



Enhance thinking skills by introducing five concepts

Thinking skills are the foundation for lifelong learning and problem-solving abilities. Preschoolers build thinking skills when they consider the relationships between things.

To help your child make connections, talk about these concepts:

1. Similarities and differences.

Give your child two items, such as an apple and an orange. Ask how the items are different. Then, ask your child to tell you how they are the same.

2. **Patterns.** Demonstrate how to make a simple pattern. Draw a circle, then a square, then a circle. Ask your child what comes next.

3. **Classification.** Use toys to teach how to group things that are alike. Ask your child to put books in one

pile and stuffed animals in another pile. Or, ask your preschooler to group items by size or by color.

4. **Fact and opinion.** Make a factual statement, such as, “Broccoli is a green vegetable.” Tell your child that this is a *fact*. Then say, “I think broccoli is the best-tasting vegetable.” Explain that this is an *opinion*. Then, ask what your child thinks. Let your child know that everyone can have their own opinions about what they like best.
5. **Cause and effect.** Discuss how one thing happens as the result of another—and encourage your child to make predictions. For example, say “I see a lot of dark clouds in the sky. What do you think is going to happen?”

Fun activities build early writing skills



Preschoolers are just starting to develop the fine motor skills they need to write letters and numbers.

At first, your child’s writing may look more like scribbles—and that’s OK. Handwriting will improve with practice.

To encourage interest, keep appealing writing tools handy, such as crayons and washable markers. Then, seize opportunities for your preschooler to write.

You can:

- **Let your child contribute.** If you’re making a grocery list or sending a card, ask your child to write a few words.
- **Exchange letters.** Put a box by your child’s bedroom door and “mail” each other notes. Then, read them to each other.
- **Weave writing** into other activities. Have your child dictate captions for drawings. Write them down and ask your child to copy the words.
- **Practice writing** familiar words. Help spell words your child uses often, such as *Dad*, *cat* and *me*.
- **Display** your child’s writing on the wall or your refrigerator.

Do educational apps really help your preschooler learn?



There are countless “educational” apps available for young children today. Many families wonder if they are actually educational—or merely entertaining.

Researchers have identified four characteristics of effective learning apps. So before you download a new one, check to see if it:

1. **Requires children to think** and use information—rather than just tap or swipe.
2. **Holds children’s interest** without being distracting. Apps with lots of sound, movement or other visual elements can actually obstruct learning.

3. **Encourages children to connect** new information to their daily lives.
4. **Allows children to interact socially** with you or a friend while playing. To find quality educational apps, check out reviews on Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/best-preschool-apps).

Source: K. Hirsh-Pasek and others, “Putting Education in ‘Educational’ Apps: Lessons From the Science of Learning,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Association for Psychological Science.

“Many apps marketed as educational are basically the equivalent of sugary foods.”

—Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

Focus on responsibility and respect during the holidays



The holiday season is meant to be a time of fun, relaxation and family togetherness.

It’s also the perfect time to help preschoolers practice responsibility and respect.

Encourage your child to:

- **Help others.** There are dozens of ways preschoolers can help out this season. They can help put things away. They can go to the mailbox with an adult and drop in envelopes. They can call family members to the dinner table. Preschoolers can also help collect gently-used toys and clothing to donate.
- **Show appreciation.** Remind your child to say *thank you* when receiving a gift. Help your child get in the habit of “writing” thank-you notes, too. Preschoolers can draw a thank-you picture.
- **Practice using manners.** If your holiday plans include a visit to someone’s home, discuss the importance of saying *hello* and *goodbye*, asking permission before touching things or pets, and taking turns. Remind your child to always use polite words—*please*, *thank you*, *you’re welcome* and *excuse me*.
- **Listen to different adults.** Your family may spend time with some adults this month that your child doesn’t usually see. This can be confusing for a preschooler, but it’s also an opportunity to practice showing respect for adults. Say something like “Mr. and Mrs. Jones are my friends and this is their house. Please use your nicest voice and follow their directions while we are here.”

Are you teaching your child how to adapt to change?



Preschoolers like doing the same things the same way. But changes, both large and small, are a part of life. Are you teaching your child to adapt? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you follow daily routines**, so your child has an overall sense of security?
- ___ **2. Do you anticipate changes** and realize that even a small change could seem like a big deal to your child?
- ___ **3. Do you talk to your child** ahead of time about an upcoming change and what it will involve?
- ___ **4. Do you reassure** your child that change can be positive—whether it’s moving to a new place or staying inside because it’s raining?
- ___ **5. Do you allow time** for transitions, such as by setting a timer for 10 minutes before dinner? When the timer goes off, your child knows it will be time to stop playing soon.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child is on the way to dealing with big and small changes in life. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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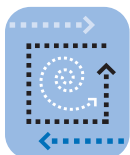
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Engage in activities that build your child's fine motor skills



Physical activity that gets your child's heart pumping is beneficial. But the small muscles in the hands need

exercise, too. These are the muscles that preschoolers use to write and manipulate objects.

The preschool years are a crucial time to help your child strengthen and develop control over muscles. Strong motor skills improve outcomes in elementary school.

Providing fine motor exercise does not have to be complicated. There are countless fun activities to try. Your child could:

- **Pick up small coins** with supervision.
- **Finger paint.**
- **Peel stickers** and then stick them on paper.

- **Dress and play with dolls and action figures.**
- **Squeeze and form clay** or play dough.
- **Use child-size spoons and forks** when eating.
- **Zip, snap and button** clothing.
- **Draw and color** with pencils, crayons and washable markers.
- **Cut with child-safe scissors.**
- **Do puzzles.**
- **Do hands-on activities** at museums.
- **Play with building blocks.**
- **String beads** of various sizes onto a piece of string.
- **Lace tennis shoes.**
- **Snap interlocking blocks** together and pull them apart.
- **Paint with cotton swabs.**
- **Use blunt-nose tweezers** to pick up pieces of cereal.

Creating art reduces stress and boosts decision-making skills



Young children learn so much through creating art. When they decide what color to paint things, they are practicing decision-making.

When they choose what to draw, they are learning self-expression. Creating art also reduces stress and activates the brain's reward center.

Children learn the most from art when they have the freedom to create and make decisions on their own. The process of creating is more important than the final product.

To make art making a learning experience for your child:

- **Provide a variety of art supplies.** Look for things you have around the house—glue, fabric scraps, paper plates, egg cartons, catalogs, paper towel tubes and yarn.

- **Help your child get started.** If your child wants to draw a cat, but doesn't know where to begin, ask questions: "What does a cat look like? What's the biggest part of a cat's body? How many legs does a cat have?"
- **Be patient and sensitive.** Some preschoolers don't like to get their hands dirty—and that's OK. Introduce materials slowly. Remember, art should be fun.
- **Talk about** your child's creations. Ask questions such as, "What is this?" "How did you make it?" "How does it make you feel?"
- **Proudly display your child's work** on the refrigerator. Send it to friends and relatives.

Source: M. Gharib, "Feeling Artsy? Here's How Making Art Helps Your Brain," National Public Radio.

Q: My preschooler will be turning five next August. I have to let the preschool know whether my child will be returning next year or heading off to kindergarten. How do I know if my child will be ready for kindergarten or not?

Questions & Answers

A: Many parents in your situation are wondering the same thing. You may be surprised at what actually makes a child ready for kindergarten. It is not whether the child can read, add or subtract. It has more to do with enthusiasm, independence and getting along with others.

Children are ready for kindergarten when they:

- **Have a desire to learn** and are excited to begin tackling subjects such as reading and writing.
- **Know how to express** themselves. Students should be able to carry on a conversation and talk about themselves and their experiences. (If your child has special needs or is an English language learner, contact the elementary school to discuss programs and services.)
- **Listen and follow directions.** Most kindergarten teachers would say this is a top priority.
- **Are somewhat independent.** They should be able to use the bathroom, wash their hands and put on a coat by themselves.
- **Can cooperate with others.** Sharing and taking turns are necessary skills for any well-functioning kindergarten classroom.

If your preschooler can do these things now, or you feel confident your child will be able to in the next six months, then it's time for kindergarten!

The Kindergarten Experience

Support your kindergartner's reading skills



Kindergarten families often ask: "When will my child learn to read?" There's no one-size-fits-all answer. Many

kindergartners read simple books by the end of the school year. Others need a bit more time.

To support your kindergartner's emerging reading skills:

- **Expose your child to a variety of printed materials.** Together, read poems, biographies, instructions and more. That way, your child will be more comfortable when encountering them in school.
- **Use new words** in ways that show what they mean. "I think that is the biggest dinosaur I've ever seen! It's *gigantic!*" This builds vocabulary. Familiarity with words makes it easier for children to recognize them in print.
- **Talk about the illustrations.** Ask your child to describe what is happening in each picture. How does your kindergartner think the illustrations relate to the story?
- **Promote participation.** Many young children memorize their favorite books. When you're reading aloud, let your child chime in and "read," too. If your child can't figure out a word, encourage trying several times before you help sound it out.
- **Play with letters.** If you don't have child-safe refrigerator magnet letters, just cut letters out of paper. Then, help your child arrange them to form different words.

Reduce school absences and tardies with simple strategies

Missing school too often can hurt students' success, even in kindergarten. When a child is late or absent, it affects other students, too. Frequent tardiness disrupts the class. And when a child is absent a lot, the teacher must use class time to help her catch up. Remember to:

- **Schedule family trips** when school is not in session. It may be tempting to add a few extra days to a holiday vacation. But when kindergartners are absent from class, they miss opportunities to learn.
- **Protect against illness.** Follow school health protocols, and reinforce hand washing. Teach your child to lather up and scrub for 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice). End with a thorough rinse and clean dry-off.
- **Check the school calendar** when making medical appointments.



With enough notice, routine visits can often be scheduled on days off or after school ends for the day.

- **Commit to being prompt.** Continue helpful habits, such as organizing school supplies at night and enforcing a consistent, reasonable sleep schedule.

Confident kindergartners are ready to tackle the world



Kindergartners who feel capable believe they can learn, believe they can make friends and believe they can be successful—and set out to do so.

Confident kindergartners:

- **Like themselves.** They are happy, most of the time, at home and in class. They rarely put themselves down.
- **Are optimistic.** They have positive attitudes about challenges and

usually say things like, "I can do this!" and "This will be fun!"

- **Have friends.** They believe that their friends like them and that they will have fun playing together.
- **Feel secure** around the adults in their lives. They know their families love them unconditionally. They know teachers want to help them learn.
- **Take healthy risks.** They like to try and experience new things. Encourage and praise these signs of self-confidence in your child.