

Early Childhood Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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Five reasons reading aloud to your child daily is important

Reading aloud to young children is one of the most effective things families can do to help prepare them to succeed in school. But according to the Reach Out and Read National Center, a nonprofit group focused on reading research, fewer than half of children under five are read to daily.

Here are five reasons why reading aloud matters:

1. **Children** who regularly see books and other reading material and who listen to reading aloud are more likely to learn to read well in the primary grades than children who do not.
2. **Reading aloud** gives families and children an opportunity to share

affection. Preschoolers feel positive attention when their caregivers read aloud to them—which builds children’s feelings of self-worth and confidence.

3. **Reading aloud** encourages children to think and use their imaginations.
4. **Reading aloud** is another way to help preschoolers learn language. Children with strong language skills tend to do better in school.
5. **Children** almost always hear words in books that they don’t hear in everyday language. Reading aloud together is one of the most effective ways to strengthen your child’s vocabulary.

Source: “Importance of Reading Aloud,” Reach Out and Read.

Self-confidence helps children reach potential



Self-confidence is one of the building blocks of academic success. Children who feel capable are proud of their abilities and more willing to tackle challenges.

To foster self-confidence:

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

Valentine crafts strengthen your preschooler'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 value of doing something nice for someone.

Consider these valentine crafts:

- **Handprint valentines.** First, cut out several large hearts from construction paper. Then, help your child dip a palm into a non-toxic paint and make a handprint on each heart. Write a message such as “Love goes heart in hand.” Be sure your child signs each heart.
- **Pipe-cleaner hearts.** Help your child thread beads along the length of a pipe cleaner. Then, shape it into a heart and twist the ends together.

- **Cookie valentines.** Heart-shaped cookies are fun for your child to make and give. Let your child 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. Your child can also glue on scraps of fabric, ribbon, sequins or beads. Next, glue the heart to the end of a craft stick and voila—your child has a homemade puppet.

“You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.”

—*Maya Angelou*

Protect your preschooler from violent screen content



Preschoolers who view on-screen violence are more likely to have psychological and social problems in adolescence, a recent study shows. They are also at risk for lower academic achievement.

To limit your child's exposure to violence in shows and games:

- **Decide what your child can watch.** Pay attention to age ratings, and read reviews. Let relatives, babysitters and others in your preschooler's life know what is allowed and what is not.
- **Make sure you can see the screen** when your child uses a device. It's easy for children to accidentally

see inappropriate material—or to secretly view content that is off-limits.

- **Talk about real vs. pretend.** Preschoolers often believe that fictional on-screen characters are real. Watch TV or play games together to help your child put events in context. If a character uses violence to solve a problem, brainstorm more appropriate solutions that people could choose in real life.

Source: L. Pagani and others, “Prospective associations between preschool exposure to violent televiewing and psycho-social and academic risks in early adolescent boys and girls,” *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*.

Are you teaching your child to be a keen listener?



Listening is a vital skill for school success—and it can be fun to practice! Are you finding creative ways to help your child develop

listening skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you play games** with your child that require careful listening, such as Simon Says?

___ **2. Do you take turns** telling a story with your child? You make up a sentence, then your child makes up the next sentence.

___ **3. Do you send** your child on short missions to bring you things? Each round, you can add more items.

___ **4. Do you clap** a rhythm and ask your child to clap it back to you?

___ **5. Do you play** Guess the Sound? You make a sound when your child's eyes are shut—jingling keys, crumpling paper, pouring water, etc. Your child has to guess the sound. Then, switch places.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping your child have fun while strengthening listening skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

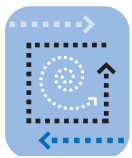
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Use positional words to help your child learn spatial concepts



During these critical early learning years, preschoolers are learning about themselves. A key part of this learning is understanding *spatial concepts*. This means having a sense of where they are in relation to what is around them.

Preschoolers also need to learn the words that describe the position of objects in relation to other objects. You can gradually introduce your child to these *positional words*.

When your child is:

- **About two years old**, work on simple spatial concepts such as *in*, *out* and *on*. “Let’s put the blocks *in* the box.” “I’m going to get you *out* of your car seat now.” “We’ll put some sprinkles *on* the cupcake.”
- **About three years old**, you can add more difficult concepts such as *over* and *under*. “I see a light hanging *over* the table.” (Pat the table, and then point to the light.) “Let’s run *under* the slide!” (Touch the slide, and then point under it.)
- **Four years old and older**, continue with more sophisticated concepts and words, such as *behind*, *in front of* and *next to*. These concepts will be important when your child reaches kindergarten. You can demonstrate these spatial concepts with toys. Line up several trucks or stuffed animals and show your child how to position them *behind*, *in front of* and *next to* one another. You can also demonstrate with family members. “Can you stand *behind* your sister?”

Research shows authoritative parenting is most effective



Researchers describe a kind of discipline that has positive effects on children’s behavior and learning. They call it *authoritative parenting*. Authoritative parents are caring, yet firm. They:

- **Set appropriate limits.** For example, children are not allowed to hit. Instead, they’re encouraged to say things like, “I’m angry because”
- **Are consistent.** They choose a few essential rules and stick to them.
- **Communicate effectively** with children. It’s easier for young kids to follow calm, simple and brief instructions.
- **Give children opportunities** to be responsible and make choices. A young child might water a house plant or choose between two outfits.
- **Have reasonable expectations.** When adults expect too much, kids are doomed to fail. Expecting too little, on the other hand, hurts kids’ skills and confidence.
- **Support children’s independence.** It’s challenging, but critical, to allow the right amount of freedom—enough for children to grow without risking their well-being.
- **Accept children for who they are.** Children need to feel good about themselves and their strengths. Maintaining discipline in a loving, caring way isn’t always easy—especially if it feels more natural to yell. But the results of authoritative parenting are clear: Kids are more accomplished and feel better about themselves. That’s worth the effort!

Source: A. Fletcher, “Positive Discipline and Child Guidance,” University of Missouri Extension.

Q: My preschooler is very competitive and usually throws a fit in frustration after losing. I sometimes let my child win to avoid dealing with the behavior—which I know is wrong. How can I help my child learn how to deal with disappointment better?

Questions & Answers

A: Preschoolers often face times when things don’t go their way, or someone else comes in first. It’s a difficult lesson, but it’s important to help preschoolers learn to accept disappointment and move on.

To prepare your child:

- **Talk about sportsmanship.** Don’t assume your child knows what it means to be a good sport. Say, “Being a good sport means respecting fellow players. It also means being a gracious (no gloating) winner and a mature (no pouting) loser.”
- **Empathize.** Let your child know that you understand how crummy disappointment feels, but explain that there are appropriate ways to react.
- **Emphasize effort.** Say that trying your best is what counts most, no matter the outcome—win or lose.
- **Teach your child how to lose.** Someone who never experiences failure will expect to win all of the time. So, let your child lose sometimes. Help your child use words to describe feelings. Encourage your preschooler to say, “I’ll try again another time.” Then, switch to a different activity for a while.
- **Focus on fun!** Remind your child that games should be played for fun. Having a good time while playing a game makes your preschooler an automatic winner.

The Kindergarten Experience

Communication skills help kids make friends



There is nothing “wrong” with being shy. However, shy people sometimes have a difficult time making friends. 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 children. 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.

Here’s how to help your child strengthen communication skills:

- **Role-play.** Help your child practice having school-day conversations with classmates. Talk about the importance of making eye contact and speaking clearly. Offer simple strategies for starting conversations. For example, “I really like your lunch box. Dinosaurs are my favorite.”
- **Demonstrate different moods.** Pretend you’re bored by the conversation. Does your child notice? If not, say, “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? Being able to pivot is important for keeping conversations going.

Source: “Building social communication skills in shy children helps with peer likability,” Yale-NUS College.

Support your kindergartner’s emerging independence

Can you believe your child is more than halfway through the kindergarten year? You may be noticing a big change. Many kids seem so much more independent after months of kindergarten instruction and responsibilities.

Encourage this newfound maturity by expecting your kindergartner to:

- **Get dressed independently.** It’s OK to help with buttons and tying shoes.
- **Help prepare breakfast or lunch.** Your child can pour dry cereal into a bowl, get the milk out of the refrigerator and peel a banana. For lunch, your child can make a simple sandwich.
- **Get things independently.** Provide a sturdy step stool. Store things like cups for water in low drawers that your child can reach easily.



- **Hang up jackets and put shoes away.**
- **Clean up.** Your child should clean out school bags, and put books and toys away after using them.

Your child’s vision can have an impact on academic success



Kindergartners with untreated vision problems often struggle more than their classmates. Unfortunately, children don’t always know that they can’t see well. They simply rub their eyes, squint and try their best to see.

Support healthy vision getting your child’s eyes examined regularly. In addition, you can:

- **Build in breaks** when your child uses screens. Too much screen time is linked to blurry vision and problems with focusing.
- **Provide sunglasses.** Bright sunlight can damage children’s eyes.
- **Serve healthy foods.** From leafy greens to fortified milk, nutritious foods are proven to support strong minds, bodies and eyes.

Source: S.L.J. White and others, “Vision screening outcomes of Grade 3 children in Australia: Differences in academic achievement,” *International Journal of Educational Research*.