

Early Childhood Parents®

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Routines and limits build your child's school-readiness

Young children need time to play, explore, dream, create and relax. But psychologists agree that kids benefit most from doing these things as part of a structured day.

Routines and limits at home provide that needed structure. They also support academic success and can boost your preschooler's attention span.

Here's how to get started:

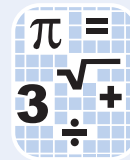
- **Follow routines consistently.** Adequate sleep, healthy meals and quiet play all help your child pay attention. Establish a regular nap time and bedtime that allows your child to get at least 11 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Serve meals and snacks at predictable times. Promote daily quiet time, free

from programmed activities, loud noises and screens.

- **Set a few basic rules** and consequences. Your child's ability to follow rules will affect school success. Children who follow rules are learning to control their behavior—which results in a greater ability to stay focused and learn.
- **Practice transitions.** The ability to move smoothly from one activity to the next is another valuable school skill. Give your child notice when it's time to switch activities. This will ease anxiety and improve concentration.

Source: Mary Louise Hemmeter and others, "Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: A Conceptual Model for Intervention," *School Psychology Review*.

Help your child create charts and graphs



Give emerging math skills a boost by showing your child how to create and understand simple charts and graphs.

Here are a couple to try:

- **A survey.** Pick a question, such as, "What is your favorite pet?" Have your child draw a dog, cat and a fish at the top of a piece of paper, leaving space between and underneath each animal. Then, have your child ask family and friends to pick the pet they like best. Each time a person picks an animal, your child should draw a smile underneath it. When the survey is complete, help your child count the smiles to see which animal has the most.
- **A weather chart.** Help your child make a calendar by drawing a square for each day of the month. Write the day of the week and the date at the top of each square. Each day, read the day and date on that day's square. Then, have your child draw a picture of the day's weather in the square—a sun, a cloud, a snowflake or a raindrop.

Use music lyrics to boost your child's emerging literacy skills



Listening to music benefits your child in many ways. And listening to music with lyrics can build

language skills that contribute to reading readiness.

When you enjoy music with lyrics together, your child:

- **Learns to listen** for repeated sounds. Recognizing sounds is a huge step toward reading.
- **Is exposed to patterns** and devices used in literature and poetry, such as rhyme and alliteration.
- **Expands vocabulary.** Song lyrics are a gateway to learning new words.

- **Practices repetition**, which improves fluency. Listening to song lines that repeat helps your child become familiar with them and eventually repeat them.
- **Hears a story.** Listening to the lyrics of a song gives your child practice with comprehension.

Source: P. Parker, "Five things to know about music and early literacy," State of Opportunity.

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything."

—Plato

Learning lessons of respect prepares your child for school



It's difficult to learn in a classroom where students don't show respect for others.

Thankfully, it's easy to teach about respect at home.

Talk to your preschooler about what it means to show respect for people and property. Give real-life examples and find ways to demonstrate it. For example, you can:

- **Draw attention to respectful behavior** when you see it. Thank the person who holds a door open for you. Thank the playmate who shares a book with your child.
- **Be a role model.** Wait politely in line or elsewhere. Talk to your child about being patient. "I wish it were our turn. But let's smile and play a quiet game while we wait."
- **Watch a TV show** together and discuss the characters' behavior.

Who is being respectful? Who isn't? How can your child tell?

- **Write a song or poem** about respect with your child. It can be silly, as long as it's meaningful and easy for your child to remember. Recite it cheerfully together.
- **Plan ahead.** If you're going somewhere, ask your child to think of three ways to show respect while there. For example, at the library your child should speak quietly, handle reading materials carefully and put books back on the shelves.
- **Create a collage.** Look through a magazine together and find pictures of people behaving respectfully. Cut them out and have your child glue them onto paper.

Source: M. Borba, Ed.D., *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues that Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, Jossey-Bass.

Are you helping your child get enough sleep?



Children need plenty of sleep to learn and grow. Are you promoting positive sleep habits?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the

questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you enforce** a consistent, reasonable bedtime—and usually stick to it, even on weekends?

___ **2. Do you follow** relaxing bedtime routines, such as bathing, brushing teeth and reading?

___ **3. Do you make sure** your child gets the right amount of sleep? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends at least 11 hours per night for preschoolers.

___ **4. Do you end screen time** at least 30 minutes before bedtime to prevent difficulty falling asleep? (Remember, this includes tablets and handheld electronic games.)

___ **5. Do you eliminate distractions**, such as the TV and loud phone calls, in the area where your child is sleeping?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're promoting good sleep habits. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

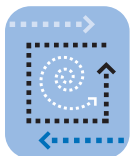
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Studies show that preschoolers prefer real-life tasks over fantasy



Fantasy play is a natural part of childhood. After all, what child doesn't enjoy pretending to be a superhero or a princess?

But studies show that when it comes to real-life tasks, young children prefer reality to make-believe. In other words, they may not enjoy pretending to do something as much as they like actually doing it. Why? Because children—even preschoolers—want to have a meaningful role in the world.

Does this mean you should swap your child's plastic lawn mower for the dangerous real thing? Of course not! But there are kid-friendly swaps that will make "play" feel important to your child. Here are three ideas:

1. Cutting up fruit. Your child loves using a rubber knife to

mimic chopping food, so why not give an age-appropriate job in the kitchen? Give your child a plastic knife and demonstrate how to cut banana slices with it.

- 2. Playing music.** Your child may have a bin of play mini musical instruments. Consider letting your child try out real-life versions. Your child may get a greater thrill out of banging on a full-sized tambourine than a pint-sized plastic one.
- 3. Gardening.** If your child's tiny pink shovel doesn't do much, offer a hand spade instead. Show how to push it into the dirt and help you with your gardening.

Source: B. Bower, "When it's playtime, many kids prefer reality over fantasy," *Science News*.

Q: My four-year-old child does not seem as talkative as my older child was at this age. Should I be worried? What language skills are typical for a four-year-old?

Questions & Answers

A: Every child is unique, and that includes the rate at which they develop language skills. There are, however, some language milestones and skills to listen for.

Most four-year-olds:

- **Enjoy talking** and asking questions. Some have a hard time stopping once they get going.
- **Use language** in different ways. They might like to sing and recite nursery rhymes in addition to using normal speech.
- **Are usually understood** by people outside their own family. Grammar and usage aren't perfect, but people can understand what the child means to say without having to ask someone to clarify.
- **Are starting to use various tenses.** "I jumped up high." Or, "I'm going to Drake's house."
- **Can give basic information.** They can say their first and last names. They can tell you a sibling's name or the name of a favorite friend. They may even be able to say the name of their street or their address.
- **Use some prepositions.** "My kitty is *under* the table." "I put my toys *in* the toy box."

Is your preschooler doing most of the above? If so, your child's language skills are likely just fine. But it never hurts to ask an expert. Check in with the preschool teacher or a pediatrician. They can tell you if your child's language skills are age-appropriate.

Celebrate Valentine's Day with skill-building activities



There are lots of ways to celebrate Valentine's Day with your child. Try a few of these fun learning activities:

- **Build math skills** in the kitchen by baking some heart-shaped treats. Let your child help with the counting and measuring. "We need two cups of flour. Let's count them as we put them in."
- **Sharpen observation skills** by going on a "heart hunt." Take a walk with your child or go on a car ride together. Who can find the most hearts?
- **Spark creativity** by making cards for family and friends. There's no need for expensive materials. Your loved ones will appreciate one of your child's drawings, tucked in an envelope. Your child can make an X and an O at the bottom of the picture to symbolize a kiss and a hug.
- **Boost language skills** by creating rhymes. It's easy to find words that rhyme with *valentine* and *day*. Help your child think of some rhyming words for each. For example, *fine*, *mine* and *shine* rhyme with *valentine*; *play*, *say* and *way* rhyme with *day*.
- **Encourage reading readiness** by reading books about Valentine's Day and love. Snuggle up with your child and share books such as *Heart to Heart* by Lois Ehlert, *Love* by Matt de la Peña and *Ollie's Valentine* by Olivier Dunrea.

The Kindergarten Experience

Help your child learn about the solar system



Your kindergartner probably knows about the sun and the moon. But what about the rest of our solar system? Chances are it will fascinate your child—and you, too!

Consider taking a week to focus on solar system activities. Plan one for each school day. You and your child might:

- **Do research.** Visit the library and check out books. In the book *There's No Place Like Space: All About Our Solar System*, for example, the Cat in the Hat tours the solar system. Go online, too. You'll find amazing pictures at www.NASA.gov.
- **Draw or print a picture** of each planet. Refer to books or websites before coloring them in. What do scientists know about how each planet *really* looks?
- **Make a book.** Combine your research and drawings. Your child can add planets' names to each page—or dictate details for you to write.
- **Make a model.** Think of creative ways to represent the planets. Use items such as fruit and balls. Line up the “planets” in the order they appear in the solar system.
- **Bake planets.** Find a cookie recipe and let your child shape the dough into “planets.” Help your child decorate each cookie with details that show what you've learned.
- **Play pretend.** Have your child pretend to be an astronaut exploring different planets.

Social skills are key for your child's kindergarten success

For most children, one of the most exciting things about kindergarten is spending time with classmates and teachers.

To make these experiences successful, work with your child on basic social skills, including:

- **Introductions.** Role-play with your child. Make eye contact, smile and say, “Hi! My name is Taylor!”
- **Manners.** Encourage your child to say *please* and *thank you*.
- **Starting conversations.** When wanting to join in a game, what could your child say? “That looks like fun! Can I play, too?”
- **Understanding.** Discuss how other people feel. “You have colored pencils, and your sister also wants to color.” Practice sharing.
- **Solving problems.** “What if Jamie took the toy you were using?” Talk



about how and when to ask for the teacher's help.

- **Apologizing.** Saying *I'm sorry* after making a mistake can foster positive relationships.

Expand thinking by asking your kindergartner questions



Every day is filled with opportunities to help your kindergartner think. As you observe the world together, talk about what you see and ask your child questions.

Here are a few to get you started:

- **What are some things** that make our family special?
- **If you could go anywhere**, where would you go?
- **If you could make** any animal talk, what animal would it be? What might it say?
- **What would you do** if you were invisible?
- **What is your favorite season**—winter, spring, summer or fall? What do you love about it?
- **If you could receive any gift** in the world, what would it be?
- **If you could give any gift** in the world, what would it be?