

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

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Curiosity leads to learning and academic achievement

Many parents feel pressured to teach their children academics at younger and younger ages. They often use direct teaching tools, such as flash cards and worksheets.

However, studies show that preschool children do a lot of important learning when they are given opportunities to explore and discover things on their own. And research links curiosity to greater academic achievement.

To foster a sense of curiosity in your preschooler:

1. Ask, don't tell. When you reveal everything to your child, there is little for him to find out on his own. So instead of saying, "Put the cars at the top of the track and push them down," ask a question:

"Where can we put these cars so they will go really fast?"

- 2. Set an example.** Your child is more likely to want to try new things if he thinks *you* want to try new things. Show him the box from a jigsaw puzzle, for example, and say "Wow, did you know we can make this picture? That's so cool! Let's put a couple of pieces together."
- 3. Cheer him on.** Be excited when your child figures something out on his own. "I love the colors you made when you mixed the paints. I bet your preschool teacher would love to see your picture."

Source: P.E. Shah and others, "Early childhood curiosity and kindergarten reading and math academic achievement," *Pediatric Research*.

Bring out the scientist in your child



Young children are curious about the world around them, which makes them natural scientists!

Promote your preschooler's interest in science with these two fun activities:

1. Oil and water. Tell your child you will bring the ocean to her. Fill a jar halfway with water and add a few drops of food coloring. Then, add baby oil until the jar is three-quarters full. Put a toy animal in, close the lid tightly and shake.

Explain to your child that oil and water don't mix together. When the water moves, it pushes the oil around, which makes shapes like waves for the toy to ride.

2. Electrical attraction. Show your child that she is electric! Run a dry comb through her dry hair several times. Then, hold the comb next to a thin stream of water. The water should move toward the comb.

Explain that your child's hair put a special kind of electricity into the comb—static electricity—which attracted the water.

Use music lyrics boosts your child's emerging literacy skills



Listening to music benefits your child in many ways. And listening to music with lyrics can build

her language skills—and help her unlock the code to reading.

When you enjoy music with lyrics together, your child:

- **Learns to listen for sounds.** Recognizing sounds is a huge step toward reading.
- **Is exposed to devices** used in literature and poetry, such as repetition, rhyming and alliteration.
- **Expands her vocabulary.** Song lyrics are a gateway to learning new words.

- **Is introduced to repetition,** which improves fluency. When she hears song lines that repeat, she becomes familiar with them and can eventually repeat them.
- **Hears a story.** Listening to the lyrics of a song gives her practice with comprehension.

Source: P. Parker, "Five things to know about music and early literacy," State of Opportunity.

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything."

—Plato

Seven strategies can make your family read-aloud time a success



Reading books aloud to young children helps them develop key reading skills. It also shapes their social and emotional develop-

ment. One study links read-alouds to decreased levels of aggression, hyperactivity, and attention difficulties.

To make your read-aloud time successful:

1. **Do it every day.** When you read aloud daily, you demonstrate that reading time too important to miss.
2. **Pick a regular time.** When reading is already part of your daily routine, you won't have to think about trying to fit it into a hectic day. Choose a time when your child will be most receptive, such as after playing outside or before bed.
3. **Read the book first—before you** read it aloud. Reading aloud is

performing. You'll do a better job if you're familiar with what you're going to read.

4. **Read books you like.** If you like a book, odds are your child will, too. Start by reading books you enjoyed as a child.
5. **Accentuate the first line.** The first line of any good story will grab the reader's attention. Your reading should make your child want to sit up and listen.
6. **Use facial expressions.** Widen your eyes to show surprise. Squint a bit to show you're thinking.
7. **Leave your child wanting more.** Stop your day's reading at a point where you are both eager to hear what happens next.

Source: P. Klass, M.D., "Reading aloud to young children has benefits for behavior and attention," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics.

Are you helping your child get enough sleep?



Children need plenty of sleep to learn and grow. Are you promoting positive sleep habits?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the

questions below to find out:

___ 1. **Do you enforce** a consistent, reasonable bedtime—and usually stick to it, even on weekends?

___ 2. **Have you established** relaxing bedtime routines, such as bathing, brushing teeth and reading?

___ 3. **Do you make sure** your child gets the right amount of sleep? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 10 to 13 hours per night for preschoolers.

___ 4. **Do you end screen time** at least 30 minutes before bedtime to prevent difficulty falling asleep? (Remember, this includes tablets and handheld electronic games.)

___ 5. **Do you eliminate distractions,** such as the TV and loud phone calls, in the area where your child is sleeping?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're promoting good sleep habits. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Celebrate Valentine's Day with skill-building activities



There are lots of ways to celebrate Valentine's Day with your child. Try a few of these fun learning activities:

- **Build math skills** in the kitchen by baking some heart-shaped treats. Let your child help with the counting and measuring. "We need two cups of flour. Let's count them as we put them in."
- **Sharpen observation skills** by going on a "heart hunt." Take a walk with your child or take him on a car ride with you. Who can find the most hearts?
- **Spark creativity** by making cards for family and friends. There's no need for expensive materials. Your loved ones will appreciate one of your child's drawings, tucked in an envelope. Help him make an X and an O at the bottom of the picture to symbolize a kiss and a hug.
- **Boost language skills** by creating rhymes. It's easy to find words that rhyme with *valentine* and *day*. Help your child think of some rhyming words for each. For example, *fine*, *mine* and *shine* rhyme with *valentine*; *play*, *say* and *way* rhyme with *day*.
- **Encourage reading readiness** by reading books about Valentine's Day and love. Snuggle up with your child and share books such as *Heart to Heart* by Lois Ehlert, *Love* by Matt de la Peña and *Ollie's Valentine* by Olivier Dunrea.

Simple ways to strengthen your child's sense of responsibility



Teaching young children how to be responsible can take great patience. After all, learning takes a lot of trial and error. But the

more you support your child's efforts, the more he'll accomplish at home and at school. He'll see that hard work gets results—and that feels great.

To promote responsibility:

- **Set expectations.** Clearly outline the rules you expect your child to follow. Talk about what will happen if he doesn't follow them. And when he makes a poor choice, hold him accountable and help him take responsibility for it.
- **Be a role model.** Demonstrate responsibility. Be honest. Take care of your duties. Be on time. Apologize for your mistakes.
- **Give responsibility.** Let your child help with age-appropriate jobs, such as picking up toys and sorting laundry. Allow him to make some decisions, such as choosing between two shirts.
- **Embrace mistakes.** Allow your child to face small challenges, such as pouring a drink. He may spill some in the process, but that's OK—it's an opportunity to learn.
- **Develop empathy.** Encourage your child to imagine how others feel. Teach him to treat others as he wants to be treated.
- **Reward maturity.** As your child becomes more responsible, adjust your rules and expectations. Don't forget to compliment his efforts.

Source: M. Purcell, "Building Responsible Kids," Psych Central.

Q: My preschooler used to be a happy-go-lucky child. But since she started preschool this year, she is turning into a perfectionist. She says her coloring is "sloppy" and that she is the slowest runner in the class. I'm worried about my daughter's self-confidence. What is going on?

Questions & Answers

A: When children begin preschool, many start comparing themselves to others. Until this year, your daughter likely never thought about her coloring or her speed. But now she can see what everyone else is doing, every day. And like many other children her age, she wonders if she is falling short.

To reassure your child that she is wonderful just as she is:

- **Emphasize effort.** Research shows that it is *effort*, rather than *ability*, that ultimately leads to success. Say things like, "Look how hard you worked on that." Or, "You always try your best."
- **Talk about mistakes.** Let your child know that people learn through their mistakes. Say, "Sometimes things don't work out. This is a great opportunity for us to think about what you could you do differently next time."
- **Avoid judgement.** Words like *best* and *worst* just add fuel to a perfectionist's fire. Your child looks to you as a model. If you avoid comparisons, she may stop making comparisons, too.
- **Just have fun.** Every day, do something with your child that is pleasurable for the two of you. Read, sing a song, go for a walk. Children need time away from work, just like adults do.

The Kindergarten Experience

Help your child learn about the solar system



Your kindergartner probably knows about the sun and the moon. But what about the rest of our solar system?

Chances are it will fascinate her—and you, too!

Consider taking a week to focus on solar system activities. Plan one for each school day. You and your child might:

- **Do research.** Visit the library and check out books. In the book *There's No Place Like Space: All About Our Solar System*, for example, the Cat in the Hat tours the solar system. Go online, too. You'll find amazing pictures at www.NASA.gov.
- **Draw or print a picture** of each planet. Refer to books or websites before coloring them in. What do scientists know about how each planet *really* looks?
- **Make a book.** Combine your research and drawings. Your child can add a caption to each page. She might write the planets' names—or dictate details for you to write.
- **Make a model.** Think of some creative ways to represent the planets. Use items such as fruit, balls and more. Line up the "planets" in the order they appear in the solar system.
- **Bake planets.** Find a cookie recipe and let your child shape the dough into "planets." Help her decorate each cookie with details that describe what you've learned.

Social skills are key for your child's kindergarten success

For most children, one of the most exciting things about kindergarten is spending time with classmates and teachers.

To make these experiences successful, work with your child on basic social skills, including:

- **Introductions.** Role-play with your child. Make eye contact, smile and say, "Hi! My name is Taylor!"
- **Manners.** Encourage your child to say *please* and *thank you*.
- **Starting conversations.** Imagine your child wants to join a game. What could she say? "That looks like fun! Can I play, too?"
- **Understanding.** Discuss how other people feel. "You have colored pencils, and your sister also wants to color." Practice sharing.
- **Solving problems.** "What if Jamie took the toy you were using?" Talk



about how and when to ask for the teacher's help.

- **Apologizing.** Saying *I'm sorry* after making a mistake can foster positive relationships.

Remain involved during the second half of the school year



Your child is halfway through his kindergarten year. By now, you may have met his teachers, visited his classroom and participated in a parent-teacher conference. The next few months continue to offer opportunities for working with the school.

Here are a few things to do:

- **Talk to the teacher** about your child's school performance. This is especially critical as first grade looms! Ask about literacy, math and social skills. Also ask what

skills your child should work on to be ready for first grade.

- **Ask about at-home volunteer opportunities.** This time of year is especially busy for teachers, as they work to plan special activities and prepare students for next year. Ask your child's teacher about ways you can help.
- **Support your child.** The second half of the school year often brings presentations, concerts and other school events parents are invited to. Make an effort to attend in person or online whenever you can.