

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Douglas-Cherokee Head Start



May 2026

Simple ways to make this a summer of learning for your child

Formal instruction may take a break for summer, but learning should never stop. Many kinds of enjoyable activities will keep your preschooler engaged in building a strong foundation of knowledge.

Make time this summer to try these with your child:

- **Create a scrapbook.**

Help your preschooler collect photos or make drawings of summer experiences. At the end of the summer, have your child show the scrapbook to friends and family.

- **Put on a show** to help your child feel comfortable speaking in front of others. Show how to make puppets from socks. Then, have your child think up a situation such as visiting a friend or going on a trip. Act it out together with the puppets. Practice the show and perform it for family.
- **Shop for words.** When you go to the store, ask your child to help find the items you need. Then, point to the word on the sign or label and read it aloud. Have your child point to the item, then the word and repeat it.
- **Serve learning at meals.** Have your child match the number of napkins to the number of people. Then, talk about *wholes*, *halves* and *quarters* as you fold them. Play thinking games at the table, such as I Spy.



Sharpen key skills kindergartners need

To help your preschooler be successful in kindergarten in the fall, work on strengthening some essential skills this summer. Here are some easy ways to help your child develop:

- **Reading readiness.** Read together daily. Talk about the difference between *fact* and *fiction*, and how printed words flow from left to right and page to page. Have your child hold books, turn the pages and “read” to you, too.
- **Hand muscle control.** Provide lots of opportunities for your child to paint, draw and write with a variety of tools. Help your child practice zipping and buttoning clothing.
- **Verbal skills.** Ask your child to name common objects and identify colors. Help your child state thoughts clearly and learn to retell events in proper sequence.
- **Thinking skills.** Have your child sort items by type, color or size. Talk about how items are similar and how they are different.

Practice personal facts

As preschoolers become more independent, they need to learn to identify themselves and their work. Provide practice with:

- **Personal information.** Does your child know family members’ first and last names and your address? If not, think of a rhyme or silly story to help with memorizing. Talk about who it is and is not OK to share this information with.
- **Printing your child’s name.** When doing summer arts and craft projects, say, “You should be proud of what you created. Be sure to sign your name!”

Discuss behaviors you see

Social skills are important for making and keeping friends in school. To instill them, point out examples of both caring and hurtful behavior in shows you and your child watch and in real life.

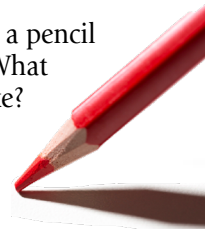


If you see that your child has hurt someone’s feelings, explain why the behavior was hurtful and what your child could have done instead. And when you see your child behaving kindly, offer plenty of praise.

Play with shadow shapes

Most preschoolers enjoy making shadows, and they are learning about science while they do it. Take some different-shaped objects, like a ball, a block and a pencil outside on a bright day. Then:

- **Turn each item slowly** in the sun and have your child call out the shapes of the shadows.
- **Have your child** hold a pencil and crouch down low. What does its shadow look like? Now have your child hold the pencil up high. Does the shadow change shape?





How can I help my child strengthen speaking skills?

Q: My four-year-old can express wants and needs understandably. But I'd like to help my child develop language skills further before kindergarten starts in the fall. What can I do?

A: Building strong language skills will make it easier for your child to learn to read and write as well as communicate. And you can help by having lots of enriching conversations together.



To strengthen your child's language skills:

- **Establish talking times.** Many families set aside mealtimes or the few minutes before bedtime for chatting with their child.
- **Have your child pick topics** to talk about.
- **Encourage questions.** Provide age-appropriate answers.
- **Tell your child about your day** in the kind of detail you'd like your child to use. Then, ask about your preschooler's day. Listen attentively to your child and ask follow-up questions.
- **Introduce new words** and include clues to help your child understand them. "We haven't eaten in hours. My stomach is growling because I'm so *famished*. Are you hungry, too?"



Are you introducing new experiences?

Preschoolers learn and grow when they experience new things. Will you help your child discover more about the world and how it works this summer? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Will you make** trying new things—such as foods and games—a regular family activity?
2. **Will you visit** interesting new places together—such as a train station or a nature center?
3. **Will you ensure** your child has new books to read by going to the library often or swapping books with friends?
4. **Will you ask** for your child's help when you are doing exciting tasks at home—such as washing a car or baking a cake?
5. **Will you arrange** for your child to play with new friends?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are ready to help your child discover new things, people, places and ideas. For each no, try that idea.

"There are not seven wonders of the world in the eyes of a child. There are seven million."

—Walt Streightiff

Keep up routines year-round

Along with more daylight, summer often brings changes to family schedules. But don't give up on a few essential routines! To avoid readjustment issues when school resumes in the fall:

- **Stick with** a regular bedtime for your child.
- **Maintain** morning "get ready" routines—washing, dressing, brushing hair, etc.
- **Continue** reading together at the same time each day.
- **Limit** recreational screen activities.
- **Enjoy** connecting at a daily family meal.

A little downtime is OK

Many extracurricular activities take a break in the summer, and families scramble to find replacements. Don't worry about filling every minute. Leaving some time unstructured in your child's day has benefits:

- **Relaxing with family members** helps young children strengthen bonds and feel loved and secure.
- **Self-directed** play helps children develop independence, problem-solving skills and self-confidence.



Talk about safety rules

Children need to learn to obey safety rules—especially during the summer when your family is away from your home or yard. To make this easier for your preschooler:

- **Make it clear** when your child must hold your hand.
- **Teach your child** to stay where you can both see each other at all times.
- **Identify a safe person or spot**—in plain sight, away from water and out of traffic—to go to if you are separated.

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