

# Early Childhood Parents®

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*make the difference!*



## Focus on basic kindergarten skills during summer months

Summer is the perfect time to make sure your child is on the path to kindergarten readiness. When children enter kindergarten, they do better if they already have some basic skills. These include being able to:

- **Express themselves clearly.**
- **Listen and pay attention** for short periods of time.
- **Identify some colors.**
- **Compare and contrast** two objects.
- **Work with their hands.**
- **Locate print on a page** and know that it tells a story.

To promote these necessary skills:

- **Encourage talking.** Discuss everything you see. Ask your child to name common objects and point out colors. Ask lots of questions.

- **Listen when your child talks.** Help your preschooler state thoughts clearly. Challenge your preschooler to retell an event in the proper sequence.
- **Help build fine motor skills.** Encourage your child to paint and write. Demonstrate how to zip and button clothing.
- **Read together daily.** Encourage your child to hold books, turn the pages, and “read” to you, too.
- **Ask your child to sort objects.** Challenge your child to sort books and toys. Before you wash clothes, have your child put them in piles by type or color. Talk about how items are similar and how they are different.

## Unstructured time benefits preschoolers



During the school year, many young children’s lives are filled with organized activities. Between preschool, sports practice, art class, etc., families sometimes don’t have enough time to enjoy relaxed time together.

During the summer, children typically spend more unstructured time at home—which is important for learning. Here’s why:

- **Spending time with family members** helps young children strengthen bonds and feel loved and secure.
- **Unstructured activities** lead to self-directed play. When kids engage in hands-on activities they get to plan and control, they develop problem-solving skills, self-confidence and a sense of independence.
- **Downtime is less stressful.** When schedules are packed with activities, some children get overwhelmed—which can sometimes lead to crying, exhaustion, headaches and stomachaches.

Source: J.E. Barker and others, “Less-structured time in children’s daily lives predicts self-directed executive functioning,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media.

# Keep learning alive with fun summer learning activities



Your preschooler does not need to sit at a desk to keep learning this summer. Many kinds of enjoyable and simple activities will keep your child engaged and motivated.

Here are a few to try:

- **Put on a show.** Being able to speak in front of others is valuable skill. Show your child how to make puppets from socks, or just use stuffed animals and bring them to life. Help your child think up a situation, such as visiting a friend or going on a trip. Then, help your child act it out using the puppets or dolls. Practice the show for friends and family members.
- **Make mealtime learning time.** Have your child sort utensils or

count plates. Talk about *wholes*, *halves* and *quarters* when you fold napkins. Have conversations at the table. The bonding that takes place over family meals benefits young children socially and academically.

- **Be scrappy.** Help your preschooler collect items to put in a scrapbook of summer memories. Your child can include photos or drawings of experiences. At the end of the summer, have your child show the scrapbook to family and friends.

**“Children are not things to be molded, but are people to be unfolded.”**

—Jess Lair

# Caring is the cornerstone of your preschooler’s character



All the pillars of character families and teachers want to see in children are based on a foundation of caring. Children who are caring use kind and respectful words. They show concern for others. They are also reliable, responsible and honest.

To encourage a sense of caring in your preschooler:

- **Care for your child.** This goes beyond meeting basic needs and offering love. Sympathize with your child. Say you understand your child’s feelings, even if they result in behavior you must correct. Express interest in things your child likes.
- **Help your child think of others.** This can be challenging for young children, but they can learn. Ask questions like, “Do you think your brother might want to play with your dinosaurs? He looks a little sad sitting over there by himself.”
- **Point out examples** of both caring and hurtful behavior in TV shows and in real life. If you see that your child has hurt someone’s feelings, explain exactly why the behavior was hurtful. Talk about what your child could have done instead. And when you notice your child acting in a kind and caring way, be sure to offer encouragement and praise.
- **Read children’s books** that teach compassion. *A Home for Bird* by Philip Stead, *Be Kind* by Pat Miller and *The Big Umbrella* by Amy Bates are great ones to get you started.

# Are you building your preschooler’s independence?



Families are naturally protective. But it’s also important to let young children explore the world and develop a sense of independence. This prepares them for school and other responsibilities.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you’re balancing your child’s safety and freedom:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you supervise** your child’s playtime with friends without hovering over them?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you offer your child** simple choices, such as “Would you like to wear your blue sweater or the red one?”
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you give your child** a chance to solve minor problems before you step in to help?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you show interest** in your child’s opinions and respect them, even if you disagree?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you play** with your child but also encourage independent play?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are encouraging independence. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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# Concentrate on your child's interests to build attention span



The ability to focus on an activity is important in school. Preschoolers find it easier to pay attention to activities

that interest them, so choose an activity your child enjoys, and try to keep your child focused on it for increasing periods of time.

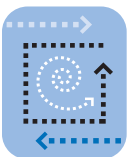
To begin, minimize distractions so your preschooler can concentrate. Then, try some of these fun attention-building activities:

- **Work together on a jigsaw puzzle.** Start with puzzles that have about 25 pieces. Remember, there is no need to finish a puzzle in one sitting. Attention span also involves coming back to a project after you have put it aside. Move on to more complicated puzzles

once your preschooler masters these.

- **Extend your story time.** Instead of looking at a short picture book, read a longer story or a beginning reader's chapter book over a period of several nights. Each night, remind your child of where you are in the story. When you stop, explain that tomorrow night you are going to continue reading to find out what happens to the characters.
- **Try a multi-step art project.** For example, help your child shape an animal out of clay. Allow the clay to dry and harden. On another day, let your child paint the animal. After the paint dries, help your child apply fur or eyes using glue and yarn or bits of paper.

# Shadow play is a fun way to explore science with your child



Most preschoolers have fun making shadows—and have no idea that they are learning about measurement, time and space while they are doing it!

All you need is a sunny day, a piece of chalk and a sidewalk or driveway. Then, try a few of these ideas:

- **Draw an X on the sidewalk** or driveway. Have your child come back several times throughout the day and stand on the X. Each time, draw an outline of your child's shadow. How does it change? Ask your child to share observations.
- **Take a few objects**, such as a ball, a block and a crayon, and move them in different ways. Discuss the shadow shapes that are formed as you turn the objects.

- **Have your child hold a crayon** and then crouch down. What does the crayon's shadow look like? Now have your child stand on tippy toes and hold the crayon up high. What does the crayon's shadow look like now? Ask your child to tell you about the ways the shadow has changed.

Follow up your fun by reading poetry and books about shadows:

- *My Shadow* by Robert Louis Stevenson.
- *The Dark, Dark Night* by M. Christina Butler.
- *What Makes a Shadow?* by Clyde Robert Bulla.
- *Goodnight Shadow* by Kimberly Muller.

Source: A. Koester, "Preschool Shadow Science," Association for Library Service to Children.

**Q:** My preschooler speaks well and is able to communicate wants and needs. However, since kindergarten begins next fall, I'd like to help my child build language skills even further. What are some things I can do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Strong language skills are directly connected to reading and writing readiness. The more you talk with your child, the stronger those skills will become.

Here's what you can do:

- **Have a time every day** when your child knows you are available to talk. Many families use a mealtime or the few minutes right before bed.
- **Ask your child** to pick something to talk about, and then discuss it together.
- **Encourage your child** to ask questions and give age-appropriate answers.
- **Talk to your child** about your day and ask about your child's day.
- **Let your child finish** speaking and then ask follow-up questions to continue the conversation.
- **Talk about things** your family is going to do in the next few days, or things you'd like to do as a family.
- **Use new words** your child may not have heard before. Synonyms are useful here. Try saying *rapid* or *quick* instead of *fast*.
- **Provide context clues** so your child can guess the meaning of new words. For example, "We haven't eaten in hours! I'm *famished*, aren't you? I think I can hear your stomach growling!" From this, your child can guess that *famished* means hungry.



# The Kindergarten Experience

## Prepare your kindergartner for first grade



The kindergarten year is coming to an end and your child will soon be entering first grade! While this

transition is exciting, it can be a bit intimidating for kids and families.

To make sure your child is ready, plan enjoyable summer activities that emphasize first-grade skills, such as:

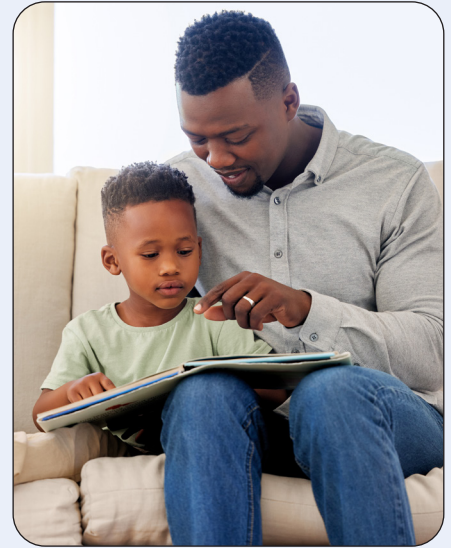
- **Reading.** Bring books wherever you go. Read with your child every day and spend time discussing materials. Talk about the difference between *fact* and *fiction*. Ask about reading activities at your public library.
- **Writing.** Keep a family journal of your summer experiences, such as swimming, hiking and seeing the ocean. Have your child add drawings and words to each page.
- **Counting.** Children love counting familiar things, such as blocks, steps, books and toys. Once your child has mastered the basics, move on to counting by twos, fives and tens.
- **Printing names.** Students may be required to write their first and last names on school papers. When doing summer arts and craft projects, say, “You should be proud of what you created. Be sure to sign your name!”
- **Social skills.** Continue to enforce rules and routines at home. Practice taking turns, and being good sports during games. Talk about how to recognize other people’s feelings. Help your child practice sharing.

## Maintain school routines over the summer for a successful fall

Summer is almost here, and even though your family’s schedule may be about to change, certain habits should stay the same.

Experts recommend that families maintain these routines year-round:

- **A regular bedtime.** You might adjust your child’s bedtime for the summer, but enforce it consistently.
- **A morning routine.** Follow the same morning routines you followed during the school year. For example, have your child wake up, get dressed, brush teeth, comb hair and eat a nutritious breakfast.
- **A daily reading time.** Check out materials from the library often to keep your home stocked with a variety of books.
- **Limited screen time.** No matter how much free time your child has, set healthy limits for the



amount of time spent in front of the TV, computer and mobile devices.

- **Family meals.** Eat at least one together each day, if possible. Ask your child questions about the day.

## Make safety a priority when you are out and about with your child



Many kindergartners think they are all grown up. But even school-age children need to abide by adults’ rules—especially during the summer when your family is away from the familiar limits of your home or yard.

Talk to your kindergartner about ways to stay safe this summer. Then, follow these tips:

- **Be hands on.** Make it clear when you are in a place where your child must hold your hand—such as

crossing a street, entering a crowded supermarket, or attending a large event.

- **Be “eyes on.”** When you are at a playground, teach your child to stay where you can both see each other at all times.
- **Establish a safe spot** or person that your child can go to if lost. A safe person could be a person in uniform or a store employee. A safe spot could be on a bench, near a sign, or inside a store—in plain sight, out of traffic and away from water.