

# Early Childhood Parents®

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Atkinson County Schools  
Family Engagement

*make the difference!*



## Increase your child's attention span with quiet activities

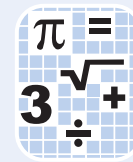
**P**reschoolers who pay attention and try their best are more likely to go on to finish college, says an Oregon State University study. Fortunately, experts say these habits can be taught.

To expand your child's attention span and concentration skills:

- **Keep work areas free of clutter.** Most children find it easier to concentrate without too many objects around them.
- **Read together.** The ability to listen to and follow a story is a building block of a child's attention span.
- **Limit recreational screen time.** Simply watching videos is a passive activity. When your child does watch, interact and talk with him about the content.
- **Pick a detailed picture** in a book. Have him look at it for one minute and then take it away. Ask him to tell you everything he can remember about the picture.
- **Encourage independent play.** Give your child a simple jigsaw puzzle to work on by himself. Increase the difficulty as he improves.
- **Use a timer.** Sit your child down with a puzzle, play dough or blocks. Set the timer for 10 minutes. Ask him to play quietly until it goes off. Praise him when he does. Help your child work up to 15 or 20 minutes of independent play.

**Source:** M.M. McClelland and others, "Relations Between Preschool Attention Span-Persistence and Age 25 Educational Outcomes," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier.

## Help your child create charts and graphs



Give your child's math skills a boost by showing her how to create and understand simple charts and graphs.

Here are a couple to try:

- **A survey.** Pick a question, such as, "What is your favorite pet?" Have your child draw a dog, cat and goldfish at the top of a piece of paper. Make sure she leaves space between each animal, and space underneath. Then, have your child ask family and friends to pick the pet they like best. Each time a person picks an animal, she should draw a smile underneath it. When she's finished, she can count the smiles to see which animal has the most.
- **A weather chart.** Help your child make a calendar by drawing a square for each day of the month. Write the day of the week and the date at the top of each square. Each day, read the day and date on that day's square. Then, have your child draw a picture of the day's weather in the square. She can draw a sun, a cloud or a raindrop.

# Show your preschooler how to speak and act respectfully



When educators are asked about the most important thing for children to learn from parents, many give the same answer: respect.

That's not surprising. If children don't have respect for authority, peers, belongings and themselves, it's almost impossible for them to succeed in school or in life. To foster respect:

- **Foster cooperation.** When you or your child's preschool teachers ask him to do something, he needs to do it. Talk to your child about the importance of completing tasks with a positive attitude—even when he may not feel like doing them.
- **Encourage patience.** Help your child learn to wait for a person to finish speaking before he speaks. Explain that if he needs to speak to the teacher, he should raise his hand.

- **Promote sharing.** Encourage your child to share his toys and other belongings with siblings. Remind him to ask nicely if he wants to use something of theirs. And tell him he should take special care of it and give it back when he is done.
- **Inspire kindness.** Prompt your child to say nice things to his friends, such as, "Did you have fun with your grandma?" "I like the picture you drew." "That's a cool hat!"

**"It's not so much the journey that's important; as is the way that we treat those we encounter and those around us, along the way."**

—Jeremy Aldana

# Three strategies can build your child's reading readiness skills



Few things predict success in school more than being a strong reader. While it may be a few years before

your preschooler learns how to read, there are things you can do now to boost her reading readiness:

1. **Read aloud with your child** every day. This is an opportunity to spend time together as well as to improve literacy skills. Children look forward to daily time with parents—which is also a great time to encourage a love of reading.
2. **Demonstrate how reading works.** Making your child aware of the structure of the printed page can improve her reading ability. Say, "We read from the left side of the

page to the right side of the page. Then we begin again on the left." Point to the sides of the page as you do this.

3. **Point out letters and words** everywhere you see them. This helps with reading, spelling and understanding books later on. Point out familiar letters, such as the letters in her name. Help her see the connection: "This word starts with the letter A. That's the same letter that your name starts with, Andrea. What other words start with the letter A?"

As your child learns the letters, move on to familiar words. When you read books, look together in the text for words your child sees often, such as *stop*, *milk* or *love*.

# Does your home environment support learning?



Parents are their children's first teachers. So that means your home is your child's first school. Are you

supporting learning in your home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you talk** to your child about things that interest you and about new things you've learned?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you notice** your child's interests and praise him when he tries something new?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you keep** a variety of reading material around the house, and let your child see you reading regularly?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you provide** learning tools, such as paper, crayons, building blocks, puzzles, safety scissors and paste?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you replace** screen time with learning activities, such as reading, talking and exploring each day?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* answer means you are promoting learning in your home. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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## Art projects boost creativity and teach children useful skills



Young children should have opportunities to create art several times a week. It doesn't matter what your child makes or even if he finishes a project. What matters is that he uses his creativity—and that he enjoys making something.

While your preschooler is creating art, he is learning how to:

- **Take risks.** "I'm going to try to make a brand new piece of art today!"
- **Make a plan.** "I know what I want to make. First, I will gather my supplies. Next, I will..."
- **Problem-solve.** "I want to color the sun, but I don't have

a yellow crayon. I think I'll use orange instead."

- **Experiment.** "Look at what happened when I mixed white and red! I made pink!"
- **Work with dimensions.** "I want to make the shape I cut out fit on this page, but it's too big. I'll have to make it smaller."
- **Be independent.** "I can make my picture all by myself without getting help from anyone."
- **Feel satisfied with himself.** "Look at what I created! I am very proud of myself."

**Source:** "Better Kid Care: Children's Art," Penn State Extension, Penn State University College of Agricultural Sciences.

## Get moving with your child to set the stage for school success



You already know that exercise leads to better health. Among other things, regular physical activity reduces the risk of diabetes, obesity and some types of cancer. But did you know that staying fit can also help your child do better in school?

Studies show that children who exercise have better motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance and focus. They also have better listening skills, and may fidget less in class. When kids burn off extra energy by running, jumping and skipping, it's easier to sit still when the time comes.

But knowing the benefits of exercise and actually getting your child off the couch are two different things. And that's where you come in. Research shows that preschoolers' activity levels are linked to their parents' activity levels. Your child takes her cues from you,

so if you want her to move more, lead the way.

To add more exercise into your family's daily routine:

- **Take walks together.** If the corner store is right down the block, ditch the car and walk to it instead.
- **Shut off digital devices.** Set a screen-free period each day, and your child may be more willing to go out and play. When she does, join her.
- **Change your after-dinner routine.** Rather than reaching for dessert, reach for a ball. Kicking a ball around outside is much healthier than eating a cookie.
- **Explore the outdoors.** When was the last time you visited a local park or playground? Slip on your sneakers, grab your child and get going.

**Source:** S.L. Barkin and others, "Parent's Physical Activity Associated With Preschooler Activity in Underserved Populations," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Elsevier.

**Q:** My daughter has suddenly become anxious about going to preschool. She tells me repeatedly she doesn't want to go back. I'm confused because she was so excited about it when she started last month. What could be going on and how can I help her?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Your daughter is not alone. Many children have a difficult time adjusting to preschool—especially after extra time at home as a result of the pandemic. The good news: With your support, this will just be temporary.

Here are some ways to help your preschooler adjust:

- **Remove the drama.** Beginning preschool is a milestone. But casting it as a big deal can make an anxious child even more so. Instead, remind your child of other places she has made friends and had fun learning. Tell her that preschool is similar in many ways.
- **Encourage her to talk.** Sometimes there is just one aspect of preschool that a child fixates on and becomes anxious about. If your child can tell you what is bothering her, you may be able to ease her mind with an explanation.
- **Control your own emotions.** Many parents are teary-eyed when their "baby" goes off to preschool. If this describes you, do your best to hide the tears from your daughter. Put on a brave smile and she just might, too!
- **Work with the teachers.** Preschool teachers are well versed in helping children adjust to preschool. Share your concerns with the teacher and ask for additional advice if needed.



# The Kindergarten Experience

## Instill a sense of responsibility in your child



Now that your child is in kindergarten, it's time to help him learn to be a responsible student.

Perhaps you already give your child responsibilities around the house. Experts agree that children develop responsibility when they see that their work contributes to the household. This concept also applies to school.

Give your child meaningful tasks to help him feel a sense of responsibility for school matters. You could:

- **Make a large wall calendar.** Have your child mark certain days to remind him what he needs to do. Library books are due on Wednesday. He needs to wear sneakers on Friday for gym class.
- **Place a box in your child's room** for his school stuff. Ask him to put his finished schoolwork there—and anything else he needs for school. Have him check the box each morning.
- **Give your child an alarm clock.** Help him set it in time to get ready and have breakfast before school starts. Have him choose his outfit the night before.
- **Help your child set a goal** for school at the beginning of each week. Write it down. Review it with him at the end of the week. If he doesn't reach the goal, help him plan for improvement.
- **Create a contract** that outlines both of your responsibilities. For example, your child agrees to do schoolwork *before* he plays. You agree to read with him every day.

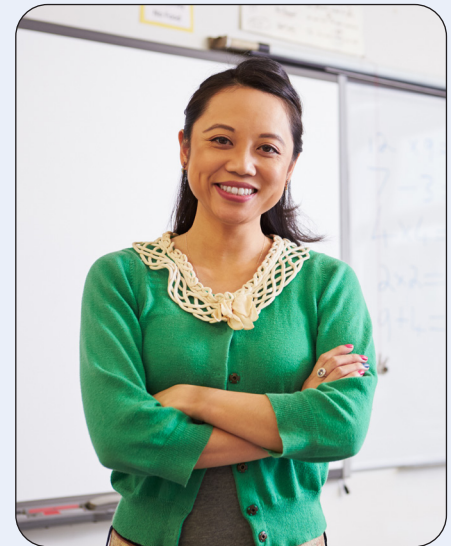
## Get the most out of your next parent-teacher conference

October usually means it's time for parent-teacher conferences. You may be a little nervous, especially if you don't know what to expect, but take heart.

Conferences are valuable for both you and the teacher—whether they are in person or online. They are an effective way to share information that will help your child.

To make your next parent-teacher conference a success:

- **Prepare in advance.** Think about questions you want to ask the teacher, or comments you'd like to make about your child. Write them down so you don't forget them.
- **Be on time.** The teacher will appreciate your promptness, and you'll be sure to get every available moment to discuss your child.
- **Listen.** The teacher will have things prepared to share with you. Listen and then share your thoughts.



- **Ask for suggestions.** What can you do to help your child at home? Are there skills the teacher would like you to focus on?
- **Follow up.** Make sure the teacher knows the best way to contact you in the future.

## Help your child develop a positive attitude about school



It's a fact: Some children just don't like going to school. And while you can't *force* a child to love school, you can help her develop a more positive attitude about it. Here's how:

- **Talk about school every day.** Ask your child, "What were your favorite parts of the day?" It's OK if lunch and recess top her list. What matters is that she has happy times at school. Be sure to ask her about what she's learning, too.
- **Say nice things** about teachers. Encourage your child to bond with them by reminding her that they care for her and want her to learn. Suggest your child draw special pictures for her teachers.
- **Foster friendships.** Help your child get to know her school friends better. Invite a classmate over to play, or include a friend in a family activity.
- **Be a role model.** Have a positive attitude about your own commitments at home and at work.