact effectively. They help kids care about other people's feelings and appreciate their points of view. Socially-aware students can recognize the behaviors that different situations call for. They treat others with the respect that allows everyone to learn.

To build your preschooler's skills:

- **Explain** that people have their own thoughts, feelings and needs.
- **Discuss** differences. People come from different cultures and backgrounds. Say that it is never OK to judge, insult or treat someone badly because of these things.
- **Show** respect for others in your own daily interactions.
- **Point out** other's feelings. "Erin is sad. What do you think might make her feel better?"
- **Rehearse** how to act in advance of new situations.
- **Praise** your child when she considers other people's feelings.

Source: "CASEL'S SEL FRAMEWORK: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted?" CASEL.

Inspire your child to think

Your child's brain forms new connections with every new experience. Support this development by talking and playing together in ways that help her think for herself:

- **Ask questions.** "How can we tell when a story is over?" "Why do we pick up toys?" Avoid questions with one-word answers.
- **Give your child time to think.** After asking a question, be sure to wait a moment or two to allow her to process it and form a response.
- **Encourage your child** to ask you questions. Constant "whys" may try your patience, but the more she asks, the more she learns and thinks.



Focus on good behavior

Do you compliment your child's behavior more than you criticize it? Correct him when he takes a toy from his sister, but make a bigger deal of praising him when he shares with her. Your child will soon get the message that doing the right thing feels great, and that boosts motivation to behave well.



Laughing supports learning

Laughter has many benefits, especially for children. It relieves frustration and can even make challenges fun. And research shows that having a good sense of humor boosts kids' health, optimism and resilience.

Foster your preschooler's sense of humor by reading silly books and singing silly songs. Show him how to string funny words or sounds together. And be sure to laugh at your child's attempts at humor. You are his most important audience!

Source: M.L. Gavin, "Encouraging Your Child's Sense of Humor," KidsHealth.



How can I help my child stop being so afraid?

Q: When my daughter was a toddler, I thought I had the boldest child in the world. Since then, we've had a complete turnaround. She cries when I leave the house. She's afraid of monsters and the dark. What should I do?

A: As a toddler, your child wasn't afraid because she didn't have the ability to wonder whether monsters might be real, or if something might be lurking in the dark. Now she has more thinking skills and a larger imagination. She can consider all sorts of possibilities—and some of them scare her. To help your child cope:

- **Offer reassurance.** Don't dismiss her worries. Instead, say that you will help her. "Let's put a night light in your room." Tell her that you are taking every step possible to make sure that you and she stay safe.
- **Respond to fears with facts.** For example, say that people sometimes wear monster costumes for fun, but their real faces are underneath.
- **Monitor media.** This is not the time for even mildly scary viewing.

It's likely these fears won't last too long. If you think something more serious is going on, contact your family doctor.



Are you encouraging curiosity?

From their earliest days, children are curious about everything around them. Nurturing that curiosity helps your preschooler develop into a student who wants to learn. Are you helping his curiosity thrive? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you set** an example by wondering aloud about things?
2. **Do you encourage** questions with positive responses? "That's a good question!"
3. **Do you go** for adventure walks together and see how many new things you can spot?
4. **Do you help** your child examine things up close with a magnifying glass?
5. **Do you give** your child toys and other items he can

safely take apart and put back together?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are encouraging your child's sense of wonder. For each no, try that idea.

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing."
—Albert Einstein

Move motor skills forward

In school, your child will need to control her body—in big ways and small. To help her build the motor skills she needs to do it, have her practice:

- **Turning pages** of books.
- **Walking on a line** on the ground.
- **Stringing large beads** onto shoelaces.
- **Zippering and buttoning** her clothes.
- **Playing active games**, like Simon Says.

Source: M.P. Dharshini, "Kids With Better Fine and Gross Motor Skills Do Better At School, Study Shows," Medical Daily.

Learning takes persistence

All children face learning challenges in school. That's why it's important for them to learn to stick with a difficult task and keep trying. To encourage perseverance:



- **Give your child** opportunities to try something challenging. Match activities to his personality.
- **Help your child** plan for success. What small steps can he take that will help him reach a big goal?
- **Praise progress.**
- **Model trying again.** "Well, that didn't work—I'm going to try this instead."

Foster writing readiness

There are many early stages on the way to writing. Pre-writing includes scribbling, drawing lines, drawing random letters and writing partial words. Anytime your preschooler makes purposeful marks on paper, she is building her writing skills.

Encourage your child by asking her about what she's writing. Write what she says beneath her marks. Then read it with her.

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