

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Port Arthur Independent School District



February 2025

Play games that encourage your child to participate in reading

Preschoolers are more engaged in learning activities when they can be part of the action. Playing games together based on the books you read can add to your child's enjoyment and interest in reading. It can also deepen understanding of the books' words, stories and characters.

Try these games when you read with your preschooler:



- **Count items in pictures.** How many trucks, ducks, bears or chairs are there? Help your child point to each one as you count them together.
- **Hunt for letters or words.** Ask your child to point to each "O" on a page, or every "the." Show excitement that being able to do this means your child is a reader!
- **Rhyme words.** Choose a word on a page and ask your child to think of as many words that rhyme with it as possible. To get the game started, you might choose the word *at* and say *cat*, *bat* and *hat*.
- **Pretend to be characters.** Encourage your child to think about what the main character might be thinking or feeling in different scenes. Choose another character for yourself. While you read or afterward, act out the story. Or, have a conversation, one character to another.
- **Draw pictures of what comes next.** Ask your child to imagine what might happen after the story's end and draw new scenes.



Show how to treat others with respect

Behaving respectfully toward other people isn't just nice for children to do. It makes homes and schools better places to live and learn for everyone.

To teach respectful behavior:

- **Provide perspective.** Preschoolers need to learn that they are not the center of the universe. Other people's needs and wants are important, too.
- **Rehearse how to act** in advance of events—how to ask the teacher a question, or to politely say *no* to a friend.
- **Encourage patience.** If your child wants to ask you a question while you are speaking to someone else, say, "Please wait until I finish my conversation."
- **Talk about differences.** Explain that there are many different people in the world, from different cultures, with different ideas, likes and dislikes. Getting to know them makes life interesting.
- **Be a role model.** Show respect for people in your own daily interactions.

Questions lead to learning

Research shows that young children ask questions for three important reasons: to learn about the world around them, to connect with people and to get permission or help to behave appropriately. Encourage this kind of curiosity in your child. Together:



- **Play guessing games,** such as I Spy. Have your preschooler silently spot an item in the room. Ask questions until you can guess what it is. Then, switch roles.
- **Put things into categories.** Say, "Horses have long tails. What else can you think of that has a long tail?"
- **Read books** with questions and answers, such as *Why?* by Laura Vaccaro Seager.

Source: S. Briggs, "The Importance of Kids Asking Questions," InformEd, Open Colleges.

Turn on valentine creativity

Spread love and explore textures by making some valentines with your child. You can:

- **Paint on unusual surfaces,** such as hearts cut out of wrinkled aluminum foil.
- **Weave hearts** out of paper strips.
- **Make a lace rubbing.** Put white paper over some lace. Let your child rub a red crayon over it. Fold to make a card.

Plan for sufficient sleep

Children need lots of sleep to learn well. One study of preschoolers found that kids who regularly got at least 10 hours of sleep per night (not counting naps) adjusted to kindergarten better and performed better academically. Create a relaxing, screen-free evening routine for your child. Then, stick to a bedtime that is at least 10 hours before wake time.



Source: D.M. Teti and others, "Sleep Duration and Kindergarten Adjustment," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics.



How can I tell if my child is kindergarten ready?

Q: My preschooler will be five in a few months. But I'm not sure if my child will be ready for kindergarten in the fall. What reading, math and other abilities should kids have before they start kindergarten?

A: While an ability to recognize letters and their sounds and to count and identify numbers will help in kindergarten, academic skills are only part of what makes children ready. For success, kindergarteners need self control, social skills and enthusiasm for learning.

What should you look for in your child? Children who have these characteristics should be able (or mostly able) to:

- **Wait their turn.**
- **Follow directions** from a teacher or other adult.
- **Get along** with classmates and friends.
- **Work alone** on projects with adult supervision.
- **Concentrate** on a task for a few minutes at a time.
- **Manage** basic personal needs, such as using the restroom independently.
- **Sit still** and enjoy listening to an adult read a short story.

You don't have to make this decision alone. Reach out to the preschool teacher or your pediatrician for help determining your child's readiness.



Are you supporting playtime learning?

For preschoolers, playtime is prime learning time. While playing, your child can explore, think creatively and learn new skills. Are you filling playtime with opportunities to learn? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you chat** together during playtime, and ask questions about what your preschooler is thinking and doing?

___ **2. Do you encourage** creative play—pretending, storytelling, making art, etc.?

___ **3. Do you help** your child strengthen motor skills by running, jumping, coloring and modeling clay?

___ **4. Do you reinforce** social skills during playtime, such as sharing and taking turns?

___ **5. Do you find** ways to include reading in your child's play?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn through play. For each no, try that idea.

*"Play is not frivolous;
it is brain building."
—American Academy of Pediatrics*

Make listening fun to do

Strengthen your preschooler's listening skills by offering opportunities to practice in interesting ways. Ask your child to:

- **Help you at home.** Choose a task your child likes. Then, give specific instructions to follow: "Fill the watering can. Touch the plant's soil. If it feels dry, water it."
- **Play Simon Says.** Your child will have to listen closely to hear instructions ("Simon says touch your left ear") and think about whether to ignore them if Simon's name isn't mentioned.
- **Listen as you tell** a story several times over a few days. Then, pretend you can't recall part of it. Can your child take over?

Connect math to daily life

Increase your child's comfort with math by showing that it is something people use in all kinds of ways every day. As you go about daily activities together:

- **Estimate.** Say, "I bet we can fit six apples in this bowl. Let's see." Then, have your child count the apples as you add them.
- **Discuss sequences.** Break activities into steps, and talk with your child about what you will do *first*, *next* and *last*.



Take steps to protect health

Winter is the season when many children contract illnesses that result in lost days of learning. To help keep your child healthy:

- **Stay up to date** with medical visits.
- **Avoid exposing** your child to people who are already sick.
- **Dress your child** in warm, protective clothing in cold weather, including a hat.
- **Teach your child** to wash hands often: before eating, after using the restroom, etc.

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