

Early Childhood Parents®

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Carrie Little, Executive Director

make the difference!



Follow this four-step process to help your child build skills

Responsibility goes hand in hand with independence—and both support school success. To teach responsibility, put your child in charge of doing some tasks independently.

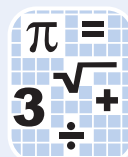
Then, take these four steps:

1. **Model the skill.** If you want your preschooler to become responsible for making the bed, for example, demonstrate how to do it correctly several times.
2. **Practice the skill** with your child. After your child is familiar with the process, make the bed together. You could pull up the sheet, while your preschooler pulls up the comforter and puts the pillow on top.
3. **Watch your child.** Let your child make the bed without your help for a few days while you supervise.

This step may be the longest in the process. Don't expect the bed to be made exactly the way you would make it, and don't remake it. The goal is not perfection. It is to develop your child's confidence to keep at it. Offer gentle suggestions for next time.

4. **Work the skill** into your child's routine. Performing a task repeatedly over time is what turns it into a habit. Have your child perform the task at around the same time every day. Post a checklist of pictures of the routine's tasks. If your preschooler gets used to getting up, getting dressed and making the bed, in the same order, around the same time every day, you may not have to offer reminders about the task.

Enhance math smarts with block play



Playing with blocks is a great way to help your child develop early math skills.

Block play also enhances problem-solving abilities and fosters analytical thinking, which are fundamental skills for math.

Here are concepts you can teach your preschooler while playing with blocks:

- **Pattern recognition.** Many math concepts are based on patterns. Create a pattern (a red block, then a yellow block and then another red block) and ask your child to copy it.
- **Addition and subtraction.** As you build a tower together, add a few blocks or take a few away. Ask your child, "How many block are in the tower now?" Count them together. Then, have your child add two blocks, or take two blocks off. Ask, "Does the tower have *more* or *fewer* blocks now?"
- **Shape identification** and how shapes fit together. Ask your child, "Is this block a square or a rectangle?" Recognizing shapes is the basis for geometry and other higher math.

Improve your child's behavior with simple discipline methods



Children need and want to have limits set for them. What's more, children who have been disciplined in a loving manner generally do better in school than those who haven't.

Here are a few simple and effective discipline strategies:

- **Enforce reasonable rules.** Make a few key rules and stick to them. Consistency makes it easier for preschoolers to cooperate.
- **Hear your child out.** Your child has opinions, and it's helpful to listen to them. But stand your ground when it really counts.
- **State things positively.** When possible, tell your child what *to do* ("Put your hands in your lap.") instead of what *not to do* ("Stop grabbing!").
- **Set a good example.** Demonstrate the behaviors you want to see.

Be honest, fair and responsible. Remain calm when you are angry.

- **Criticize carefully.** Talk about your child's behavior, not your child. Say, "That comment was rude" instead of "You are rude."
- **Focus on success.** Notice what your child does well and comment on it. Give specific compliments. "You put your art supplies away. You're taking good care of your things!" Positive reinforcement results in better behavior.

Source: B. Martin, Psy.D., "The 5 C's of Effective Discipline: Setting Rules for Children," Psych Central.

"A child without discipline is, in a way, a lost child. You cannot have freedom without discipline."

—Ricardo Montalban

Praising preschoolers for being smart can lead to dishonesty



It's appropriate to offer praise when children learn something new. But adults must be careful *how* they do it. If you celebrate how smart your child is, your good intentions could backfire.

Researchers believe that when young children hear "You're so smart" all the time, they can feel pressured to *prove* they're intelligent. That means they might be more willing than others to cheat at games and other activities.

This doesn't mean that patting a child on the back for a job well done will turn that child into a cheater. But it does mean that families should pay attention to *how* they praise kids—and *what* they praise them for.

When praising your child:

- **Avoid labels.** Resist the urge to call your child the "smart one" or the "creative one" or the "athletic one." When children feel their identity is tied to a label, they often try to preserve that label at all costs.
- **Focus on effort** instead of talent. Did your child work hard on an art project? Compliment your child's actions. "You really colored carefully!" Don't chalk it up to some inborn ability by saying, "You're always so good at art." Make it clear that putting in effort is how people get better at things.

Source: L. Zhao and others, "Praising Young Children for Being Smart Promotes Cheating," *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.

Are you building your preschooler's love of reading?



Helping preschoolers enjoy books prepares them to enjoy reading. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see

if you're making reading fun for your preschooler:

- ___ **1. Do you have a daily family reading time?** Pick a time when your child seems to enjoy books most.
- ___ **2. Do you let your child help pick which books to read,** even if it results in reading certain favorites over and over?
- ___ **3. Do you help your child find books about interests—**whether it's dinosaurs, trucks or sports?
- ___ **4. Do you read with enthusiasm** and give characters different voices to make books come alive?
- ___ **5. Do you read in a variety of interesting places?** Try reading together in a fort made from sheet draped over a table. Enjoy a story during bath time or an audiobook in the car.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're helping your child develop a love of reading. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Six simple ways young children can help protect our planet



Earth Day is April 22. And while protecting the Earth is a job for everyone every day, you can use this special

day to begin or reinforce the habit with your preschooler.

Teaching preschoolers about caring for the planet instills awareness and fosters responsibility. In addition, many activities that help the Earth are educational and free. And they are suitable for young children. Here are six ideas to try:

1. **Turn off the lights** and television when you leave a room and ask your child to do the same.
2. **Keep a cup** on the bathroom sink. Teach your child to fill it with water before brushing teeth. After brushing, you child can use the water in
- the cup to rinse. Leaving the water on while brushing teeth is wasteful.
3. **Plant something** with your child. Plant seeds outdoors if you can. If not, plant them in a container. Consider joining a tree-planting activity in your community.
4. **Fill reusable water bottles** with tap water instead of buying bottled water. Unless there is an emergency, such as a flood or other unusual situation, tap water in the United States and Canada is safe to drink.
5. **Reuse items.** Demonstrate how to repurpose things. Use empty boxes and paper rolls for craft projects.
6. **Participate in a clean-up day.** Many communities plan events to celebrate Earth Day. Rally neighbors to clean up a section of your own neighborhood or block.

Help your preschooler develop a sense of social awareness



Is there such a thing as being too supportive when it comes to your preschooler's negative emotions? Experts say yes.

Adults who tend to be overly sympathetic about their children's troubled feelings often think their kids are more socially well-adjusted than others. Those same kids' teachers, however, often rate them as being less well-adjusted.

Why the disconnect? It could be that when families indulge every bad mood their child has, the child never stops to consider that there may not be a good reason for that mood.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your preschooler's feelings. But rather than rush to agree every time your child feels wronged, reserve judgment and:

- **Ask for details.** If your child says a friend was mean, find out more. Say, "Tell me what happened." This way, you're encouraging your child to open up but not automatically agreeing that your child is a victim.
- **Challenge your child.** Your child may be upset about losing a game, but was that game really unfair? Ask, "Why do you think the game was unfair?" If the real story is that your child made a few mistakes, then point that out. Your child wasn't mistreated; your child just made a few mistakes—and that's OK. It's a hard, yet vital, lesson for preschoolers to learn.

Source: V.L. Castro and others, "Changing tides: Mothers' supportive emotion socialization relates negatively to third-grade children's social adjustment in school," Social Development, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Q: When my child was a toddler, I thought I had the boldest, most outgoing child in the world. One year later, we've had a complete turnaround. My preschooler cries when I leave the house and is afraid of clowns, monsters and the dark. What happened?

Questions & Answers

A: As toddlers, children have few fears because it simply doesn't occur to them that they should be afraid. They don't have the ability to wonder whether monsters might be real, or if there might be something lurking in the dark.

But now, your child is going through a new phase of cognitive development. Kids this age can consider all sorts of possibilities—and many of them are scary. Some even worry that something bad will happen when they are not with their parents, which is probably why your child doesn't like you to leave.

It's likely these fears won't last too long. For most fears, attention and reassurance help children cope.

To promote a sense of safety:

- **Monitor TV and videos.** This is not the time for anything even mildly scary.
- **Keep your absences brief,** when possible, while your child's fears are at their height.
- **Say, "I love you and I am going to keep you safe, even when you're asleep."**
- **Be playful.** If your child loves pretend, use "anti-monster spray" (a spray bottle of water mixed with a spritz of perfume) in the room at night. Or, inspect the closets and drawers before turning out the light. Add a night light in the room, too.

If your preschooler's fears persist, make an appointment with the pediatrician.

The Kindergarten Experience

Confidence can boost your child's school success



One of the most effective ways to help kindergarten students succeed in school is to help them feel good about their abilities. When children feel capable, they feel confident—and ready to tackle all sorts of challenges.

To boost your child's confidence, teach these valuable lessons:

- **You are competent.** Too many adults say *yes* when children want a new toy, but *no* when they try to help the family. If you are doing laundry, for example, and your kindergartner asks, "Can I do that?" you can answer, "Sure, please start handing me everything that is white."
- **You are secure enough to wait.** Your child deserves your attention, but not *all* of your attention. Kids should frequently hear things like, "I am busy right now. Your turn will come later." Or, "I need to finish reading this. You will be fine coloring your picture while I do this."
- **You can entertain yourself.** Spend time with your kindergartner, but don't feel the need to provide constant entertainment. Suggest activities that your kindergartner can do alone, such as reading a book, drawing a picture, or putting together a puzzle. When your child does play independently, say, "You are good at entertaining yourself!"

Source: J.I. Clarke, Ph.D. and others, *How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible and Respectful Children—From Toddlers to Teens*, Marlowe & Company.

Reinforce the concept of time with your kindergartner

Teachers put a lot of effort into teaching students about the concept of time. And there's a lot for kindergartners to learn. How long is a *second*, *minute*, *hour* and *day*? How about a *week*, *month* and *year*? What are *past*, *present* and *future*?

A real mastery of time doesn't come until later in the elementary years. But the more you can do now to help your child understand time, the better.

Have your child:

1. **Select a task to do**, such as jumping up and down 50 times, drawing a picture, making the bed, or eating a bowl of cereal.
2. **Estimate how many minutes** it will take to complete the task.
3. **Use a timer or stopwatch to track** the time it actually takes to complete the task.



4. **Check to see how close** your child's estimate was to the actual time it took.

Repeat the process of estimating and verifying often to reinforce your child's understanding of the time it takes to complete tasks.

Give your kindergartner practice listening and speaking in turn



Listening to others and waiting for a turn to speak are essential skills for school. As a family, you can practice these communication skills:

- **During mealtimes.** Family meals are great for teaching conversation skills. Give family members a chance to say something about their day. Do not allow others to speak while someone else is talking.
- **During story time.** Reading aloud gives your child practice listening and paying attention. Ask questions about the story. "Can you

tell me which part you liked best in the story?" "Does this story remind you of any other stories we've read?"

- **During playtime.** Games such as Simon Says have been around forever because they are fun and they teach young children to listen carefully. Many board games encourage talking, listening and taking turns. You can also sing your child's favorite song using the syllable "la" instead of singing the words. See if your child can listen carefully and guess the song you are singing.