

Early Childhood Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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Your child's playtime builds skills and promotes learning

Studies show that preschoolers learn a lot through play. But have you ever wondered just what your child is learning while she's having fun? Consider that:

- **Making art inspires** creativity and helps your child coordinate hand muscles. Supervise while she cuts, colors, glues and tapes—and marvel at her masterpieces.
- **Pretending strengthens** your child's imagination. Dolls, props and costumes help set the scene and prompt her to wonder, "How would someone feel in this situation?" "What might they do or say?"
- **Making music improves** your preschooler's listening, movement and rhythm. Practice singing,

playing instruments and moving to the beat together.

- **Building things encourages** your child to plan, count and figure things out. Blocks, boxes and puzzle pieces can motivate her to build.
- **Playing games helps** your child cooperate and learn sportsmanship. It also helps her learn letters, numbers and words.
- **Reading builds** attention span, language skills and imagination. It's the perfect activity to do every single day.

Source: M. Yogman and others, "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/ec_play3.

Include your preschooler in family tasks



Most preschoolers love the special activities and events that happen this month. But what they want most of all is to be part of what you are doing.

To include your child:

- **Give him a role** in family rituals and traditions. If you always send a card to a relative who lives far from you, skip a store-bought card. Instead, let your child decorate a folded piece of construction paper. Then you can write a short note inside.
- **Put him to work!** Remember, preschoolers *want* to help. Your child can stir batter. He can help set the table. He can put stamps on envelopes. Anytime you are about to do a little task, think to yourself, "Can my child do this instead?"
- **Build in some time for him.** When you are out with your child, take five minutes to stop and look at a colorful display. Make his favorite lunch and sit down to share it with him. Activities like these let your child know you have time for him—no matter how busy you are.

Encourage your preschooler's desire to do the right thing



When children are young, they behave well to earn parents' approval and avoid negative consequences.

As they get older, they need to learn to behave well—simply because it's the right thing to do.

To instill the desire to do what's right in your preschooler:

- **Give her unconditional love.** Children who are secure in their parents' love almost always behave better than children who are not.
- **Be a role model.** Your child is watching you *all the time*. If she overhears you speaking in a disrespectful tone to people, she will be more likely to speak that way, too.
- **Promote appropriate behavior.** Say things like, "In our family, we use

kind words and we don't hit." "We ask to borrow things that don't belong to us. We don't take them."

- **Encourage her to make amends.** If your child has hurt someone's feelings, she should apologize and ask what she can do to fix it.
- **Cue her to think of others.** If a family member drops something on the floor, say to your child, "Look on the floor. Do you see something that Dad dropped? Let's pick it up and give it to him." Praise your child when she follows through.

"Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

—Mark Twain

Use jigsaw puzzles to increase your child's attention span



Preschoolers don't need too many toys, but jigsaw puzzles are worth having. Putting together puzzles builds fine motor skills and helps young children think logically and visually. Puzzles are also among the best toys for helping children extend their attention spans.

Working on a puzzle can:

- **Help your child** learn to concentrate quietly on a project. Once your child is in kindergarten, his teacher will expect him to be able to sit and work independently for short periods of time.
- **Show your child** the progress he is making. He can see progress as the picture develops. He can also

see progress as he moves from a simple puzzle to a more difficult puzzle.

Start your child with puzzles of about eight pieces. Move up at his pace. Some older preschoolers surprise their parents by doing 50-piece puzzles.

- **Teach your child** to return to a project. Attention is not just about how much a child can learn and do in one sitting. Some tasks just can't be done all at once, but they still need to be completed!

Doing part of a puzzle one day, then returning the next day to work on it again, lets your child practice a skill that will help him study and do larger projects when he gets to elementary school.

Do you know the basics of effective discipline?



Disciplining children is one of the toughest parts of parenting. Are you practicing effective discipline

at home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you choose** just a few important rules—and explain them in simple words your preschooler understands?
- ___ **2. Do you enforce** household rules consistently so your child always knows what you expect?
- ___ **3. Do you set** expectations that are appropriate for your child's age? This prevents rules from being too lenient or too tough.
- ___ **4. Do you react** carefully and calmly when your child misbehaves, providing her with a good behavior role model?
- ___ **5. Do you celebrate** your child's good behavior much more often than you notice her mistakes?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're using an effective discipline method. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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Help your preschooler gain literacy skills during the holidays



The holiday season creates many opportunities for families to spend time together. Why not weave reading into some

of that time?

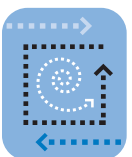
Here are some effective ways to strengthen your family bond and your preschooler's literacy skills:

- **Blend reading** into your holiday activities, such as cooking and baking. Read part of a recipe to your child. Have her retrieve an ingredient from the pantry. Then read directions, such as, "Stir for one minute." Help your child carry out the instructions.
- **Get cozy with your child.** Take advantage of cooler temperatures and grab a blanket, snuggle up and read several books together.

If you're experiencing warm weather, have a reading picnic outdoors instead.

- **Listen to books.** Sometimes your eyes and hands are busy, such as during a car trip to visit family. So turn on an audiobook with your child and discuss it.
- **Trade stories with your child.** Tell her a story about how you spent winter months when you were her age. Then have her tell you a story about something she would like to do (or has already done) this winter. Write down her story and ask her to draw pictures to go along with it.
- **Have a special read-aloud night.** Turn off the TV and other devices. Grab a snack and read your family's favorite holiday books together.

Use positional words to help your child learn spatial concepts



Your child is learning about himself as a person during these critical early learning years. A key part of this

learning is understanding *spatial concepts*. This means having a sense of where he is in relation to what is around him.

Your preschooler also needs to learn the words that describe the position of objects in relation to other objects. You can gradually introduce him to these *positional words*.

When your child is:

- **About two years old**, work on simple spatial concepts such as *in*, *out* and *on*. "Let's put the blocks *in* the box." "I'm going to get you *out* of your car seat now." "We'll put some sprinkles *on* the cupcake."
- **About three years old**, you can add more difficult concepts such as *over* and *under*. "I see a light hanging *over* the table." (Pat the table, and then point to the light.) "Let's run *under* the slide!" (Touch the slide, and then point under it.)
- **Four years old and older**, continue with more sophisticated positional words, such as *behind*, *in front of* and *next to*. These concepts will be especially important when your child reaches kindergarten. You can demonstrate these spatial concepts with toys. Line up several trucks or stuffed animals and show your child how to position them *behind*, *in front of* and *next to* one another. You can also demonstrate with family members. "Can you stand *behind* your sister?"

Q: My son is very competitive. When he loses a game or things don't go his way, he gets so frustrated that he usually throws a fit. I sometimes let him win to avoid dealing with his behavior—which I know is wrong. How can I help my child learn how to deal with disappointment better?

Questions & Answers

A: Every child faces times when things don't go his way, or someone else comes in first. It's a difficult lesson, but it's important to help your preschooler learn to accept it and move on.

To prepare your child:

- **Talk about sportsmanship.** Don't assume he knows what it means to be a good sport. Tell him, "Being a good sport means respecting fellow players. It also means being a gracious (no gloating) winner and a mature (no pouting) loser."
- **Teach him how to lose.** A child who never experiences failure will expect to win all of the time. So, let your child lose sometimes, and then help him express his feelings. Tell your child to use his words to say how he feels.
- **Empathize with him.** Let him know that you understand his disappointment. Encourage him to say, "I'll try again another time." Then, have him switch to a different activity for a while.
- **Emphasize effort.** Tell your son that he can always feel proud if he gives his best, no matter the outcome—win or lose.
- **Focus on fun!** Remind your child that games should be played for fun. If he has a good time, then he is a winner.

The Kindergarten Experience

Keep learning alive over the winter break



You and your child deserve a break from the busy school year! But that doesn't mean learning has to stop.

You and your kindergartner can enjoy building important skills over the winter break if you:

- **Play games.** Sneak learning into activities such as playing store (math), acting out a story (reading) and playing Simon Says (listening and following directions).
- **Explore.** Go on a virtual field trip to a museum or take a nature walk. Observe a construction site (from a safe distance).
- **Cook.** Use reading, math and science to follow a recipe.
- **Talk and listen.** This builds vocabulary and communication skills. Discuss daily life and ask questions that require creative thinking, such as, "What would it be like to live in outer space?"
- **Read.** Mix up your daily reading routine. Try reading in new places, such as a fort made with a sheet and kitchen chairs.
- **Exercise.** Build your child's muscles and prevent cabin fever by going outside or building a safe, indoor obstacle course.
- **Limit screen time.** Instead of filling free time with digital devices, set reasonable limits. Make a list of screen-free ideas.
- **Practice manners.** A special holiday dinner or a visit to someone's home is a perfect opportunity for your child to practice polite and respectful behavior.

Kindergarten assignments can set the stage for future success

Assignments in kindergarten help reinforce learning. They also help children develop positive study habits. Kindergartners are not expected to spend more than a few minutes on any one assignment. And the work should be enjoyable for your child.

Along with that enjoyment should come a sense of responsibility that will prepare him for the homework he'll be assigned in later grades.

Your child may be asked to:

- **Practice saying his name** and address.
- **Watch a teacher-made video.**
- **Draw a picture** of his family.
- **Find three things** that begin with a certain letter of the alphabet.
- **Count the items** on a table.
- **Find two different kinds** of leaves.
- **Find three shapes** and tell a family member what they are.



Establish a place in your home that's free from distractions for your child to work. He will likely feel a sense of pride to have his own work space!

A winter poem can boost your kindergartner's writing skills



Looking for a simple project that will give your kindergartner's emerging writing skills a boost? Help her

create a winter poem! It's easy with the following steps:

1. **Write five sentences** that begin with, "In winter, I" Then add a different sense (*see, hear, touch, taste, smell*) to each sentence and leave space for your child to add a word.
2. **Discuss what each sense means.** Your child may need examples,

such as, "Remember when we heard leaves crunching under our feet in the fall?" "Remember when we smelled the grass after it was cut in the summer?"

3. **Spend time observing winter.** What does your child sense inside? Outside? While doing errands? Bring the poem with you, and help her fill in the blanks.
4. **Help your child choose a title** for the poem. Encourage her to add illustrations and her name.

Source: "Instant Poetry! A Writing Exercise," Education.com, niswc.com/winter-poem.