Early Childhood
Parents
make the difference!
March 2024
Vol. 28, No. 7
Smithville ISD



Human book characters are ideal for teaching ethical behavior

Want to strengthen your child's social skills? Read stories that feature ethical characters—the human kind. Studies show that stories featuring people are better at teaching social skills than books with "human-like" animals.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't read your child animal stories. It simply means that when it comes to behavior and values, kids learn best from fellow humans.

Why? Possibly because kids can "see themselves" in other people in a way they can't in animals. When an animal character behaves well, kids don't always grasp what that behavior has to do with them. But when a human character does the right thing, they relate.

Here are a few titles that feature human characters making positive choices to read together:

- ***The Quiltmaker's Gift*** by Jeff Brumbeau. A seamstress agrees to stitch a quilt for the selfish king if he will give away his other possessions. By the end, the ruler learns that giving is more satisfying than gifts.
- ***A Chair for My Mother*** by Vera B. Williams. After a fire destroys their belongings, a girl and her mother and grandmother collect coins to buy new furniture. Their slow labor of love demonstrates the power of caring and the strength of families.
- ***The Empty Pot*** by Demi. Ping has a gift for growing flowers. But when his seeds fail to blossom for the emperor, will the little boy tell the powerful man the truth? Yes, because honesty is always the best policy.

Source: N.E. Larsen and others, "Do storybooks with anthropomorphized animal characters promote prosocial behaviors in young children?" *Developmental Science*, Wiley-Blackwell.

How to avoid using bribes with your child

"If you finish putting away your toys, I'll read you another book." "If you share your cookie with Charlie, I'll let you play one more game." Deals like these might seem like effective motivators for children.

However, when you present an idea to your preschooler in this way, you are not offering motivation; you are offering a bribe. Bribes don't teach young children to cooperate. Instead, they teach kids that if they do what is asked of them, they will get something in return.

To boost cooperation without resorting to bribes:

- **Change the way** you say things. For example, use the word *when* instead of *if*. "When you finish putting away your toys, we can read another book." This puts the emphasis on what the child is expected to do.
- **Explain why** the desired action is helpful or valuable. "When you put away your toys, we won't trip and break them."

Source: A. Brill, "Why Threats and Bribes Don't Lead to Cooperation and What to Try Instead," Positive Parenting Connection.

Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute®

Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute®

Make a bird feeder to boost your child's observation skills



Making a bird feeder with your preschooler is a wonderful way to teach about caring for nature and learn more about birds.

Here's what you'll need:

- **String.**
- **Half of a stale bagel.**
- **Peanut butter.**
- **Shortening.**
- **Bird seed.**

Tie one end of the string to the bagel through its hole. Then mix one teaspoon each of peanut butter and shortening. Spread the mixture onto the bagel. Press the coated side of the bagel into bird seed. Hang the feeder outside and watch who enjoys it.

Note that some bird seeds are designed to attract certain birds. Keep a bird guide handy to help you and your child identify the birds you see. You can use binoculars or a camera to get a better look. Ask your child to draw a picture of each bird that visits the feeder.

For more bird feeding tips, visit *https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/feeding-birds-your-backyard.*

"You can learn so much just by observing."

—Jessica Williams

Help your preschooler learn and grow by taking regular walks



Adults often rack their brains for new ways to nurture their children's learning. Simply add learning to an activity you are probably doing anyway: taking a walk.

Walking helps your preschooler stay physically fit. And while you walk, you can also boost observation, math and communication skills. The key is to make walks interesting and fun.

When walking with your child:

- **Count cats or dogs**—or anything else you see. Different kinds of cars. Fire hydrants. Swings.
- **Search for five things** you and your child have never seen before.
- **Identify shapes.** What do you see that is round? Square? Oblong?
- **Point out numbers**—on mailboxes, buildings or signs.
- **See how many things** your child can find of a certain color.
- **Look for things** that need to be fixed. Overgrown weeds. A pothole. Broken windows or fences.
- **Find things** that make each of you happy. A fluffy dog. A baby in a stroller. A smiling neighbor.
- **Identify letters** of the alphabet on signs. Or, call out the first letter of things you pass. "M" for mailbox.
- **Play a game of I Spy.** Look ahead of you and say, "I spy something ... (smooth, pink, etc.)." See if your child can locate it. Take turns spying and guessing.
- **Be silly.** Every 20 steps or so, do something for your child to imitate—clap your hands, hop, skip or dance.
- **Notice things** that have changed since your last walk.

Are you inspiring your preschooler to be creative?



Preschoolers are naturally imaginative. You can enhance creativity even more by encouraging your child to try new things. Creative play helps children learn to express themselves. It also builds their thinking and problem-solving skills.

Are you fostering your child's creative ability? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you point out** different types of art to your preschooler, such as photography, sculptures, architecture, poetry and music?

___**2. Do you make up** stories together and encourage your child to create different endings to popular stories?

___**3. Do you offer** your child tools, such as sidewalk chalk, blocks and play dough, to make and draw things?

___**4. Do you allow** your child to get messy while working on projects?

___**5. Do you give** positive feedback when your child makes something?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're enhancing your child's creativity. For *no* answers, try that idea from the quiz.

Early Childhood Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.
Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

 Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute®

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—or be distracted by a rumbling stomach.
- **Memory.** If kids don't eat well (if they skip a meal, for example), they may have trouble remembering what they've learned. And 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 do less well 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.

To support future school success, start establishing positive eating habits now. Researchers have found that young children are more likely to eat healthy foods if families:

- **Offer options.** Let your child pick between two snacks (like apples and bananas, or carrots and celery).
- **Make it fun.** Arrange cut-up fruits into a smiley face or rainbow.
- **Cook together.** Invite your preschooler into the kitchen to help you. Involving young children in the process of making healthy meals makes them more excited about eating them!

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

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with fun learning activities



Most preschoolers enjoy fantasy and make-believe, which is why St. Patrick's Day can be so much fun for them. Here are a few activities to try with your preschooler:

- **Go on a scavenger hunt for gold.** Place gold stickers on five of your child's toys and other items. Hide them (in fairly easy-to-find places) and encourage your child to find them. When your child finds the gold, celebrate with a healthy green treat, such as grapes cut in half.
- **Turn a green bell pepper** into a shamrock stamp. Cut off the top of a bell pepper. Press the larger piece of the pepper into green paint. Then, show your child how to stamp it onto paper. Paint a stem and let your child use crayons, glitter or paint to decorate the shamrock.
- **Try a sensory sift for gold.** Put beans or rice in a large pan. Mix in gold coins made from yellow construction paper. Let your child pick out the gold. Supervise to keep small items out of your child's mouth and off of the floor.
- **Read books** about St. Patrick's Day together. Try *Jack and the Leprechaun* by Ivan Robertson, *How to Catch a Leprechaun* by Adam Wallace, or *The Luckiest St. Patrick's Day Ever!* by Teddy Slater.

Q: I'm worried about my youngest child's writing ability. His older sister started writing when she was his age. Meanwhile, he has not even mastered a stick figure yet. What can I do to help? My child is supposed to go to kindergarten in less than a year.

Questions & Answers

A: Children develop different skills at different rates. It is not unusual for a four-year-old boy to seem a little behind a four-year-old girl in developing fine motor skills. (These are the small hand muscle skills used for writing and drawing.) Girls seem to develop fine motor skills a little sooner than many boys do. In the same regard, boys tend to develop gross motor skills (running, jumping, balancing) faster.

So don't worry too much at this time. Instead, introduce your child to activities that will strengthen his fine-motor skills. Together:

- **Play with play dough** or clay. Squeezing and rolling dough develops hand muscles.
- **Finger-paint.** You can use real finger paint if you want, but children also enjoy "painting" in shaving cream and pudding.
- **Put together puzzles** to help build hand-eye coordination.
- **Play with building blocks** that snap together. Many children enjoy doing this type of activity for long periods of time.
- **Experiment** with different writing tools. Start with markers, then try chalk, crayons, and finally pencils.

Practical activities like dressing and undressing, combing hair and brushing teeth will also help your child develop fine motor skills.

If you still have concerns after a few months, speak with your child's pre-K teacher or a pediatrician.

Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute®

The Kindergarten Experience

Math success begins with a positive mindset



According to research, the brain's "emotion" and "intellect" centers are connected. They are permanently entwined.

What this means for kindergartners is that their mindset can affect their ability to solve math problems. Think about it: When children are nervous or upset about a worksheet, they may struggle to answer the questions. But when they remain calm and confident, they are likely do much better.

To encourage a math positivity:

- **Remind** your child that effort leads to achievement. Does your child claim not to be able to do math because "I'm just not smart"? That implies people are either born intelligent or not. But that isn't true. People can learn and get smarter.
- **Send** the right message. Instead of saying, "That problem looks really hard," say, "That problem looks intriguing." A child who worries about something being too difficult, may decide not to try. But if it's *interesting*—not necessarily hard or easy—it may seem worth the effort.
- **Teach** your child to relax. If jitters get overwhelming when your child is doing math, suggest taking a deep breath and picturing something happy or fun. Say, "Remember, you know more than you think!" If you can help ease anxiety, your child will have a better chance for success!

Source: S. Sparks, "Positive Mindset May Prime Students' Brains for Math," Education Week.

Give your kindergartner practice working with others

There's a lot to be said for encouraging children to show leadership. But, let's face it—some kids are just plain bossy. They won't take turns. They won't share. They won't listen to what anyone says.

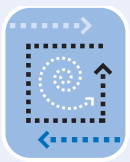
Your kindergartner will be expected to work with others throughout school, so learning how to cooperate is important.

To help your child learn how to be a contributor rather than a dictator:



- **Have family members** take turns making decisions for the whole family—from which movie to watch to what to have for dinner.
- **Establish basic house rules.** For example, if one child cuts the cake, the other gets to choose the first piece. If one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.
- **Teach fair ways** to make decisions. Have your children play "rock, paper, scissors" to see who gets on the computer first. Flip a coin to decide who takes the first bath.
- **Offer praise** when you see your child being a team player. "That was nice of you to let Jamie pick out a book first."

Spring is the perfect time to learn more about animals



Learning about animals is a great early science lesson for kindergartners. Spring is a natural time to focus on this, since many kinds of animals are having new babies in the spring.

To help your child learn more about baby animals:

- **Read a book** about your child's favorite animal and how it cares for its young. Choose a book with detailed illustrations. Ask your child's teacher for suggestions.
- **Visit animals.** If you live near a farm or zoo, take your child to see baby animals up close. If not, look closer to home, such as for baby birds that have hatched from eggs in a nest.
- **Teach new vocabulary.** Does your child know that the name of a baby animal often differs from the name of its parent? Kindergartners know some adult and baby animal names, such as *dog* and *puppy*. Use pictures of animals to teach your child *cow* and *calf, horse* and *foal,* and others.