Early Childhood
Parents
make the difference!
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Where Vision Becomes Legacy



Five simple ways to boost your child's school readiness

Research shows that when families take an active role in learning at home, children have a much easier time succeeding in the classroom. As you head into this new school year, try these five simple strategies to sharpen your preschooler's school smarts:

1. **Play together.** Kids explore the world through play. Spend time working on a puzzle, building a tall tower of blocks or playing dress up. These playful moments build problem-solving skills and creativity.
2. **Get creative.** Don't be afraid of a little mess! Activities like squishing modeling clay, finger-painting and drawing with crayons help develop the fine motor skills needed for writing.
3. **Prioritize connection.** Physical affection, like hugs and snuggles, does more than just strengthen your bond. It helps your child feel safe and secure—and have the confidence needed to take risks and learn new things at school.
4. **Move your body.** Strong bodies lead to focused minds. Together, take a walk around the block, head to the playground, or play a game of catch in the yard. Afterward, discuss the highlights of the day. This helps your child practice communication and reflection.
5. **Partner with teachers.** Start the year off strong by introducing yourself to your child's teacher. Stay curious about what your child is learning each week. When families and teachers work together, children thrive.

Source: K.L. Bierman and others, "Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children," Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Expand your preschooler's reading world



Reading a wide variety of books helps children build the background knowledge they need to understand and connect with what they read.

Introduce your child to:

- **Fiction.** Stories with make-believe characters help kids develop imagination. Talk to your child about the difference between *real* and *pretend*.
- **Myths and fables.** Classic tales like "The Lion and the Mouse" teach life lessons and values. These stories often use words that children don't hear in everyday conversation, boosting their vocabulary.
- **Poetry and rhymes.** Look for rhythmic poems to build phonological awareness. Rhyming helps kids hear the individual sounds within words, which is a foundational skill for decoding words.
- **Nonfiction.** These books show preschoolers that reading can help them discover and learn new things. Exploring real-world topics boosts background knowledge.

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Boost your child's school-ready behavior with simple strategies



Setting and enforcing clear boundaries at home helps children learn to follow rules and cooperate. Children who experience consistent, loving correction develop the self-regulation skills they need in a classroom setting.

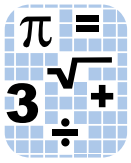
To build school-ready behavior:

- **Create a few key rules** and stick to them. Consistency at home makes it easier for your child to follow routines at school.
- **Hear your child out.** Listening to your child's ideas and opinions builds confidence. Then, stand your ground on important boundaries.
- **State things positively.** Say "Please walk," rather than "Don't run." Positive directions are easier for a child's brain to process and follow.
- **Set an example.** Demonstrate the honesty and responsibility you want to see. By staying calm when you are frustrated, you teach your child how to handle school-day stresses.
- **Criticize the action, not the child.** Say, "Taking that toy was unkind," rather than "You are being rude."
- **Focus on success.** Notice when your child does well and be specific. "You put your books away! Thank you for taking care of them." Positive reinforcement results in better behavior at home and at school.

"With self-discipline most anything is possible."

—Theodore Roosevelt

Focus on developing skills that improve future math outcomes



Researchers have found that preschoolers' ability to grasp certain math concepts is a strong predictor of how children will perform in math in fifth grade. Three skills in particular have a significant impact on a child's future success with math—counting, patterning and comparing quantities.

Luckily, there are lots of fun and simple ways to strengthen your preschooler's skills in these areas. Play frequent games of:

- **Count the shapes.** Sharpen counting and shape-recognition skills at the same time! Pick a room in your house, then see how many examples of a particular shape your child can find there. Can your preschooler find five rectangles in the kitchen? How many circles are there?
- **What comes next?** Draw a simple pattern of colored squares (red, blue, green, red, blue, green). Stop coloring after a certain square, such as blue. Now ask your child what comes next. Is it another blue square? Is it a red one? Or does the pattern call for green? Once your child masters simple patterns, move on to more complex ones.
- **Which has more?** Make two unequal piles of small objects. (Use coins, pieces of cereal, paper clips, etc.) Ask your child to tell you which pile has more in it. Then ask how your child knows. (Is it taller? Is it wider?) Count together to find out!

Source: B. Rittle-Johnson and others, "Early Math Trajectories: Low-Income Children's Mathematics Knowledge From Ages 4 to 11," *Child Development,* The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc.

Are you teaching your child to be kind to others?



Preschoolers who learn to care about people and things are more likely to care about doing well in school, too. They are also better friends and classmates.

Are you helping your child become kind and caring? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you nurture** a sense of appreciation by reminding your child to say *thank you* to others for things they do, and by having your child draw thank-you pictures?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to do acts of kindness, such as offering to share a new book or toy?
3. **Do you teach** your child how to take care of living things, such as plants or pets?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to think about others' feelings?
5. **Do you model** caring by thanking, helping and showing respect for your child and others?

How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you are promoting caring and kindness in your child. Mostly *no* answers? Try those ideas in the quiz.

Early Childhood Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Turn family screen time into an effective learning activity



Screen media exposure can pose challenges for preschoolers, so it's important to be intentional and selective about your child's digital interactions. Research shows that when parents watch programs alongside their children—a practice called "co-viewing"—kids stay more focused and learn significantly more from what they see.

Whether children feel a program is more important because a parent is watching or they simply enjoy the extra support, adult interaction makes a difference. For a productive experience:

- **Prioritize quality content.** Since your child is paying close attention, select age-appropriate, educational media. While nature documentaries are excellent, cartoons that focus on emotional intelligence and social values are also great choices.
- **Stay actively engaged.** If you are scrolling through your own phone, your child will notice the disconnect. Pay attention to the screen and talk about the characters or the plot as it unfolds.
- **Avoid the "babysitter" trap.** Resist the urge to leave the room for chores as soon as a show starts. Discussing content turns a passive habit into an active learning moment.

Remember: The American Academy of Pediatrics still recommends that families limit recreational screen time and encourage active alternatives.

Source: Texas Tech University, "Parents' presence when TV viewing with child affects learning ability," ScienceDaily.

Teach your child how students respect and care for property



As the new school year begins, your child will suddenly be in charge of a lot of stuff—backpacks, jackets and notes from the teacher. Your child will need to manage these items at school and carry them back and forth every day.

When preschoolers learn to take care of their belongings, they take their first step toward respecting the world around them. This practice helps them learn to treat school property and their friends' belongings with that same care.

To help your child start the year off right, try these three habits:

1. **Model proper use of supplies.** For example, remind your child that crayons are for paper, not for walls or furniture. After playing with outdoor equipment, teach your child to put it away immediately. Leaving items outside means they could get ruined by rain or even go missing.
2. **Create a home base for papers.** Set up a specific bin or folder for school papers. Even very young children can learn a backpack routine. After getting home, your child can open the bag, pull out papers and place them in the bin for you to see. This keeps bags organized and ensures you don't miss important first-week forms.
3. **Practice borrowing with care.** If your child borrows a toy, return it promptly and in good condition. When using library books, show your child how to turn pages carefully to avoid tearing, and have your child help you place books gently in the return bin.

Questions & Answers

Q: My four-year-old is incredibly competitive and usually has a meltdown after losing. Sometimes I let my child win just to avoid the drama, even though I know it's not the best fix. As the preschool year begins, how can I help my child handle disappointment better?

A: The preschool years bring many firsts for children, including navigating group games and playground competition. Learning to accept that things don't always go a certain way is a major preschool milestone. Teaching your preschooler to handle disappointment builds essential classroom skills.

To prepare for a successful year:

- **Define sportsmanship.** Explain that being a good sport means respecting others. Say, "A good sport is a kind winner who doesn't brag and a brave loser who doesn't pout."
- **Empathize with feelings.** Say that losing feels crummy and it's OK to be disappointed. Then, explain that there are appropriate ways to react.
- **Celebrate effort.** Shift the focus from the outcome to the effort. Emphasize that playing as well as you can is the real goal, regardless of the score.
- **Practice losing.** When kids never lose at home, the playground can be a shock. Let your child lose occasionally. Encourage your child to use phrases like, "I'll try again next time!"
- **Keep it playful.** Remind your child that games are for fun and friendship. Focusing on the joy of playing makes your preschooler an automatic winner.

Here's to a year of growth and plenty of fun on the playground!

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The Kindergarten Experience

Teachers share back-to-school tips for success



What's the secret to making sure your kindergartner has a successful school year? Seasoned teachers have shared their best back-to-school advice with families:

- **Follow routines at home.** Children thrive when they have consistent times to eat, sleep, play, read, do chores, etc.
- **Create daily rituals.** Start mornings by eating breakfast together. Ask about school every evening and end the night with a bedtime story.
- **Discuss school rules** with your child and talk about the importance of following them.
- **Read every notice** sent home by the school and your child's teacher so you never miss an important update.
- **Tell the teacher** about any major changes at home, such as a new baby or a move.
- **Stay positive.** Avoid saying negative things about school in front of your child. Make it clear that you and the teacher are on the same "team."
- **Support schoolwork.** Establish a regular time and quiet place for learning. Stay nearby to offer encouragement.
- **Limit screen use.** Choose digital activities carefully and limit the amount of time your child spends passively watching videos.
- **Provide balance.** While organized activities are great, all children need downtime to daydream, create and relax.

Become an active member of your child's education team

When your child enters elementary school, you join a team dedicated to your child's growth. Research shows that when families stay involved with school, students perform better and feel more confident.



To become an active partner in your child's education:

- **Share your child's story.** You know your child best. Talk to the teacher about your child's unique strengths, interests and OPPORTUNITIES for growth. Ask for specific ways you can practice new skills together at home.
- **Find your fit.** Look for ways to contribute to school success that match your schedule. Whether it's joining the parent-teacher organization or handling small volunteer tasks from home, your support makes a difference.
- **Maintain open communication.** Check in with teachers regularly to stay up to date on your child's progress. Consistent, friendly dialogue helps prevent surprises.
- **Prioritize school events.** Review the annual calendar early. Mark down "can't-miss" dates like back-to-school nights and conferences. Making the time to attend these events shows your child you care and that education is a top priority for the whole family.

Help your kindergartner learn how to focus and finish tasks



In kindergarten, students are learning to settle down and complete their work—and not simply quit when they get bored or frustrated. To help your child develop perseverance:

- **Encourage quiet time.** Give your child space to look at books or play alone.
- **Let your child struggle** a bit. Avoid jumping in to help immediately. Say, "I bet you can get it."
- **Instill perseverance.** Teach your child to keep trying even after making a mistake.
- **Limit supplies.** Offer only a few pieces of paper at a time so your child doesn't waste sheets on half-finished drawings.
- **Play board games** or put together puzzles that require concentration.
- **Let your child run** and be noisy after finishing a job. Your child will learn there is time to let off steam after finishing work.