

# Early Childhood Parents®

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Carrie Little, Executive Director

*make the difference!*



## A summer schedule helps preschoolers stay on track

Following a routine over the summer will make returning to a school routine in the fall easier for young children. During the break from preschool, try these teacher-tested strategies to keep your child on a schedule:

- **Stick to the basics.** Preschoolers still need about 11 hours of sleep each night—even if they don't have to get up for preschool or day care. So if your child usually wakes up at 7 a.m., maintain an 8 p.m. bedtime. Try to schedule breakfast, snacks, lunch and dinner around the same time every day.
- **Do some kind of "work" during the day.** Have your child do daily age-appropriate chores, such as putting toys and clothes away.
- **Schedule outdoor time** in the morning. The morning is a great time to play outside—especially if you live in a warm climate. Encourage physical activity in the coolest part of the day.
- **Plan quiet time after lunch.** Your child can take a nap or engage in screen-free activities, such as reading to a stuffed animal, working on a puzzle, etc.
- **Keep a calendar.** Will your child participate in a summer program or have scheduled visits with relatives? Mark these events on the calendar so that it is clear when they are coming up. Review the next day's plans each evening so your child knows what to expect.

## Set limits on recreational screen time



Children usually have more access to screen devices in the summer than they do during the school year. Limiting their use may be a challenge, but it is key to making sure your child has enough time for more productive activities.

To make screen-time limits work for your family:

- **Create a schedule** and stick to it. For example, you might allow your child to watch a 30-minute show in the morning and then play 30 minutes of digital games in the afternoon.
- **Be prepared.** Bring books everywhere you go. If you are traveling in a car or waiting in a line, give your child a book instead of a digital device.
- **Make a list** of screen-free activities. Include things like coloring a picture, making a craft, playing with puppets, etc. If your child says "I'm bored," suggest an activity from the list.
- **Set controls.** If all else fails, put a timer on the TV that limits when it can be turned on. Put a password on your tablet and computer. Hide portable devices.

# The journey can be as exciting as the destination for your child



Traveling during the summer offers a great opportunity for young children to sharpen their senses. Time spent in the car, bus or train is perfect for activities that require kids to use their eyes, ears and hands to learn.

Here are a few ideas:

- **Bring a cookie sheet** for your child to use as a lap desk. It's a great surface for arranging magnetic letters, coloring and holding a snack.
- **Take along aluminum foil.** Show your child how to create shapes and make animals or special jewelry with it.
- **Download some audiobooks** for children and listen to them together.

- **Practice math skills.** Make a game out of counting cows, billboard signs, blue cars or landmarks.
- **Play kid-friendly music.** Encourage your child to listen to the words and sing along.
- **Take along a sketch pad** and crayons. Ask your child to draw the interesting things you see along your journey.

**“Always walk through life as if you have something new to learn, and you will.”**

—Vernon Howard

# Good nutrition is vital for your child's future academic success



What children eat affects how they think and feel. And according to research, children who eat a well-balanced diet are likely to reap academic benefits.

Good nutrition promotes:

- **Concentration.** When children are well-nourished, they're more alert and better able to focus. That means they won't have to struggle to pay attention.
- **Memory.** If kids don't eat well (if they skip a meal, for example), they may have trouble remembering what they've learned. If they can't retain the day's lessons, they'll have a harder time keeping up.
- **Achievement.** Children with poor diets are more likely than their peers to repeat a grade. They also tend to score lower in math and on standardized tests.

• **Better behavior.** Undernourished kids have higher rates of suspension from school than their better-fed peers. They're also more prone to arguing or fighting with classmates. Food clearly plays a big role in children's future school success.

Researchers have found that young children are more likely to eat healthy foods if parents:

- **Offer options.** Let your child pick between two snacks (like apples and peaches, or carrots and celery).
- **Make it fun.** Arrange cut-up fruits into a smiley face or rainbow.
- **Include them.** Invite your child into the kitchen to help you cook. When children are involved in the process of making healthy meals, they are more excited about eating them!

Source: Kansas State University, "Winning the war: How to persuade children to eat more veggies," ScienceDaily.

# Are you teaching and practicing listening skills?



The most important part of communication isn't talking—it's *listening*. And listening skills will help your child in every class in school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child become a good listener:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you try to give your child your undivided attention** when she's talking? If you're busy, say, "I'd love to talk about this after I cook dinner."
- \_\_\_ **2. Are you patient** when you listen? Sometimes, it may take a while for your child to actually say what she wants to say.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you avoid interrupting** your child when she is talking and ask her not to interrupt you?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you "listen"** to your child's behavior? A child who is acting up is communicating a need.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you avoid breaking in** with the "right" answer? If possible, let your child try to figure it out.

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're raising a good listener. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# Creating art reduces stress and boosts your child's thinking skills



Young children learn so much through creating art. When deciding what color to paint things, they are practicing decision-making. When drawing pictures, they are learning self-expression. Creating art also reduces stress and activates the reward center of kids' brains.

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 sure your child gets the most from art time:

- **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.

# Build your child's literacy skills with summer reading activities



Look around a preschool classroom and you're sure to see books and words everywhere! It's important for young children to be surrounded by printed words in order to build reading readiness.

To make reading activities part of your preschooler's summer fun:

- **Continue having daily story time together.** Take advantage of the longer days by varying the times you read. Reading outside after dinner can be a nice change.
- **Read everywhere.** See how many places you can find to read. Read on a walk, at bath time, during meals and with relatives.
- **Grow vocabulary daily.** As you go through each day, make it a point to teach your child at least one new word.
- **Refresh reading supplies often.** A weekly trip to the public library will allow you to bring home a variety of reading material on a regular basis.
- **Read signs.** Can your child recognize the word *stop* on the big red sign? What about the word *library* on the building? Look for other words your child sees frequently and point them out.
- **Keep in touch with a classmate.** Encourage your child to send drawings, letters or messages to friends over the summer. Writing and reading these (with your help) is great practice—as well as a chance to keep in touch.

**Q:** I love summer and spending time with my kids, but my preschooler is so active and adventurous that I am always worried he is going to get hurt! How can I teach safety without squelching his spirit?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Your concern is valid. Injuries happen more in summer than any other time of the year. And a child who follows safety rules is more likely to stay in one piece and ready for learning.

Still, you have a good point about not over-restricting your child. Children learn so much by exploring and testing new skills. The compromise is common sense. Let your child play and explore, but practice accident prevention. Here's how:

- **Be careful around water.** Don't ever turn your back on your child—even if he can swim and even if the water is shallow.
  - **Use sun protection.** Apply sunscreen to your child before he goes outdoors. Reapply often. Have him wear a hat. Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
  - **Check playground equipment for safety.** Ideally, the surface below should be soft: wood chips or mulch, not concrete.
  - **Insist your child wear a helmet and protective gear** when skating or riding. He should only ride or play in areas that are free of traffic.
  - **Use caution around tools!** It will be years before your child is old enough to handle equipment such as a grill or a lawn mower. Until then, he should stay away.
- Have a safe summer filled with fun and learning!

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Focus on learning with your child over the summer



Ever wonder what's on your kindergartner's mind? A lot! At this age, cognitive development is exciting, thanks to

new subjects at school and new abilities to explore and understand the world.

This summer, keep your child's focus on:

- **Language arts.** Your child may have already mastered the alphabet in many ways—singing, writing, recognizing and even reading. Strengthen reading comprehension by talking about each story's *beginning*, *middle* and *end*.
- **Math.** Continue to count everything you see and do with your child—the number of steps you climb, the number of books on a shelf, the number of birds you see on a walk. Point out basic shapes, such as triangles and squares. Then, introduce more complex figures, such as cubes and cones. Look for patterns, too. “The pattern on that sheet goes pink, orange, pink, orange.”
- **Concepts.** Talk about the meanings of words like *above/below*, *under/over* and *less/more*. Make it a game by naming and demonstrating opposite concepts. “This cup has *less*. This cup has \_\_\_\_ (*more*).” “This book is *above* the table. This book is \_\_\_\_ (*below*).”
- **Classic games.** Playing games such as make-believe, I Spy, Simon Says, etc. offers your child many ways to learn.

## Keep your child motivated as the school year winds down

As summer approaches, it's tempting to relax about school responsibilities. But every day of kindergarten counts! Your child is building skills that are necessary first grade and beyond.

To maintain motivation until the last day, focus on:

- **Interests.** Kids try hardest when they're fascinated by activities. When practicing a math skill, pick an activity that's challenging—but not so hard that your child wants to give up. Progress and success motivate kids to keep trying.
- **Freedom.** Give your child lots of opportunities to solve problems independently. Provide simple toys, such as blocks and toy characters, to promote creativity.
- **Emotion.** Help your child feel capable. While praise is valuable,



genuine interest and accomplishments (rather than compliments) encourage kids most. Sometimes it helps to ask, “How do you think you did?” Then agree with your child's positive assessment!

## Take time to celebrate your child's kindergarten success



Graduating from kindergarten is something special to celebrate! Summer is a great time to look back on the school year and prepare for more learning ahead. Make time to:

- **Talk to your child** about what went well this year. What school events did your family enjoy most? What schoolwork habits did your child develop? Ask questions, such as, “What friends did you make? What did you enjoy learning?”
- **Set exciting goals.** What would your child like to accomplish in first grade? Some goals can be academic (reading a book independently), and some can be personal (making new friends).
- **Explore the world.** Visit farms, marinas, airports and historical sites, too. Take a daily walk and talk about the environment.
- **Prepare for learning.** Engage in activities that will make learning easier next year. Read, do simple science experiments, practice math skills and build social skills.