

Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

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Five reasons you should read aloud to your child every day

Reading aloud to young children is one of the most effective things parents can do to help prepare their children to succeed in school. But according to the Reach Out and Read National Center, a nonprofit group focused on reading research, fewer than half of children under five are read to daily.

Here are five reasons why reading to children is so important:

1. **Children** who regularly see books and other reading material and who listen to reading aloud have a better chance of learning to read in the primary grades than children who do not.
2. **Reading aloud** gives parents and children an opportunity to share

affection. Preschoolers feel positive attention when their parents read aloud to them—which builds children’s feelings of self-worth and confidence.

3. **Reading aloud** encourages children to think and use their imaginations.
4. **Reading aloud** is another way to help preschoolers learn language. Children with strong language skills tend to do better in school.
5. **Children** almost always hear words in books that they don’t hear in everyday language. So reading aloud to children is one of the most effective ways to strengthen their vocabulary.

Source: “Importance of Reading Aloud,” Reach Out and Read, niswc.com/ec_readaloud.

Help your child recover from small setbacks



As your preschooler explores and tries new things, it’s only natural that he will experience some

failures. Learning how to bounce back in these situations will serve him well in school and in life.

To help your child recover:

- **Be empathetic.** “I can see how sad you are that you didn’t make it across the monkey bars. It’s disappointing when you try to do something and it doesn’t work out.”
- **Offer encouragement.** “Sometimes kids must grow before their arms are strong enough to make it across the monkey bars. You’re growing fast and I think you’ll be ready soon. Let’s try again and see how far across you can get!”
- **Be a good role model.** Your child notices how you react to your own disappointments, so handle them with grace. For example, if a new recipe doesn’t turn out well, say “I tried something new and gave it my best shot—that’s what matters most. I’ll try again.”

Source: J. Lahey, *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, Harper.

Introduce your preschooler to the power of the five senses



Children learn about their world through seeing, touching, tasting, hearing and smelling. To help your child appreciate what he can do with his senses:

- **Play 1-2-3 Look and See.** Put five items on the table. Ask your child to look at them, then cover his eyes. Take one item away. When he opens his eyes, can he guess what's missing?
- **Make a "feely" bag.** Place a variety of small items in a paper bag. Have your child close his eyes, reach his hand in and pick up an item. Can he guess what it is without looking?
- **Take a smell walk.** Lead your child around your house with his eyes closed. See what smells he can sniff and name.
- **Have a taste test.** Have your child place salt on the tip, side and back of his tongue. Then, repeat with sugar and lemon juice. Discuss which part of his tongue is more sensitive to which taste.
- **Have a listening minute.** Stand outside in the dark with your child. Have him guess the sounds he hears in the night.

"If I, deaf, blind, find life rich and interesting, how much more can you gain by the use of your five senses!"

—Helen Keller

Taking regular walks can help your preschooler learn and grow



Parents often rack their brains for new ways to nurture their children's learning. Simply add learning to an activity

you are probably doing anyway: taking a walk.

Walking will not only help your child stay physically fit, it can also boost her observation, math and communication skills. The key is to make walks interesting and fun. Here's how:

- **Count cats or dogs**—or anything you see! Different kinds of cars. Fire hydrants. Swings.
- **Search for five things** you and your child have never seen before.
- **Identify shapes.** What do you see that is round? Square? Oblong?
- **Point out numbers**—on mailboxes, buildings or signs.
- **See how many things** your child can find of a certain color.
- **Look for things** that need to be fixed. Overgrown weeds. A pothole. Broken windows or fences.
- **Find things** that make each of you happy. Fall leaves. A baby in a stroller. A smiling neighbor.
- **Identify letters** of the alphabet on signs. Or call out the first letter of things you pass. "M" for mailbox.
- **Play a game of I Spy.** Look ahead of you and say, "I spy something ... (smooth, pink, etc.)." See if your child can locate it. Take turns spying and guessing.
- **Be silly.** Every 20 steps or so, do something for your child to imitate—clap your hands, hop, skip or dance.
- **Notice things** that have changed since your last walk.

Are you teaching your child to be a keen listener?



Listening is a vital skill for school success—and it can be fun to practice! Are you finding creative ways to help your child develop her listening skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you play games** that require careful listening, such as Simon Says?
- ___ **2. Do you take turns** telling a story with your child? You make up a sentence, then your child makes up the next sentence.
- ___ **3. Do you send** your child on short missions to bring you things? Each round, you can add more items.
- ___ **4. Do you clap** a rhythm and ask your child to clap back the same rhythm?
- ___ **5. Do you play** Guess the Sound? Your child shuts her eyes and you make a sound—jingling keys, crumpling paper, pouring water, etc. Your child has to guess the sound. Then switch places!

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping your child have fun as she strengthens her listening skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Family routines increase your child's social-emotional health



Routines don't have to be boring—and they can help your preschooler succeed in school and beyond.

According to research, kids who follow at least five positive family routines have stronger social-emotional health (SEH) than those who don't. And the better your child's SEH, the better able he is to form relationships, grasp emotions, and do well in school.

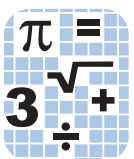
Routines help young children feel secure and figure out their place in the world. They also provide kids with structure. Routines don't need to be complicated. Simple, steady rituals are all it takes.

Here are three common routines that can benefit your child:

- 1. Eating together.** Sharing daily meals with your child is the most basic and beneficial household ritual you can adopt.
- 2. Sharing stories.** Whether it's a fairy tale at bedtime or a picture book each morning, start a reading routine with your child. In addition to improving his emotional health, it will boost his word smarts, too.
- 3. Playing.** It doesn't matter what you play—just that you play regularly. From “weekend puzzle night” to Tic-Tac-Toe Tuesday, find a playtime routine that works for your family and follow it.

Source: E.I. Muñiz and others, “Family Routines and Social-Emotional School Readiness Among Preschool-Age Children,” *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Focus on building skills that lead to future math success



Researchers have found that a preschooler's ability to grasp certain math concepts is a strong predictor of how she'll

perform in math when she reaches fifth grade. Three skills in particular have a significant impact on a child's future math success—counting, patterning and comparing quantities.

Luckily, there are lots of fun and simple ways to strengthen your preschooler's skills in these areas. Play a game of:

- **Count the shapes.** Sharpen your preschooler's counting and shape-recognition skills at the same time! Pick a room in your house, then see how many examples of a particular shape she can find there. Can she find five rectangles in the kitchen? How many circles are there?

- **What comes next?** Draw a simple pattern of colored squares (red, blue, green, red, blue, green). Stop coloring after a certain square, such as blue. Now ask your child what comes next. Is it another blue square? Is it a red one? Or does the pattern call for green? Once she masters simple patterns, challenge her with more complex ones.
- **Which has more?** Make two unequal piles of small objects. (Use coins, pieces of cereal, paperclips, etc.) Ask your child to tell you which pile has more in it. Then ask how she knows. (Is it taller? Is it wider?) Count together to see if she's right!

Source: B. Rittle-Johnson and others, “Early Math Trajectories: Low-Income Children's Mathematics Knowledge From Ages 4 to 11,” *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc.

Q: My son isn't very physically active, and I'm worried that he isn't getting the exercise he needs. How can I encourage him to move more?

Questions & Answers

A: Regular exercise helps children build strong muscles and bones, develop motor skills and boost self-esteem. It's never too early to start integrating exercise into your child's daily life.

To promote physical activity:

- **Schedule regular times** for exercise and stick to them. Think about when your child is likely to have the most energy.
- **Take turns choosing** the activity. If your child likes soccer, for example, agree to play at least once a week.
- **Plan activities** that make your child feel successful. Don't play games or sports that require too much agility or are too hard for him.
- **Keep an exercise log.** It's fun to look through it and see how committed your whole family is to good health.
- **Drive less and exercise more.** Brainstorm with your family about places you can walk to instead.
- **Think of creative ways** you and your child can exercise. You could play a game of tag or have a sit-up contest. On rainy days, you might build an indoor obstacle course or make up a dance.
- **Use exercise** rather than food as a reward. For example, “After you pick up your toys, we can go on a family walk.”
- **Limit screen time.** Watching videos and playing computer games doesn't require much physical or mental energy.

The Kindergarten Experience

Stereotypes can impact your child's self-image



Little girls may start out confident about their intelligence, but things change somewhere along the way. Studies show that while five-year-olds consider women to be as smart as men, they soon change their opinion. By age six, girls begin to see boys and men as brainier than girls and women.

Surprisingly, girls in first grade and beyond tend to think that girls work harder in school than boys—but they consider boys to be naturally smarter.

Why the shift? It may be because most of the explorers, scientists, artists and others studied in the classroom are male. That can send the message that women don't rise to the same heights as men. But that's because in previous generations, women were not afforded the same opportunities.

To help your kindergartner see that women are just as smart as men:

- **Applaud her effort.** When she buckles down to complete a task, pat her on the back. Show her that working hard matters. You don't need to be born knowing something in order to master it.
- **Offer examples.** Read children's books about famous women like Amelia Earhart and Sojourner Truth. Point out all the strong, successful women around your child. From her pediatrician to her kindergarten teacher, women are doing important, meaningful work!

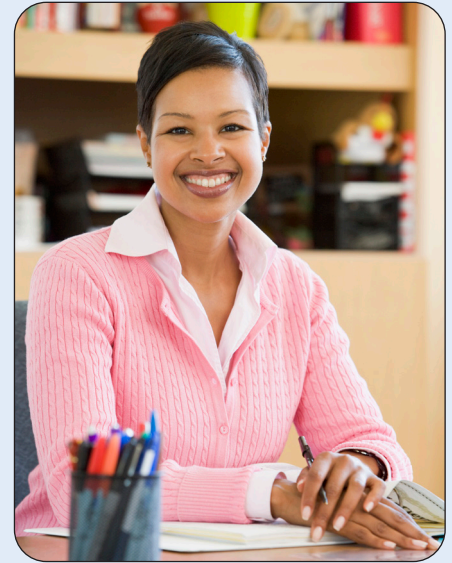
Source: L. Bian and others, "Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests," *Science*, The American Association for the Advancement of Sciences.

Preparation leads to successful parent-teacher conferences

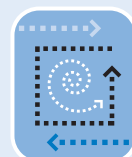
Among the many *firsts* in kindergarten is one for parents—the first parent-teacher conference. Whether your meeting is in person or online, it's natural to feel anxious. But a little preparation will go a long way toward easing your butterflies and ensuring a positive experience.

To prepare:

- **Review schoolwork.** In the days leading up to the conference, pay extra attention to your child's learning. Is homework time going smoothly? Does he seem to be struggling or excelling in certain areas? How does he feel about school?
- **Make a list.** What do you want to discuss? Include any changes in your child's life. Also ask questions, such as, "How are my child's reading skills developing?"
- **Be on time.** Conferences can be short, so don't waste a minute!
- **Keep an open mind.** All students have areas in which they can improve. Sometimes this is hard for parents to hear. Focus on solutions and remember your shared goal: helping your child succeed!



Reinforce the concepts of size with three simple activities



There are lots of ways to help your kindergartner explore the concept of size. Encourage him to notice and compare the things around him. Use words like *bigger*, *smaller*, *shorter* and *longer* to describe them.

Then, try a few of these activities:

1. **Read the fable** "The Lion and the Mouse." Discuss the sizes of the characters. How big are their ears? Their paws? Their voices? Then, compare other animals you see, such as a cat and a dog. Which animal is smaller?
2. **Make pancakes of all sizes.** Put them in order from smallest to largest. Which one does your child want to eat? The smallest pancake or the biggest one of all?
3. **Compare lengths.** Ask your child to measure and then compare the lengths of different items. For example, "This crayon is four inches long and that banana is eight inches. The crayon is four inches shorter than the banana."