

Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

December 2023
Vol. 28, No. 4



Have your preschooler move around to learn letter sounds!

Learning letter names and sounds are important early steps toward reading. Research shows that when children move their bodies while making letter sounds, they learn them more effectively. Try these activities:

- **Write letters in the air.** Hold your arm straight out in front of you with your first finger pointed. Move your whole arm to make the shape of a letter. Can your child guess your letter? Now have your child make a letter for you to guess.
- **Make letter shapes.** Encourage your child to lie on the floor, and give challenges like “Curl your body into the letter C” or “Bend your body like an uppercase L.” Some letters, such as B, K and M, might take teamwork!

- **Move to letter sounds.** Together, think of movements to match letter sounds. For w, your child might wiggle around while saying, “W-w-wiggle.” Your child could jump up and down for J, walk on tiptoe for T and spin for S.
- **Walk on giant letters.** Help your child write a giant alphabet in chalk on pavement. Pretend to be tightrope walkers as you walk along each letter and say its name or sound. Or, give each other instructions: “Hop along the v” or “Walk backward around the o.”

Source: L. Damsgaard, et al, “Effects of 8 weeks with embodied learning on 5- to 6-year-old Danish children’s pre-reading skills and word reading skills,” *Educational Psychology Review*.

A strong self-image boosts learning



Children who feel confident and capable are proud of their abilities and want to try their

best. They are also more willing to keep trying when faced with a challenge.

To give your preschooler’s self-image a boost:

1. **Ask for your child’s opinion.** “What vegetable should we have tonight with dinner, peas or broccoli?” “What do you think is the best TV show for kids?” “What’s the coolest place we’ve ever gone together?”
2. **Respect your child’s interests.** You don’t always have to join in. Often, saying something like “I notice you really like to play with your blocks” is enough.
3. **Ask for help.** Feeling competent builds courage to try new things. Have your child help you with small tasks.
4. **Value your child’s company.** Take your child on an errand or a walk and say you love spending time together.

Source: K. DeBord, Ph.D., “Self-Esteem in Children,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension, North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University.

Build your preschooler's motor skills with fun physical activities



Sometimes it is easy to overlook the importance of motor skills for school success. But making sure your preschooler is as healthy as possible is a vital step in supporting learning. Developed muscles, bones and joints are the “drivers” of your child’s motor skills.

Exercise is one important way to build motor skills. Exercise can also help your child:

- **Reduce stress.** Your child will be happier, calmer and better able to cope with challenges.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Kids in a healthy weight range are more likely to keep a healthy weight as adults.
- **Sleep better.** A rested child is one who is ready to learn.

To promote exercise this winter:

- **Bundle up** and take a family walk.
- **Build an indoor obstacle course** using cushions, chairs and other items. Encourage your child to crawl, jump and wiggle.
- **Hold a scavenger hunt.** Have family members move throughout the house on a race to find items on individualized search lists.
- **Have small dance parties** throughout the day. Put on a favorite song and dance around together.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

—Lao Tzu

Research shows that taking naps can improve your child's learning



You're not the only one who could use a nap. Your child could, too! According to research, young kids who take regular naps have an easier time learning new things. Not only that, their memories are sharper and they retain what they've learned better. That's because, during sleep, the brain “replays” what it took in that day, creating solid recollections.

Unfortunately, many children stop taking naps once they reach preschool age. That's a shame, because kids this age need 11-13 hours of sleep in a 24-hour day, and they may not get it all at night. Naps are a great way to make up for missing shut-eye.

To encourage your child to take naps:

- **Create a routine.** Whether there is preschool every day or not, have your child wake up around the same

time each morning and go to bed at the same time at night. Also assign a regular time for naps. Make it clear that even if your child doesn't sleep, nap time is for lying quietly on the bed and resting.

- **Offer calm surroundings.** Your child may have trouble drifting off if the TV is distracting or all the lights are on. Turn them off and consider playing some quiet music in the background. A soothing atmosphere is ideal for napping.
- **Limit caffeine.** While kids don't drink coffee, they may sip soda or iced tea, or eat chocolate and other candy. Don't let these sleep-stealers interfere with your child's ZZZs!

Source: M. Sandoval and others, “Words to Sleep On: Naps Facilitate Verb Generalization in Habitually and Nonhabitually Napping Preschoolers,” *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

Are you improving your preschooler's ability to learn?



Young children naturally want to learn. But how much they learn depends a lot on their families.

Are you doing things that stimulate your child's learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you foster** thinking skills by asking your child to help solve problems? Ask questions, such as, “What's the best way to ... ?”

___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to use all five senses: to look, listen, feel, taste and smell?

___ **3. Do help your child** have new experiences, such as visiting a gallery or museum together.

___ **4. Do you suggest** your child sit at a table or desk when working on something? This can help children remained focused on the task.

___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions? You can look up the answers together.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're stimulating your child's learning. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

Early Childhood
Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2023, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
independent, private agency. Equal
opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Develop your child's literacy skills during the holidays



The holiday season creates lots of opportunities for families to spend time together. Why not weave reading into some

of that time?

Here are some effective ways to strengthen your family bond and your preschooler's literacy skills:

- **Blend reading** into your holiday activities, such as cooking and baking. Read part of a recipe aloud. Have your child retrieve an ingredient from the pantry. Then read directions, such as, "Stir for one minute." Help your child carry out the instructions.
- **Get cozy with your child.** Take advantage of cooler temperatures and grab a blanket, snuggle up and read several books together.
- If you're experiencing warm weather, have a reading picnic outdoors instead.
- **Listen to books.** When your eyes and hands are busy, such as during a car trip to visit family, turn on an audiobook. Listen with your child and discuss it.
- **Trade stories with your child.** Tell a story about how you spent winter months when you were your child's age. Then, ask your preschooler to tell you a story about something your family could do this winter. Write down the story and ask your child to draw pictures to go along with it.
- **Have a special read-aloud night.** Turn off the TV and other devices. Grab a snack and read your family's favorite holiday books together.

Teach your child how students respect and care for property



In school, students are responsible for a lot of physical items—folders, pencils, books, notes from teachers, etc. They have

to carry them back and forth between home and school.

Losing or damaging these items means messages do not get delivered, lunches are not eaten, and—as your child advances through the grades—crucial assignments go unfinished.

But when promoting responsibility, focus more than your own child's property. Your child will also have to respect the property of others, including school property.

To help your preschooler learn to treat property with respect:

- **Demonstrate the proper way** to use things. For example, your child

should use crayons on paper, not on furniture or on the walls. After riding a big wheel, your child should put it away before coming indoors. Leaving it outside means it could be damaged by weather or stolen.

- **Provide a bin for papers.** Even a young child can be taught to open a backpack after coming home from preschool or day care, pull out the papers and place them in the bin for you to sort through.
- **Demonstrate how to take special care** of things that belong to others. If your child borrows a toy from a friend, for example, return it together promptly. If your child borrows books from the library, show how to turn pages carefully. When the books are due, have your child put them gently in the return bin.

Q: I am a little concerned about my child's ability to pay attention in kindergarten next year. I know kindergarten will involve more seat work than preschool did. Can you explain the attention span needed for kindergarten and give me tips for preparing my child?

Questions & Answers

A: Kindergarten does involve more seat work, but this work will take place in small chunks. Kindergarten teachers are well aware that their students are ages five or six and have a strong need to be active.

In ordinary circumstances, your child will be expected to pay attention to the teacher or to one activity for about 15 minutes at a time. As the year goes on, that amount of time may increase to 25 minutes (for an engaging activity).

To extend your preschooler's attention span:

- **Limit recreational screen time.** Zoning out in front of a video is a passive activity. It feeds a child's desire to be entertained with constant changes of scenery.
- **Encourage time with toys** such as puzzles and blocks. Playing with these builds concentration.
- **Practice following directions.** Start with one-step directions, such as, "Hang your jacket on the hook." Move on to two-step directions, such as, "Bring me the bag and then hang your jacket on the hook." When your child masters this, try three steps.
- **Read together.** This is the best activity of all. Children learn to engage with the story and use their imagination. Also encourage your child to look at books independently.

The Kindergarten Experience

Keep learning alive over the winter break



You and your child deserve a break from the busy school year! But that doesn't mean learning should stop.

You and your kindergartner can enjoy building important skills with winter break activities. Here's how:

- **Play games.** Sneak learning into activities such as playing store (math), acting out a story (reading) and playing Simon Says (listening and following directions).
- **Explore.** Go on a field trip to the town hall or take a nature walk. Observe a construction site (from a safe distance).
- **Cook.** Use reading, math and science to follow a recipe.
- **Talk and listen.** This builds vocabulary and communication skills. Discuss daily life and ask questions that require creative thinking, such as, "What would it be like to live in outer space?"
- **Read.** Mix up your daily reading routine. Try reading in new places, such as a fort made with a sheet and kitchen chairs.
- **Exercise.** Build your child's muscles and prevent cabin fever by going outside or building a safe, indoor obstacle course.
- **Create art.** Dip winter themed cookie cutters into washable paint and let your child stamp a piece of paper with them. Make a snowman out of paper plates.
- **Practice manners.** A special dinner or a visit to someone's home is a perfect opportunity for your child to practice polite and respectful behavior.

Help your kindergartner stay healthy over winter months

Winter is known as the cold and flu season, and many parents are concerned about their children getting sick.

While it is impossible to keep your child from ever getting sick, take steps to provide the best chance of staying healthy—and ready to learn.

Here's how:

- **Make sure your child** gets 11 to 13 hours of sleep every night.
- **Feed your child** a healthy diet.
- **Make sure your child** wears warm clothing if you live in a cold climate. Much of a person's body heat escapes through the head, so wearing a hat is a smart idea, too.
- **Keep your child** up-to-date on medical visits.
- **Follow school protocols** for preventing the spread of illness.



- **Have your child** wash hands regularly. This prevents the spread of 80% of infections.

Kindergarten assignments can set the stage for future success



Kindergarten assignments help reinforce what students are learning in the classroom. They also help children develop positive study habits.

Kindergartners are not expected to spend more than a few minutes on any one assignment. And the work is designed to be enjoyable for your child.

Along with that enjoyment should come a sense of responsibility that will prepare your child for school assignments assigned in later grades.

Your child may be asked to:

- **Practice saying name,** age and home address.
- **Watch a teacher-made video.**
- **Draw a picture of family.**
- **Find three things** that begin with a certain letter of the alphabet.
- **Count the items** on a table.
- **Find two different kinds** of leaves.
- **Find three shapes** and tell a family member what they are.

Establish a place in your home that's free from distractions for your child to work. Your kindergartner will likely feel a sense of pride to have a work space!