

# Early Childhood Parents<sup>®</sup>

January 2021  
Vol. 25, No. 5

Region 16 ESC Title III SSA

*make the difference!*



## Create a learning-rich home with these three strategies

**Y**our child's formal education will take place when he starts school. However, a lot of crucial learning happens right at home. In fact, the things he learns at home now may have the biggest impact on how he does in school later.

According to research, kids who grow up in learning-rich homes have the best chance of thriving in school—and the benefits are long-lasting.

What do learning-rich homes have that others don't?

1. **Literacy activities.**
  2. **Educational materials.**
  3. **Quality interaction with parents.**
- Luckily, none of these is expensive, and none requires special expertise.

To create a learning environment for your child:

- **Read together.** Point out new words. Run your finger under each sentence to show how text goes left to right. Ask your child questions about what you read.
- **Offer educational toys.** Use puzzles to hone problem-solving skills. Try dominoes to teach numbers. Play with blocks. Grab a pot and a wooden spoon and make music.
- **Talk.** Have conversations with your child every day. Show him you care about what he's thinking and feeling. Engaging in conversations teaches your child to interact, builds his vocabulary and stimulates learning.

**Source:** "Child's Home Learning Environment Predicts 5th Grade Academic Skills," New York University, [niscw.com/ec\\_environment](http://niscw.com/ec_environment).

## Help your child learn letters in creative ways



Recognizing letters is an important step toward reading and writing readiness.

Thankfully, it can also be fun! To teach your child about letters in engaging ways:

- **Make them out of food.** Give her kid-friendly, tasty supplies to create letters, such as circle-shaped crackers and small, straight pretzels. Allow your child to break up foods to form letters, too.
- **Light them up.** In a dark room, use the light beam from a flashlight to draw letters on a ceiling or wall. Can your child follow the beam and figure out the letters you're writing?
- **Start with parts.** Draw a shape or line for your child, such as a circle or diagonal line. Let her add to it, eventually making a letter, such as T or N. Offer hints as needed. Then, switch roles and let her draw the first line.
- **Play letter match.** Write letters in uppercase and lowercase on a sheet of paper. Have your child draw lines from each lowercase letter to its uppercase match.

## Making predictions builds your preschooler's thinking skills



Making predictions requires kids to consider evidence and recognize patterns. Even a young child can make educated guesses based on what he knows.

To help your child predict, use:

- **Books.** Predicting what will happen next in the story helps him understand what you're reading to him. Before turning the page, ask, "After they get in the boat, where do you think they will go?"
- **Experiences.** "What will we see on our way to Grandma's house?" "Will it be hot or cold when we go outside?"
- **Familiar routines.** "I am wearing my uniform and I'm getting ready

to leave. Where do you think I am going?" "What will we do when we finish eating dinner?" "What do you think you'll need for your bath?"

Be sure to discuss your child's prediction results, too. "You said we would see a horse farm on the way to Grandma's house. There it is. Look, I see one black horse and three brown horses!"

**"Did you ever stop to think, and forget to start again?"**

—Winnie the Pooh

## When it comes to illustrations in books, more isn't always better!



Your child loves picture books, but if each page is filled with too many illustrations, it could slow her language learning.

Why? Because when preschoolers see multiple pictures on a page, they can struggle to follow the story (possibly because they aren't sure where to look).

One study showed that young children who were read stories with one illustration per page learned twice as many new words as children shown pages with multiple pictures. This doesn't mean you shouldn't share picture books with your child—all reading is valuable—but you may want to consider the illustrations when choosing them.

To maximize your child's language learning when reading together:

- **Seek out** books with a single picture per page. One splashy, engaging illustration may hold your child's

attention and help her better grasp the words she's hearing.

- **Avoid too many** lift-the-flap books. These stories are fun, but they may actually hinder your child's word acquisition. That's because the act of lifting the flaps and looking underneath distracts from the words on the page. (Don't toss your child's favorite flaps, of course! Just include plenty of regular books during story time, too.)
- **Clarify** multi-illustration stories. When reading your child books with more than one picture per page, point to the drawing that goes with whatever text you're reading at the moment. This will help her connect the words to the correct illustration. And that, in turn, can bolster her book smarts!

**Source:** Z.M. Flack and J.S. Horst, "Two sides to every story: Children learn words better from one storybook page at a time," *Infant and Child Development*, niswc.com/ec\_pictures.

## Are you making patience a priority in your home?



Preschoolers can try parents' patience. However, patience is a vital school success trait for your child to develop—and he can learn it by watching you!

Are you promoting patience in your home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you give** your child time to master new skills, such as pouring a drink or zipping his jacket?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you stay calm** when your child is upset? Model how you want him to act in difficult situations.

\_\_\_ **3. Do you try to relax** when you have to wait? Show your child how to take turns politely.

\_\_\_ **4. Do you avoid rushing?** Following routines and schedules can prevent impatience and the need to push kids to "hurry up."

\_\_\_ **5. Do you forgive yourself** and others? Show your child how to learn from mistakes and be positive about the future.

### How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are promoting patience. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

Early Childhood  
**Parents**  
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

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Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

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

Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
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# Five ways to enrich family time with your preschooler in 2020



What your preschooler wants most from you is for you to spend time with him. No matter how much time you spend with your child now, make a New Year's resolution to make the most of that time!

Here are five ways to get started:

- 1. Focus on *quantity*** as well as quality. Thirty minutes of playing on the floor with your child is wonderful. But taking him on your Saturday afternoon walk and talking with him the whole time is even better. (Make sure he is well-rested and fed ahead of time!)
- 2. Involve your child** in family life. Let him help you prepare meals. Ask him to do simple chores, such as dusting. If the weather is nice, he can also work outdoors and pick up sticks from your yard or sidewalk.
- 3. Eat meals together as a family.** Research shows that more conversation and family bonding happens around the table than anywhere else.
- 4. Exercise together.** Move with your child daily. Walk, bike, skate—even climbing stairs counts.
- 5. Engage in your child's interests.** If he loves to color, sit down and color a picture with him. If he likes dinosaurs, read books about dinosaurs together. Watch his favorite television show together and then ask him to tell you why he likes it.

## Research shows authoritative parenting is most effective



Researchers describe a kind of discipline that has positive effects on kids. They call it *authoritative parenting*. Authoritative

parents are caring, yet firm. They:

- **Set appropriate limits.** For example, children are not allowed to hit. Instead, they're encouraged to say things like, "I'm angry because ..."
  - **Are consistent.** They choose a few essential rules and stick to them.
  - **Communicate effectively** with children. It's easier for young kids to follow calm, simple and brief instructions.
  - **Have reasonable expectations.** When parents expect too much, kids are doomed to fail. Expecting too little, on the other hand, hurts kids' skills and confidence.
- **Give children opportunities** to be responsible and make choices. A young child might help set the table, water a house plant or choose between two outfits.
  - **Support children's independence.** It's challenging, but critical, to allow the right amount of freedom—enough for children to grow without risking their well-being.
  - **Accept children for who they are.** Children need to feel good about themselves and their strengths. Disciplining in a loving, caring way isn't always easy—especially if it feels more natural to yell. But the results of authoritative parenting are clear: Kids are more accomplished and feel better about themselves. That's worth the effort!

**Source:** A. Fletcher, "Positive Discipline and Child Guidance," University of Missouri Extension.

**Q:** Next week, my daughter's preschool will host a kindergarten readiness night. In February, the school would like pre-K parents to tell them whether their children will return for another year of preschool or head off to kindergarten. How do I know if my child will be ready for kindergarten?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Lots of parents feel confused when it's time to make a decision about kindergarten. Some think that kids have to be able to read and write before they are ready to move on from preschool.

That's not the case. The teachers at your child's new school will teach her to how read and write. What kindergarten teachers want is for children to have skills that make them ready to learn.

A child who will be successful in kindergarten can:

- **Listen and follow directions.** Kindergarten teachers understand they are dealing with five-year-olds and will not give complicated directions. But when the teacher tells your child it's time to sit down and listen to the story, she needs to do it.
- **Cooperate and take turns.** Your child may be in a classroom of 20 or more students next year. She will need to know how to get along with them. That means thinking about others' feelings and sharing the attention of adults.
- **Take care of basic needs.** When she arrives, she will be expected to put away her backpack. Your child should be able to use the restroom independently and wash her hands.

If you are still unsure about your child's readiness, ask her preschool teacher for some guidance.



# The Kindergarten Experience

## Confidence can boost your child's school success



One of the most effective ways to help kindergarten students succeed in school is to help them feel good about themselves. When your child has healthy self-esteem, he sees himself as a capable person—ready to tackle all sorts of challenges.

To boost your child's confidence, teach him these three lessons:

- 1. He is competent.** Too many parents say *yes* when a child wants a new toy, but *no* when he tries to help the family. If you are doing laundry, for example, and your child asks, "Can I do that?" you can answer, "Sure, please start handing me everything that is white."
- 2. He is secure enough to wait.** Your child deserves your attention, but not *all* of your attention. He should frequently hear things like, "I am helping your brother right now. Your turn will come later." Or, "I need to finish reading this article. You will be fine coloring your picture while I do this."
- 3. He can entertain himself.** Spend time with your child, but don't feel the need to keep him constantly fascinated. Suggest activities that he can do—read a book, draw a picture, put together a puzzle—and encourage him to do them on his own. When he does, remember to compliment his creativity and his efforts.

**Source:** J.I. Clarke, Ph.D. and others, *How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible and Respectful Children—From Toddlers to Teens*, Marlowe & Company.

## Keep your kindergartner healthy over winter months

**W**inter is known as the cold and flu season. Couple that with a pandemic, and it's no wonder parents are concerned about their children getting sick.

While it is impossible to keep your child from ever getting sick, take steps to give her the best chance of staying healthy—and ready to learn.

Here's how:

- **Make sure your child** gets 10 to 12 hours of sleep every night.
- **Have your child** wash her hands regularly. This prevents the spread of 80% of infections, including COVID-19.
- **Make sure your child** wears warm clothing if you live in a cold climate. Much of a person's body heat escapes through the head, so wearing a hat is a great idea, too.
- **Keep your child** up-to-date on medical visits and vaccinations.
- **Feed your child** a healthy diet.
- **Avoid exposing** your child to people who are already sick.



## Strategies to help your child overcome schoolwork struggles



Most kindergartners enjoy learning and interacting with their teachers. However, many are not quite as interested in completing assignments. While you can be understanding, you also want to support your child's learning. It's important to:

- **Keep the purpose** of schoolwork in mind. It reinforces emerging skills, helps your child develop good habits and helps you keep up with your child's progress.
- **Talk with the teacher** about expectations. How long should assignments take? How much should you help? Also discuss any concerns. If schoolwork is frustrating or takes too long, look for solutions together.
- **Have a positive attitude.** Encourage your kindergartner to take pride in doing a "big kid" job. Say things, like: "You finished all of your schoolwork. How grown up!"
- **Offer choices.** "Would you like to do reading or math first?" Having a say can boost motivation.
- **Establish routines**, such as working at the same time each day. When kids develop habits, they're more likely to follow through.