

# Early Childhood Parents®

October 2024  
Vol. 29, No. 2

Cornbelt Educational Cooperative

*make the difference!*



## Enhance your preschooler's focus with quiet activities

**P**reschoolers who pay attention and try their best are more likely to go on to finish college, says an Oregon State University study. Fortunately, experts say these habits can be taught.

To expand your child's attention span and concentration skills:

- **Keep work areas free of clutter.** Most children find it easier to concentrate without too many objects around them.
- **Read together.** The ability to listen to and follow a story is a building block of a child's attention span.
- **Limit recreational screen time.** Simply watching videos is a passive activity. When your child does watch, try to watch together and talk about the content.

- **Pick a detailed picture** in a book. Have your child look at it for one minute and then take it away. Then, say, "Tell me everything you can remember about the picture."
- **Encourage independent play.** Give your child a simple jigsaw puzzle to work on independently. As your child improves, increase the puzzle difficulty.
- **Use a timer.** Sit your child down with some toys, play dough or blocks. Set the timer for 10 minutes and ask your child to play quietly until it goes off. Help your child work up to 15 or 20 minutes of independent play each day.

Source: M.M. McClelland and others, "Relations Between Preschool Attention Span-Persistence and Age 25 Educational Outcomes," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier.

## Geography begins with simple maps



The results from the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

reveals that only 25% of students are proficient in geography.

However, studies show that children can and do get interested in geography. One effective way to foster that interest is to start when they are young by focusing on the places that are most meaningful to them.

Teach your preschooler to draw a simple map that includes your family's house and street. The map can be as basic as a square with a triangle on top for the house and a straight line underneath for the road. What matters is that the place is familiar to your child.

Drawing simple maps like these helps your child think "geographically." A child who draws a map of a house at the age of five may go on to draw the neighborhood at eight and the city at 12.

Source: P. Brillante, Ed.D. and S. Mankiw, Ed.D., "A Sense of Place: Human Geography in the Early Childhood Classroom," *Young Children*, National Association for the Education of Young Children.

# Show your preschooler how to speak and act respectfully



When educators are asked about the most important thing for children to learn at home, many give the same answer: respect.

That's not surprising. If children don't have respect for authority, peers, belongings and themselves, it's almost impossible for them to succeed in school or in life. To foster respect:

- **Expect cooperation.** Talk about it with your child. For example, say that when you or the preschool teachers ask your child to do a task, it needs to be completed—even if your child doesn't feel like doing it.
- **Encourage patience.** Help your child learn to wait for a person to finish talking before speaking up. Explain that when students want to speak to the teacher during class, they should raise their hands.

- **Promote sharing.** Encourage your child to share toys and other belongings with siblings and friends. Remind your child to ask permission to use someone else's item—and to return it in good condition.
- **Inspire kindness.** Prompt your child to say nice things to friends, such as, "Did you have fun with your grandma?" "I like the picture you drew." "That's a cool hat!"

**"It's not so much the journey that's important; as is the way that we treat those we encounter and those around us, along the way."**

—Jeremy Aldana

# Three strategies can build your child's reading readiness skills



Few things predict success in school more than being a strong reader. While it may be one or two years before

your preschooler learns how to read, there are things you can do now to boost reading readiness:

1. **Read aloud with your child** every day. This is an opportunity to spend time together as well as to improve literacy skills. Children look forward to daily time with family—which is also a great way to encourage a love of reading.
2. **Demonstrate how reading works.** Provide a foundation by making your child aware of the structure of the printed page. Say, "We read from the left side of the

page to the right side of the page. Then, we begin again on the left." Point to the sides of the page as you do this.

3. **Point out letters and words** everywhere you see them. This helps with reading, spelling and understanding books later on. Point out familiar letters, such as the letters in your child's name. Explain the connection: "This word starts with the letter T. That's the same letter that your name starts with, Tracey. What other words start with the letter T?"

As your child learns the letters, move on to familiar words. When you read books, look together in the text for words your child sees often, such as *stop*, *milk* or *love*.

# Are you teaching and practicing listening skills?



The most important part of communication isn't talking—it's *listening*. And listening skills will help your child in every

class in school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child become a good listener:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you try to give** your undivided attention when your child is talking? If you're busy, say, "I'd love to talk about this after I cook dinner."
- \_\_\_ 2. **Are you patient** when you listen? Sometimes, it may take a while for young children to actually say what they want to say.
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you avoid interrupting** when your child is talking? Do you ask your child not to interrupt you?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you "listen"** to your child's behavior? A child who is acting up is communicating a need.
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you avoid breaking in** with the "right" answer? If possible, let your child try to figure it out.

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're reinforcing listening skills. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

Early Childhood  
**Parents**  
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents  
to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:  
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through September.  
Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute,  
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an  
independent, private agency. Equal  
opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Daily family fitness enhances your child's school performance



You already know that exercise leads to better health. Among other things, regular physical activity reduces the risk of diabetes, obesity and some types of cancer. But did you know that staying fit can also help your child do better in school?

Studies show that children who exercise have better motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance and focus. They also have better listening skills, and may fidget less in class. When kids burn off extra energy by running, jumping and skipping, it's easier to sit still when the time comes.

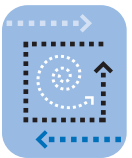
Research shows that preschoolers' activity levels are linked to their families' activity levels. Your child takes cues from you, so if you want to inspire more movement, lead the way.

To add more exercise into your family's daily routine:

- **Take walks together.** If the corner store is right down the block, ditch the car and walk to it instead.
- **Shut off digital devices.** Set a screen-free period each day, and your child may be more willing to go out and play.
- **Change your after-dinner routine.** Rather than reaching for dessert, reach for a ball. Kicking a ball around outside is much healthier than eating a cookie.
- **Explore the outdoors.** When was the last time you visited a local park or playground? Slip on your sneakers, grab your preschooler and start the adventure.

Source: S.L. Barkin and others, "Parent's Physical Activity Associated With Preschooler Activity in Underserved Populations," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Elsevier.

# Have fun with science by turning your bathtub into a laboratory



Most preschoolers love to splish and splash in the bathtub. While getting clean, they can also learn some important science concepts.

To turn your tub into a science lab, gather together some of these "science" tools: sponges, plastic boats, empty plastic bottles, a small rock, a spoon, straws, plastic pitchers, a large plastic bowl, bubble bath solution and rubber animals.

When in the tub, encourage your child to:

- **Guess which items** will sink and which ones will float. Then, have your child test predictions.
- **Use the pitchers** to pour and measure. Talk about the meanings of *full*, *half full* and *empty*.

- **Fill one container** with water and another with only soap bubbles. Talk about the concepts of *heavy* and *light*.
- **Pour water** into the plastic bottles. Ask your child, "Which has more water?" "Which has less?" Have your child pour each bottle's water into a bowl to verify predictions.
- **Float a large bowl** on the water. Help your child count how many rubber animals will fit in the "boat" before it sinks.
- **Pour a small amount** of bubble bath solution into the bowl and add water. Help your child use the straw to blow into the soapy water. How big can your child make the bubbles? Talk about what causes the bubbles to form.

**Q:** I am worried that my happy-go-lucky preschooler is turning into a perfectionist. Since starting preschool this year, my child has been saying things like, "My coloring is sloppy and I'm the slowest runner in the class." How can I help my child focus less on what others are doing?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Before entering preschool, many children never think about how neat their coloring is or how fast they run. However, once they begin preschool, many start comparing themselves to others.

When children see what everyone else is doing, every day, it's only natural for them to wonder if they are falling short.

To reassure you preschooler:

- **Emphasize effort.** Research shows that it is *effort*, rather than *ability*, that ultimately leads to success. Say things like, "Look how hard you worked on that picture." Or, "You always try your best."
- **Talk about mistakes.** Let your child know that people learn through their mistakes. Say, "Sometimes things don't work out. This is a great opportunity for us to think about what you could you do differently next time."
- **Avoid judgment.** Words like *best* and *worst* just add fuel to a perfectionist's fire. Your preschooler looks to you as a model. If you avoid comparisons, your child may stop making comparisons, too.
- **Just have fun.** Every day, do something with your child that is pleasurable for the two of you. Read, sing a song, go for a walk. Children need time away from work, just like adults do.



# The Kindergarten Experience

## Maintain healthy balance in your child's schedule



It's natural to want to structure life so your child is on a path to success. But if almost every minute of your

kindergartner's waking hours is scheduled with schoolwork, chores and extracurricular activities, your child is overcommitted.

Overscheduled children can become overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, discouraged and ultimately unmotivated. These children eventually find it difficult to keep up in school.

Take time this month to review your kindergartner's schedule and make sure it's balanced. Here's how:

- **Help your child select** one or two structured activities that match interests and abilities.
- **Schedule one to two hours** of free time each day for your child. This time should not be spent on screen activities. Instead, give your child access to art supplies, games, books, etc.
- **Expect some boredom.** Boredom is actually beneficial! It can motivate children to listen to their inner voice. They imagine, tinker, write, draw and create.
- **Plan for "unrushed" family time.** Schedule times that are completely open to just pattering around the house and yard together. Listen to music. Take a walk. Do anything you and your child enjoy that has no particular goal.

Source: B. Saavedra, *Creating Balance in Your Child's Life*, Contemporary Books/McGraw-Hill.

## Get the most out of your next parent-teacher conference

October usually means it's time for parent-teacher conferences. You may be a little nervous, especially if you don't know what to expect, but take heart.

Conferences are valuable for both you and the teacher. They are an effective way to share information that will help your child succeed.

To make your next parent-teacher conference a success:

- **Prepare in advance.** Think about the questions you'd like to ask the teacher, or thoughts you'd like to share about your child. Write them down so you don't forget them.
- **Be on time.** The teacher will appreciate your promptness, and you'll be sure to get every available moment to discuss your child.
- **Listen.** The teacher will have things prepared to share with you. Listen and then share your thoughts.
- **Ask for suggestions.** What can you do to help your child at home? Are there skills the teacher would like you to focus on?
- **Follow up.** Make sure the teacher knows the best way to contact you in the future.



## Help your kindergartner develop a positive attitude about school



It's a fact: Some kids just don't like going to school. And while you can't *force* your child to love school, you can

inspire a more positive attitude about it. Here's how:

- **Talk about school every day.** Ask, "What were your favorite parts of the day?" It's OK if lunch and recess top the list. What matters is that your child has happy times at school. Ask about what your child is learning, too.
- **Say nice things about teachers** and encourage your child to bond with them. Say, "Your teacher cares about you and want to help you learn." Suggest your child draw special pictures for teachers, too.
- **Foster friendships.** Help your child get to know school friends better. Invite a classmate over to play, or include a friend in a family activity.
- **Demonstrate a positive attitude.** Regularly express enjoyment when you learn new things, big and small.