

## How Your Preschool Child Learns

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Your child is at a special stage. Children ages 3 to 5 are learning all the time—and they learn best by being active. Like other preschool children, your child probably asks lots of questions: How does this work? What makes plants grow? How do worms move if they don't have legs? What's inside this old clock? Preschoolers are very curious about their world.

We could answer these questions, and sometimes we do. But because we want children to see themselves as inventors, problem solvers, discoverers, and capable learners, we help them develop their natural curiosity. We encourage them to observe, explore, take things apart, build, create, draw, and see what they can find out. The more active children are in their work, the more they learn and remember.

While preschool children are alike in many ways, no other child is exactly like your child. And no one knows your child better than you do. You know how your child learns and reacts to new situations, so you can help your child's teachers. If you share with us what is happening to your child at home—the arrival of a new baby, the death of a pet, nightmares, temper tantrums, trips, separation, or divorce—we can understand your child better. We can support positive and difficult events through reassuring stories, soothing art activities, imaginative dramatic play, and extra love and attention.

If your child has a health problem such as an allergy, diabetes, or asthma, please let us know what we can do to keep your child safe. We also want to know if your child has a diagnosed disability or any other type of special need. While a child may have a disability in one or more areas of development, in other areas a child may be developing at a completely normal rate. We will do everything we can to help your child participate as fully as possible in all aspects of our program.

## The Goals of Our Curriculum

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The most important goals of our preschool curriculum are for children to get along well with others and become enthusiastic learners. We want children to become independent, self-confident, curious learners who can work well with others. We're teaching them **how** to learn, not just in preschool, but all through their lives. We do this by creating purposeful and productive play experiences that help children grow in all areas.

Our curriculum identifies goals in four areas of development.

**Social/emotional:** to help children develop independence, self-confidence, and self-control; follow rules and routines; make friends; and learn what it means to be part of a group.

**Physical:** to increase children's large muscle skills—balancing, running, jumping, throwing and catching—and to use the small muscles in their hands to do tasks like buttoning, stringing beads, cutting, drawing, and writing.

**Cognitive:** to acquire thinking skills such as the abilities to solve problems, to ask questions, and to think logically—sorting, classifying, comparing, counting, and making patterns—and to use materials and their imagination to show what they have learned.

**Language:** to use words to communicate with others, listen to and participate in conversations with others, understand the purpose of print, recognize letters and words, and begin writing for a purpose.

Through the activities we plan and the way we organize the classroom, select toys and materials, plan the daily schedule, and talk with children, we seek to accomplish the goals of our curriculum and give your child a successful start in school.

## What Children Learn at Home

Many parents ask us what they can do to help their children succeed in school. You don't need to buy a lot of special toys or equipment to turn your child into a successful student. The best thing you can do is to take time to play with your child, read wonderful books together, and talk as you go about your normal, everyday household chores. Sometimes, after a long day at work, this may seem difficult. But you'll find that this kind of attention has a powerful effect on children and makes your job as a parent more fun and interesting—and sometimes easier.

You are your child's first and most important teacher. The way you talk with your child makes a big difference in how your child thinks and feels and the kind of person your child will become. If we can work together and do some of the same things at school and at home, your child will benefit in many ways.



## Literacy

How can you prepare your child to read and write? The most important way is to take time to listen to and talk with your child. Hold your child on your lap and read books together every day. Talk about the stories. And make sure your child sees you reading and writing. When grown-ups read and write, children know that reading and writing are important.

When you and your child...	You might say...	This helps your child...
Read books together	"Who is this story about? What do you think will happen next? Have you ever felt this way? Now it's your turn to tell the story to me."	Learn new vocabulary Understand what is read Express ideas and feelings
Talk about what happened during the day and together make up a story	"I wonder if anything happened today at school that made you laugh. Tell me about it."	Recall events Use language to express ideas and describe events Learn that parents feel school is important
Recite nursery rhymes, chants, and songs and then have fun changing the words that rhyme	"Let's sing 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star'... We'll make up a silly rhyme. How about 'Twinkle, twinkle little car, how I wonder what you are?'"	Hear the sounds in words (phonological awareness) Have fun playing with words
Notice street and store signs and talk about what they say and mean	"See that red sign? It says <i>stop</i> . All cars, buses, and trucks stop at this sign. Let's see if we can find another stop sign."	Learn about print and what it means Learn that reading is important in the real world
Find letters from your child's name on food containers	"Holly, do you see a letter you know on this box of Honey-Nut Cheerios?"	Recognize and name some letters

## Math

You don't have to be a whiz at math to be a wonderful math teacher for your child. Lots of things you do at home every day involve math. The main idea is to include your child in these experiences and make them fun.

When you and your child...	You might say...	This helps your child...
Set the table for dinner	"Put one napkin (or plate, cup, fork) wherever you see a chair."	Match one-to-one when counting
Put away groceries	"Can you find all the food that needs to go into the refrigerator? Now hand me all the cans. Can you tell what is inside?"	Sort objects into categories Describe different foods
Sort and fold clothes	"Let's find all the socks first. They we'll see which ones go together."	Sort and match
Play with a collection of pennies, nickels, and dimes	"Can you put all the ones that look the same together? Which pile has the most? Let's count and find out."	Compare and organize Estimate Count
Prepare lunch together	"Would you like your sandwich cut in two triangles or four little squares?"	Make choices Learn the names of shapes

## Science and Social Studies

Your child is naturally curious about the world. You can show that you are curious too by saying, "I wonder why..." when you see something interesting. Encourage your child to ask questions, observe things carefully, predict what will happen next, experiment, think about what happened, and share that information. There are many things that you do together in your everyday life that can help your child to learn about the natural world (science) and what people do (social studies).

When you and your child...	You might say...	This helps your child...
Prepare simple foods such as toast, pancakes, or scrambled eggs together	"Look how runny the egg is now. What do you think will happen when we heat it in the pan?"	Observe carefully Notice cause and effect Describe how things change Make predictions
Look at family photos together	"Let's look at some old photos of you. See that? That's you when you were a baby. What were you able to do? What can you do now that you couldn't do then?"	Learn how people change over time Learn about family history
Go for a walk and collect seeds and leaves	"I wonder why some leaves are green and some are yellow. What do you notice about this leaf? How is it different from the other leaves we found?"	Observe and describe Understand plant life
Pretend to be the people you met when you went to the doctor and act out what you saw them do	"Let's pretend we're back at the doctor's office and it's time for a check-up. Who do you want to be? What should the office look like?"	Learn about jobs people have in our community

## The Arts and Technology

Your home is a place for your child to explore the arts and technology. It doesn't matter whether you can sing, dance, or act. Remember, for young children, the act of creating is what's important, not what the child produces. You don't need to be artistic yourself to raise a creative child. Keep in mind also that technology is about using tools to get a job done, whether it's an egg beater, a tape recorder, a screwdriver, or a computer.

When you and your child...	You might say...	This helps your child...
Turn on a tape recorder and listen to music together	"This music makes me want to clap. Let's do it together."	Operate a machine Become aware of rhythms and patterns Follow a beat
Go on the Internet together to find out what kind of caterpillar you found in your garden	"Let's see if we can find a picture that matches this caterpillar on the computer so we can learn more about it."	Learn how to find answers to questions Appreciate the value of computers
Dress up and pretend together	"I'm going to be a kitty, and I'm going to pretend to lick my paw just like this and walk ever so quietly just like this. Who are you going to be? Show me, and I'll try to guess who you are."	Observe people and animals more closely Make decisions Create a role
Talk about your child's artwork	"Tell me about your picture. How did you get the idea to draw it? What do you like best about it?"	Develop a sense of accomplishment Evaluate his/her own work

## Conclusion

We hope that this booklet has helped you to understand our approach to preschool education and appreciate the important role you play in supporting your child's learning. The key to successful learning experiences is to figure out what interests your child. Then use those interests to engage your child in actively exploring and learning about the world. It doesn't matter where you live—city, farm, town, suburb, bayou, mountain, desert, tundra, or coast—or what kind of home you have. Every place is a learning environment for a child.

Together, at home and at school, we can help your child to...

- get along with others
- do well in school
- become a good reader
- solve math problems
- speak and write well
- be creative
- make decisions
- develop physical skills
- have good study habits
- be self-confident and respectful
- enjoy learning