

Early Childhood Parents®

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First Step Pre-School

make the difference!



Make reading an enjoyable experience for your child

What is the most important reading activity you can do with your preschooler? Have fun! It makes sense that when a beginning reader gets pleasure from reading, she's more likely to *want* to read—and to read more.

To make reading enjoyable:

- **Visit the library regularly** and bring home a variety of books. Find ones that match your child's interests. Ask the librarian for suggestions, too.
- **Choose a daily reading time**, such as before bed. Reading should never feel like a chore, so pick a time when your child seems to enjoy books most.
- **Read in comfortable spots.** Your child may love reading in a rocking chair, on pillows on the floor, or in her bed. Suggest that she snuggle with a stuffed animal during story time.
- **Take your time with each book.** Let your child examine each page as you read and ask questions. Read with emotion.
- **Talk about what you read.** Ask your child questions as you read, such as, "Why do you think she did that?" "Was that a good ending?" Answer her questions, too. Show how much you like reading!
- **Attend reading events.** Reading can be even more fun in groups. Check the library's schedule of events. Does it host story times for kids? How about special events that encourage young readers?

Have some fun with your child's name



There is one word your preschooler will probably hear, read and write every day throughout his life—his name! Here's how to use it to increase his reading and writing readiness:

- **Label household items** with your child's name, such as his coat hook, toys and bedroom door. Capitalize the first letter.
- **Show your child** how to write his name on a piece of paper. Talk about each letter and the sound it makes.
- **Write in creative ways.** Help your child trace the letters in his name on paper with glue, and sprinkle on some glitter. Have him write letters in sand using his finger. He could even try to shape letters out of dough!
- **Give your child challenges.** Write his name on an index card. Cut the card into four pieces. Can he put them back together to make his name?
- **Play name games.** Clap the syllables of your child's name. ("Jack-son Pear-son.") Rhyme it with other sounds. ("Jackson Packson!")

Autumn leaves are wonderful learning tools for your child



Many trees shed their leaves in the fall. You can use the leaves for some great learning activities with your preschooler.

Help your child:

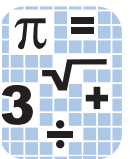
- **Collect different kinds** of leaves. Count the leaves collected from each type of tree.
- **Sort leaves** by size, color and shape.
- **Match leaves.** Set out two or three of each kind of leaf. Let your child find the matches.
- **Make leaf rubbings.** Put a leaf under a sheet of paper. Rub the paper with crayon and watch a leaf appear.
- **Read picture books** and poems about trees and leaves.

- **Create hand leaves.** Trace your child's hands onto pieces of construction paper in fall colors. Cut them out to make fall leaves.
- **Have a leaf race.** Use straws to blow leaves across the table. See who can blow his leaf across the table first.
- **Play "Leaf Hide and Seek."** Hide a leaf in the room. Tell your child when he's getting *hot* or *cold* as he searches for the leaf.

"Play is our brain's favorite way of learning."

—Diane Ackerman

Use a variety of manipulatives to give math concepts meaning



Parents are proud to hear their preschoolers count to 10. But educators want children to do more than just recite numbers.

They want children to understand what numbers represent.

One way to give numbers and math concepts meaning is to use objects—what educators call *manipulatives*. Try these activities with your preschooler:

- **Count aloud while you work.** "One, two, three"—as you sort through the mail. Count the buttons on your child's shirt as you button them.
- **Give your child cups** to play with in the bathtub or sandbox. Experiment with the concepts of *more vs. less*, *empty vs. full*, *all vs. none*.
- **Put some small objects** on the table. Ask your child, "How many are there?" Help her touch each one as you both count aloud. Then mix up the objects, remove a few and count again.
- **Ask your child to arrange** a set of objects from *biggest to smallest*. Then ask her to arrange them from *smallest to biggest*.
- **Write the numbers 0 to 10** on index cards (one number per card). Give your child some small stickers and ask her to place the correct number of stickers on each card. Then challenge her to put the cards in numerical order.
- **Have your child sort buttons** by size and shape, number of holes or color. Supervise as she does this.

Are you helping your child respect belongings?



At school, students must respect others' belongings, such as books, toys, crayons and furniture. Answer *yes* or

no to the questions below to see if you're encouraging this behavior:

___ **1. Do you give** your child places to keep belongings, such as a bin for blocks or a container for crayons?

___ **2. Do you make** cleaning up a habit? "Before we get out a new game, let's put away the one we just played."

___ **3. Do you talk** about the benefits of respecting others' belongings? "If you treat Grandpa's piano gently, I'm sure he'll let you play it again."

___ **4. Do you notice** when your child treats belongings well? "Thanks for putting your books on the shelf. That will keep them in great condition!"

___ **5. Do you set** an example by caring for household items, including your child's belongings?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are building your child's respect for property. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Encourage your preschooler to talk about ideas and actions



When your child begins school, his teacher will want him to talk about his thoughts, ideas and experiences. This kind of

communication is a very important part of preschool and kindergarten.

To build communication skills:

- **Get the story** behind your child's drawings. When your child draws a picture, ask him to tell you about it. Then write his description underneath his drawing.
- **Talk about your day** with your child. Say more than, "We're going out." Instead, try, "We are going to the store this afternoon. I need to get some fruit and a box of cereal. You can help me pick them out."
- **Help your child** recount something in sequence. This helps him learn

that one event follows another. For example, ask him, "What are some of the things you do *after* dinner and *before* bed?" If he's not sure, say, "You brush your teeth. Then what do you do?"

- **Encourage your child** to provide details. If he tells you that he went out to the playground with his class, ask questions that will help him recall more of that experience. "What did you do on the playground? Did you like playing on the swings or on the monkey bars more?" "Who was playing with you on the playground?"

Source: N. Gardner-Neblett and K.C. Gallagher, *More Than Baby Talk: 10 Ways to Promote the Language and Communication Skills of Infants and Toddlers*, The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute.

New experiences boost your child's skills and knowledge



Children learn all day long as they practice skills and experience new things. You can encourage learning

by introducing your child to a variety of activities.

Together you can:

- **Attend open houses** at your local fire station, police station or post office. Your child will enjoy meeting the employees and learning about what they do in their jobs.
- **Take a tour** of your neighborhood. Go on a walk and notice the people, pets, buildings and activities around you.
- **Sit outside** and look at the trees, clouds and landscape. Ask your child to describe the shapes and

colors she sees. Then ask her to close her eyes and describe the sound she hears.

- **Take a trip in a car**, bus or train. Talk about all the interesting things you pass along the way.
- **Get library cards** for the family. Visit the library regularly and attend special events offered for preschoolers.
- **Explore a new place.** Take your child somewhere she's never been before—the zoo or a local museum.
- **Go to work.** If possible, take your child to your job and show her what you do. Or make plans to visit a relative's workplace.

Source: *The Little Things Make a Big Difference*, National Association of Elementary School Principals and World Book Educational Products.

Q: I am overwhelmed by all the expensive and fancy educational toys I see in the stores. Will my child's learning suffer because I can't afford to fill his room with such toys?

Questions & Answers

A: Not at all. Education experts have long maintained that the best toys for children are the simplest ones.

Why? Because a child has to use his thinking skills to decide how he will play with them.

The best toys:

- **Spark creative play.** Toy animals, dolls and toy cars are examples. When your child plays with them, he can make up stories and pretend. The toys don't have to be expensive. Children can turn something as simple as a cardboard box into hours of creative fun.
 - **Can be shared.** It's fine for kids to play alone sometimes. But they also need to play with other children to build social skills. A simple toy, such as a ball, can be used both ways.
 - **Are safe.** Toys with lots of little parts or sharp edges are much more likely to cause accidental injury to your child than simpler toys, like blocks.
 - **Hold your child's interest.** A small train set, for example, is something a child will probably come back to again and again. Each time he approaches it, he will think of a new way to play with it.
- A few basic enjoyable toys—along with books and puzzles—are all your child needs. They will help him develop many of the skills he will need to be successful in school.

The Kindergarten Experience

Activities can build valuable listening skills



You want your kindergartner to be an excellent listener. But simply telling her to “listen” isn’t enough.

To motivate your child to pay attention, give her opportunities to practice in engaging ways.

Encourage your kindergartner to:

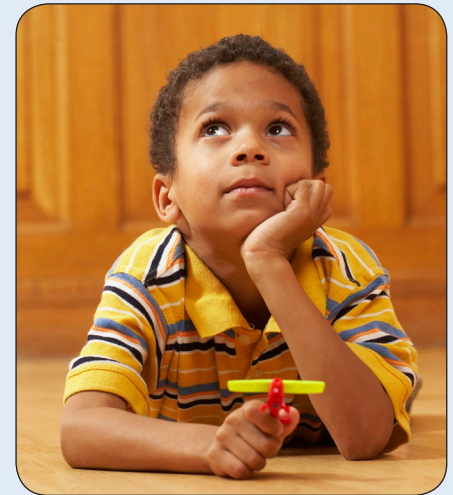
- **Help out around the house.** Choose tasks that interest your child. Maybe she likes setting the table or watering plants. Then give her specific directions to follow. “Fill the watering can. Touch the plant’s soil. If it feels dry, water the plant.”
- **Tell stories.** Read or tell your child a detailed story several times. Make it one she enjoys. Then, pretend you can’t remember a part of it. Can your child complete the story for you? You may be surprised at how well she listened and how much she remembers!
- **Play Simon Says.** Building listening skills is always fun with this classic game! Children love listening to “Simon’s” instructions (“Simon says raise your right hand”) and doing what he says. When Simon doesn’t give the order (“Raise your left hand”)—kids should ignore the instruction.
- **Learn new board games.** Board games have rules that often need repeating. But that’s OK—this gives your child opportunities to listen. Just make sure she’s enjoying the game, too.

Perseverance is important in kindergarten and beyond

In kindergarten, students are expected to settle down and complete the jobs they’re given. They can’t jump from one activity to another if they get frustrated or bored. They must learn how to persevere and finish what they start.

To help your child stay on task:

- **Encourage him to engage** in quiet activities at home. Give your child time to read and work alone.
- **Let him struggle** a bit when he’s working on a task. If you always jump in to help, he won’t develop a “can do” attitude. Suggest your child try different strategies to figure out a solution.
- **Give him** only a few pieces of paper when he wants to draw. Don’t let him throw away 10 drawings before he really gets started.



- **Let your child run around** and be noisy when he completes a task. He’ll learn that he can let off steam after work at home, and understand that he can wait until recess to let off steam at school.

Teach your kindergartner how to resolve conflicts peacefully



Knowing how to resolve conflicts peacefully is an essential part of the self-discipline necessary for success in school.

To help your child learn:

- **Do not allow her** to engage in physical fighting. If she hits, or another child does, separate them immediately. Say, “We do not hit. Hitting hurts people.”
- **Give her examples** of peaceful words she can use instead of hitting or fighting. “It’s my turn now, please.”
- **Teach her to say “Stop!”** when another child is provoking her.

Practice saying, “Stop! I don’t like that!” If the other child won’t stop, your child should tell an adult.

- **Suggest alternatives** when she is truly so upset that she needs to do something to cool off. Outdoor alternatives to hitting and fighting include running, jumping or even a loud yell. Indoor choices could include drawing an “angry picture” or punching a pillow. You can even make a rule that “Hitting is for pillows only.”

Source: J.L. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, Ph.D., *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets From Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.