

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Moore Public Schools



December 2024

Enhance your child's knowledge of the senses of taste and smell

A lot of learning activities for preschoolers focus on looking, listening and touching. But your child's sense of taste and smell also provide important ways to experience and learn about the world.

These two senses are so closely connected, people don't always realize which one they are using. To have some fun learning about these senses with your child:

- **Have a taste and sniff contest.** Have family members close their eyes and hold their noses. Place a small amount of fruit, such as orange, grapefruit or lime, on each person's tongue. Can they tell what it is? Next, have them smell the food with their eyes still closed. Is it easier to recognize the fruit this way?
- **Talk about tongues.** Explain to your child that the tongue has thousands of taste buds that send signals to the brain. There they mix with smell signals from the nose to help us recognize flavors.
- **Find out what salt can do.** Salt can make sweet foods taste sweeter. Make two mugs of hot chocolate with milk, cocoa powder and sugar. Then, add a pinch of salt to one mug. Which tastes sweeter?
- **Keep a log of things** you and your child smell for a day. See how many things you can recognize by smell, such as pine needles, clean laundry, and different foods. Teach your child words to describe the smells, such as *woody* or *refreshing*.

Source: "In brief: How does our sense of taste work?" National Library of Medicine, NIH.



Help your child learn to persevere

Sometimes, tasks will bore or frustrate your child. That's when perseverance comes in. For success in school, students must persist and finish what they start rather than quitting. To develop your preschooler's perseverance:

- **Have your child engage** in quiet, solo activities. Set a timer for a few minutes and ask your child to stick with the activity. Gradually increase the time.
- **Allow time for your child** to struggle a bit when doing a challenging task. Instead of jumping right in to help, suggest that your child try different strategies to figure out a solution.
- **Provide only a few** pieces of paper for drawing. Don't let your child make a mark or two on 10 pieces of paper before really getting started.
- **Give your child** a chance to run around and be noisy after completing a task. This teaches that there's a time for everything, and your child can wait to let off steam until after work is done.

Fill the winter with learning

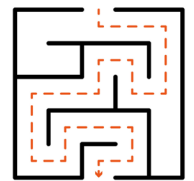
Winter officially begins on December 21. Try these seasonal learning activities together:

- **Pair up.** Gather several pairs of mittens (or cut them out of different colored paper). Mix them up and have your child sort them into pairs.
- **Play detective.** Go outside together and identify signs of winter, such as colder air, wintry decorations, bare trees, etc.
- **Get a feel for cookie cutters.** Have your child trace around plastic cookie cutters and look at the shapes they make. Then, place the cutters in a bag and see if your child can pull out a cutter that matches each shape just by feel.



Teach 'beginning' and 'end' with games and mazes

One of the first steps in learning to manage time is to understand the idea of *beginning* and *end*. When you and your preschooler play board games, point out the beginning and end of pathways the game pieces must travel. Or, draw simple mazes and guide your child's hand on the pencil as it twists and turns from the beginning to the end.



Supply stability in the break

A break from school, festive events and varying schedules can upset children's routines. To avoid readjustment issues in January:

- **Have your preschooler eat** and sleep at consistent times as much as possible.
- **Uphold rules.** Respect and good behavior are important at any time of year.
- **Talk about preschool,** and the fun your child will have there again soon.



Educational toys are pricey. Do kids really need them?

Q: Our budget right now won't allow for fancy educational toys and expensive devices. Will that leave my child behind?

A: Don't worry—many of the best toys for children are also the simplest. Educators agree that thinking is one of the most vital parts of play. Simple toys, like balls, toy animals, plastic cups, etc. let your child think about how to play with them each time. A few of these basic toys—along with books and puzzles—are all your child needs to develop many of the skills needed for success in kindergarten.



To encourage thinking and learning, look for toys that:

- **Let your child imagine** different stories while playing. Foam blocks, for example, can be a construction site, the walls of a zoo, a tower for a castle. Even empty cardboard boxes can provide hours of creative fun.
- **Your child can use alone or share.** Playing alone builds children's self-sufficiency, and sharing helps them develop social skills.
- **Are safe.** Toys or repurposed household items with lots of little parts or sharp edges are more likely to cause accidental injuries than a plastic cooking pot and some clean, empty food boxes.
- **Inspire repeat play.** Children come back to dress-up clothes and toy animals, for example, because they can play with them in unlimited ways.



Are you helping your child change focus?

In school, your child will likely change from one activity to the next on a schedule. Are you making it easier for your child to stop doing one thing and get ready to start another? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you alert** your child before a change? "In five minutes, we are going to leave."
- ___ **2. Do you explain** what will happen before and after events? "We'll put on coats and go to the library. When we get home, we'll read."
- ___ **3. Do you give** your child a task during a switchover? "We are leaving now. Will you please turn off the light?"
- ___ **4. Do you use** objects to interest your child in changing activities? "Let's take this book home to show Daddy."

- ___ **5. Do you create** goodbye rituals? "Wave to Grandma as we go out the door."

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to switch gears. For each no, try that idea.

"Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights."
—Pauline R. Kezer

Expand math knowledge

In addition to helping your child learn about numbers and counting, you can build kindergarten math readiness by introducing these fundamental geometry concepts:

- **Lines.** Point out *horizontal* lines, which go from side to side, and *vertical* lines, which run from top to bottom. How many can your preschooler find today?
- **Positional words.** Ask your child questions about the positions of objects in relation to other things. Are they *above*, *below*, *beside*, *in front of* or *next to* them?

Instill kindness three ways

Kindness is an essential ingredient in a positive learning environment. To encourage your child to treat others with kindness:

- 1. Talk about it.** What does kindness look like? Sound like? Feel like?
- 2. Act it out.** Use dolls or puppets to role-play situations. What does your child think is the kind thing to do?
- 3. Read about it.** Share books about kindness with your child, such as *Kindness Makes Us Strong*, by Sophie Beer.



Source: M. Coulombe and E. Zuccaro, "A Culture of Kindness in Early Childhood Classrooms," Edutopia.

Make a special learning spot

Keep up your child's interest in learning over winter break by creating an inviting place at home to do it. Here are some ideas:

- **Choose a cozy spot**—such as the corner of a bedroom or in an open closet.
- **Line it with pillows.** Add books, paper, crayons and other school supplies.
- **Have your child select** a stuffed animal as a learning buddy.
- **Spend some "learning time"** together in the spot. Encourage your child to spend time there without you, too.

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