

Early Childhood Parents®

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A summer schedule helps preschoolers stay on track

When children follow a routine over the summer, returning to a school routine in the fall is easier for them. During the summer break, try these teacher-tested strategies to provide structure to the day:

- **Stick to the basics.** Preschoolers still need about 11 hours of sleep each night—even if they don't have to get up for preschool or day care. So if your child usually wakes up at 7 a.m., maintain an 8 p.m. bedtime. Also try to schedule breakfast, snacks, lunch and dinner around the same time every day.
- **Do some kind of "work"** during the day. Have your child do daily age-appropriate chores, such as putting toys and clothes away.
- **Schedule outdoor time** in the morning. The morning is a great time to play outside—especially if you live in a warm climate. Encourage physical activity in the coolest part of the day.
- **Plan quiet time after lunch.** Your child can take a nap or engage in screen-free activities, such as reading to a stuffed animal, working on a puzzle, etc.
- **Keep a calendar.** Will your child participate in a summer program or have scheduled visits with relatives? Mark these events on the calendar so that it is clear when they are coming up. Review the next day's plans each evening so your preschooler knows what to expect.

Add a learning element to your family travels



Traveling during the summer offers many opportunities for young children to sharpen their senses.

Time spent in the car, bus or train is perfect for activities that require kids to use their eyes, ears and hands to learn.

Here are six activities to try on your next travel day:

1. **Bring a cookie sheet** for your child to use as a lap desk. It's a perfect surface for arranging magnetic letters, coloring and holding a snack.
2. **Take along aluminum foil.** Show your child how to scrunch it into shapes and make animals or special jewelry with it.
3. **Download some audiobooks** for children and listen to them together.
4. **Practice math skills.** Make a game out of counting cows, billboard signs, blue cars or landmarks you pass.
5. **Play kid-friendly music.** Encourage your child to listen to the words and sing along.
6. **Take along a sketch pad** and crayons. Ask your child to draw some of the interesting things you see along your journey.

Set limits on your preschooler's passive recreational screen time



Children usually have more frequent access to screen devices in the summer than they do during the school year.

Limiting their use may be a challenge, but it is key to making sure your child has enough time for more productive activities.

To make screen-time limits work for your family:

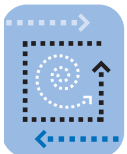
- **Create a schedule** and stick to it. For example, you might allow your preschooler to watch a 30-minute show in the morning and then play 30 minutes of digital games in the afternoon.
- **Be prepared.** Bring reading material with you. If you are traveling in a car or waiting in a line, hand your child a book instead of a digital device.

- **Make a list** of screen-free activities. Include things like coloring a picture, making a craft, playing with puppets, etc. If your child says "I'm bored," suggest an activity from the list.
- **Set controls.** If all else fails, put a timer on the TV that limits when it can be turned on. Put a password on your tablet and computer. Hide portable devices.

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents."

—Jane D. Hull

Teach the concept of time with calendars, paper chains and books



Time concepts can be challenging for young children to master, because understanding it requires higher-order thinking skills. To develop your child's sense of time:

- **Keep a calendar** in your child's bedroom. Let your preschooler mark special days with stickers. Explain that calendars are read from left to right. Each morning, ask your child to cross off the day before. This helps your preschooler learn that the preceding day is over, and a new one has begun.
- **Use time-related words** when looking at a calendar: "Let's put a sticker on *tomorrow*." "We went to visit Grandpa *yesterday*." "You

have soccer on *Wednesdays*." "Your birthday is on *February 20*." "*Today* is *Monday*."

- **Count how many days** there are until something fun. "Aunt Dot will be here in eight days!" Then, make a paper chain with one link for each day. Hang it in a place you and your child will notice. Each night, have your child tear off one link. Explain that just as the chain is getting shorter, so is the amount of time until the event.
- **Read books about time.** Try:
 - » *Chicken Soup with Rice: A Book of Months* by Maurice Sendak.
 - » *Cookie's Week* by Cindy Ward.
 - » *Can We Play: A Pop-Up, Lift-the-Flap Story About the Days of the Week* by Mara Van Der Meer.

Are you building your preschooler's 'word power'?



Knowing just the right word to use can give a preschooler real power. A strong vocabulary improves your child's

thinking and communication skills. And there is a clear connection between a strong vocabulary and academic success.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are expanding your child's word knowledge:

- ___ **1. Do you talk about words?** When reading books together, discuss the meanings of unfamiliar words.
- ___ **2. Do you use new words** for familiar ideas? "Let's tidy your room by *categorizing* your toys."
- ___ **3. Do you read books** with rich vocabulary and engaging storylines?
- ___ **4. Do you pick a Word of the Day** that family members try to use at least three times during that day?
- ___ **5. Do you use visual aids**, such as a "word wall" that contains new words and their definitions?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child learn and use words. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Build your child's literacy skills with summer reading activities



Reading over the summer helps preschoolers maintain the important literacy skills they've learned throughout the school year.

By incorporating reading activities into your daily routines, you can ensure your child is ready to thrive in the upcoming school year. Here are a few to try:

- **Continue having daily story time together.** Take advantage of the longer days by varying the times you read. Reading outside after dinner can be a nice change.
- **Create a summer reading nook** and fill it with pillows, stuffed animals and soft blankets.
- **Read everywhere.** See how many places you can find to read. Read

on a walk, at bath time, during meals and with relatives.

- **Refresh reading supplies often.** A weekly trip to the public library will ensure your child has a variety of reading material on a regular basis.
- **Read signs.** Can your preschooler recognize the word *stop* on the big red sign? What about the word *library* on the building? Look for other words your child sees frequently and point them out.
- **Keep in touch with a classmate.** Encourage your child to send drawings, letters or messages to preschool friends over the summer. Writing and reading these (with your help) is great literacy practice—as well as a chance to keep in touch.

Creating art reduces stress and boosts your child's thinking skills



Young children learn so much through creating art. When deciding what color to paint things, they are practicing decision-

making. When drawing pictures, they are learning self-expression. Creating art also reduces stress and activates the reward center of kids' brains.

Children learn the most from art when they have the freedom to create and make decisions on their own. The process of creating is more important than the final product.

To make sure your child gets the most from art time:

- **Provide a variety of art supplies.** Look for things you have around the house—glue, fabric scraps, paper plates, egg cartons, catalogs, paper towel tubes and yarn.

- **Help your child get started.** If your child wants to draw a cat, but doesn't know where to begin, ask questions: "What does a cat look like? What's the biggest part of a cat's body? How many legs does a cat have?"
- **Be patient and sensitive.** Some preschoolers don't like to get their hands dirty—and that's OK. Introduce materials slowly. Remember, art should be fun.
- **Talk about your child's creations.** Ask questions such as, "What is this?" "How did you make it?" "How does it make you feel?"
- **Proudly display your child's work** on a wall or the refrigerator. Send it to friends and relatives.

Source: M. Gharib, "Feeling Artsy? Here's How Making Art Helps Your Brain," National Public Radio.

Q: I love spending time with my children in the summer, but my preschooler is so active and adventurous that I am worried about safety! How can I keep my preschooler safe without squelching my child's spirit?

Questions & Answers

Children learn so much by exploring and testing new skills. However, you are right to be concerned about your preschooler's safety, especially during the summer months when accidents are more common.

The compromise is common sense. Let your child play and explore, but practice accident prevention. Here's how:

- **Be careful around water.** Keep a watchful eye—even if the water is shallow and your child knows how to swim.
- **Use sun protection.** Apply sunscreen to your child before going outdoors. Reapply often. Wearing a hat when in direct sunlight can further protect your child from sun exposure. Try to avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- **Check playground equipment** for safety. Ideally, the surface below it should be made of soft material, such as recycled tires, wood chips or mulch.
- **Require your child** to wear a helmet and protective gear when skating or riding. Insist your child ride or play in areas that are free of traffic.
- **Use caution around equipment.** It will be years before your child is old enough to handle a grill or a lawn mower. Until then, be sure your preschooler keeps a safe distance.

Have a safe summer filled with fun and learning!

The Kindergarten Experience

Focus on learning with your child over the summer



Ever wonder what's on your kindergartner's mind? A lot! At this age, cognitive development is exciting, thanks to new subjects at school and new abilities to explore and understand the world.

This summer, keep your child's focus on:

- **Language arts.** Your child may have already mastered the alphabet in many ways—singing, writing, recognizing and even reading. Strengthen reading comprehension by asking your child about each story's *beginning*, *middle* and *end*.
- **Math.** Continue to count everything you see and do with your child—the number of steps you climb, the number of books on a shelf, the number of birds you see on a walk. Point out basic shapes, such as triangles and squares. Then, introduce more complex figures, such as cubes and cones. Look for patterns, too. “The pattern on that sheet goes pink, orange, pink, orange.”
- **Concepts.** Talk about the meanings of words like *above/below*, *under/over* and *less/more*. Make it a game by naming and demonstrating opposite concepts. “This cup has *less*. This cup has ____ (*more*).” “This book is *above* the table. This book is ____ (*below*).”
- **Classic games.** Playing games such as make-believe, I Spy, Simon Says, etc. offers your child many ways to learn.

Take time to celebrate your child's kindergarten success

Graduating from kindergarten is something special to celebrate! This summer, take time to look back on the school year and prepare for more learning ahead. Make time to:

- **Talk to your child** about what went well this year. What school events did your family enjoy most? What schoolwork habits did your child develop? Ask questions, such as, “What friends did you make? What did you enjoy learning?”
- **Set exciting goals.** What would your child like to accomplish in first grade? Some goals can be academic (reading a book independently), and some can be personal (making new friends).
- **Explore the world.** Visit farms, marinas, airports and historical sites, too. Take a daily walk and talk about the environment.



- **Prepare for learning.** Engage in activities that will make learning easier next year. Read, do simple science experiments, practice math skills and build social skills.

Keep your child motivated as the school year winds down



Toward the end of the school year, it's tempting to relax about school responsibilities. But every day of kindergarten counts! Your child is building skills that are necessary for success in first grade and beyond.

To maintain motivation until the last day, focus on:

- **Interests.** Kids try hardest when they're fascinated by activities. When practicing a math skill, pick an activity that's challenging—but not so hard that your child wants

to give up. Progress and success motivate kids to keep trying.

- **Freedom.** Give your child lots of opportunities to solve problems independently. Provide simple toys, such as blocks and toy characters, to promote creativity.
- **Emotion.** Help your child feel capable. While praise is valuable, genuine interest and accomplishments (rather than compliments) encourage kids most. Sometimes it helps to ask, “How do you think you did?” Then, agree with your child's positive assessment!