

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Cormier School & Early Learning



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Develop your preschooler's ability to move ahead after setbacks

Preschoolers are learning new skills all the time. But some things take practice to master. When trying new things, your child will probably experience some failures. That's OK! Learning how to bounce back and keep trying after a failure will serve your child well in school.

To foster resilience:

- **Be understanding.** "I can see you are sad that you didn't make it across the monkey bars. It's disappointing when you try to do something and it doesn't work."
- **Provide encouragement.** "Sometimes kids must get stronger before they can make it across the bars. You're getting stronger all the time. Let's try it again the next time we are at the playground."
- **Suggest goals your child can reach** along the way. "You can help your arms get stronger by practicing hanging from the bar. Let's see if you can hang while I count to three."
- **Set an example.** Let your child see you handle your own setbacks with grace. For example, if you try a new recipe and it doesn't turn out well, say "I tried something new—that's what counts. Next time, I think I'll grill the meat instead of frying it."

Source: J. Lahey, *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Succeed*, Harper.



Help your child learn when to listen and when to speak

Listening to others and speaking in turn are important classroom skills. Provide opportunities for your child to practice during:

- **Family meals.** Ask each person to say something about their day. Everyone else should listen quietly until it's their turn.
- **Read aloud time.** Ask your child to listen carefully while you read. Afterward, ask for your child's thoughts about the story. "Which part did you like best?"
- **Playtime.** Many board games encourage talking, listening and taking turns.

Build understanding of time

Time is an abstract concept that takes years for children to master. To help your preschooler learn some basics now:

1. **Use a timer** to give your child a sense of how long one minute and five minutes are.
2. **Ask how long** your child thinks it will take to do a task, like putting on a jacket. Time it and see.



Set a standard for positive behavior

Rules and limits help children learn how to behave and make them feel secure. What's more, children whose families use loving discipline to teach them about following rules tend to do better in school than other kids.

Here are a few simple strategies for maintaining boundaries and improving behavior:

- **Use positive words.** Whenever possible, tell your child what *to do* ("Clasp your hands together") rather than what *not to do* ("Don't touch things in the store").
- **Model the behaviors** you want to see. Be honest, fair and responsible. Speak calmly when you are upset and use words to convey your feelings.
- **Criticize behaviors**, not your child. Say, "That comment was rude," not "You are so rude."
- **Listen to your child.** Your preschooler has opinions, and it's helpful to listen to them. But stand your ground when it counts.

Source: B. Martin, Psy.D., "The 5 C's of Effective Discipline: Setting Rules for Children," Psych Central.

There's no place like home

Earth Day is April 22. This year, help your preschooler learn more about our planet and its systems. You and your child can:

- **Plant something.** Plant seeds outside if you can, or look for a tree planting activity in your community. Talk with your child about how plants help clean the air and also give us things we need.
- **Save water.** Explain that life on Earth depends on clean water. Teach your child ways to avoid wasting it, like turning off the tap when brushing teeth.





My child has become very fearful. What should I do?

Q: When my preschooler was a toddler, I thought I had the boldest, most outgoing child in the world. One year later, we've had a complete turnaround. My child cries when I leave the house and is afraid of monsters and the dark. How can I help?



A: Toddlers often seem fearless because they don't have the thinking ability to wonder about things like whether monsters might be real, or if something might be lurking in the dark. But now your preschooler has developed more thinking skills and a larger imagination and can consider all sorts of scary possibilities—including whether something bad might happen when you are separated.

To promote a sense of safety:

- **Provide reassurance.** Say, "I love you and I am going to do everything I can to keep us both safe." Keep your absences brief whenever possible.
- **Supervise media use.** This is not the time for anything remotely scary.
- **Be playful.** Use "anti-monster spray" (water in a spray bottle) at bedtime. Or, inspect the closets and drawers before turning out the light. Add a night light to the room, too.

It's likely these fears won't last long. If they persist, contact a pediatrician.



Is reading a priority in your family?

Children are more likely to want to read when everyone around them is reading. Are you boosting your preschooler's interest in reading by establishing a family reading culture? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you have** family reading rituals, such as read-alouds at bedtime and weekly trips to the library?
2. **Do you take** reading material along when you and your child leave the house? Keep books in a bag and grab them to read together when you are stuck waiting somewhere.
3. **Are you building** a family library? Keep favorite books on hand to read again and again.
4. **Are you setting** a reading example? Does your child see you reading each day?

5. **Do you talk** about books and reading, and share interesting things you read?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making reading a regular part of family life. For each no, try that idea.

"A child. A book. A read. A chat. This is the way the mind grows. Not with a test but a tale."

—Michael Rosen

Build with blocks and watch math skills grow

Mixing a little math into playtime is easy when the play involves blocks. To build your child's math skills, reinforce these concepts while playing with blocks together:

- **Counting and relative quantity.** Build a tower and ask your child, "How many blocks are in the tower?" Count them together. Then, have your child add two blocks, or take two away. Ask, "Does the tower have *more* or *fewer* blocks now?"
- **Shape identification** and how shapes fit together. Ask questions like, "Is this block a square or a triangle?" and "If we put these two triangles together, what shape do they make?"

Offer praise that inspires

Praise from you can be motivating for your child. But the words you use matter. Keep these *do's* and *don'ts* in mind:

- **Do focus your praise** on effort over talent. Compliment your child's actions.
- **Don't always say** "You're so smart." Your child may feel pressured to prove it. This can lead children to cheat.
- **Don't apply labels**, like the "shy one" or the "athletic one," that limit your child.

Routines aid responsibility

Performing a task repeatedly over time is what turns it into a habit. So, to teach your child to take responsibility for a task, work it into a regular routine. Have your child perform it around the same time every day. Post a checklist of pictures of each step in the routine. When your preschooler gets used to getting up, brushing teeth and dressing in the same order, for example, you can offer fewer reminders.



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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com