

Early Childhood Parents®

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Region 16 ESC Title III Program

make the difference!



Help your preschooler learn about cultures and traditions

Embracing family traditions can enhance your preschooler's life and help her appreciate who she is and what she has. And as you share your family's heritage, help your child appreciate that many people have different backgrounds and traditions that are important to them.

To promote cultural awareness:

- **Show your child photos** and keepsakes from your family's past. Children especially love to see photos of their parents and grandparents as children.
- **Prepare a dish** that represents your family's origins. Have your child help. Children are more likely to try new foods when they help prepare them.

- **Read books** about children from different cultures and countries. Discuss the books together. Point out similarities: "This girl likes to play soccer—just like you do!" Also point out differences: "She speaks a different language than we do."
- **Introduce your child** to diverse groups of people and encourage friendships with children from a variety of backgrounds.
- **Be a good role model.** Use kind language when talking about others, and avoid using stereotypes. Gently correct your child if she says something inappropriate.

Source: K. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, Teachers College Press and Center for the Improvement of Child Caring.

Four ways to bolster kids' self-esteem



Positive self-esteem is one of the building blocks of academic success. Children who feel confident and capable are proud of their abilities and want to try their best.

To give your preschooler's self-image a boost:

1. **Ask his opinion.** "What vegetable should we have tonight with dinner, peas or broccoli?" "What's the best TV show for kids?" "What's the coolest place we've ever gone together?" Get your child's input on these kinds of questions and more.
2. **Respect his interests.** You don't always have to join in. Often, just saying something like "I notice you really like to play with your cars" is enough.
3. **Ask for his help.** Feeling competent builds courage to try new things. Have your child help you with small chores.
4. **Value his company.** Take your child on an errand or a walk and tell him you are glad he is with you.

Source: K. DeBord, Ph.D., "Self-Esteem in Children," North Carolina Cooperative Extension, North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University.

Valentine crafts strengthen your preschooler's skills and creativity



Valentine's Day offers a great opportunity for you and your child to spend time together—making valentines! Preschoolers

benefit from making valentines because the process is creative, works fine motor skills and teaches the value of doing something nice for someone.

Consider these valentine crafts:

- **Handprint valentines.** Help your child cut out several large hearts from construction paper. Dip his palm into a nontoxic paint, then help him make a handprint on each heart. Write a message such as "Love goes heart in hand." Have your child sign his name.
- **Cookie valentines.** Heart-shaped cookies are fun for your child to make and give. Let him help with the measuring and baking. Then,

together, decorate them any way you wish.

- **Heart puppets.** Cut out a heart shape from an old cereal box. Let your child decorate the heart using crayons, glitter or paint. Have him glue on scraps of fabric, ribbon, sequins or beads. Then help him glue the heart to the end of a craft stick to create his very own puppet.
- **Pipe-cleaner hearts.** Help your child thread beads along the length of a pipe cleaner. Then, shape it into a heart, twisting the ends together.

**"No act of kindness,
no matter how small,
is ever wasted."**

—Aesop

Study shows that building respect in early years is effective



Over time, kids become respectful not just because it's right, but because they understand how being respected feels. They

realize that it feels good to be asked politely, thanked and treated nicely. Gaining this knowledge requires input from parents and families.

A study of moms and preschoolers published by the Economic and Social Research Council shows that:

- **Talking to preschoolers** often about people's thoughts and feelings makes a difference. For example, "That little boy is crying. Why do you think he's upset?" Or, "Grandpa is frowning. How do you think he's feeling?" These conversations give your preschooler opportunities to be understanding.
- **Discussions about feelings** have long-term benefits. Talking with your preschooler now may help her for many years to come—well into elementary school, when having positive social skills will make it easier to get along with classmates and teachers.
- **Being a positive role model** is important. When talking about other people's emotions, use a warm tone. Research suggests this increases kids' cooperation. Keep in mind that in addition to discussing real-life emotions, it helps to address how characters in books, movies and TV shows might be feeling.

Source: N. Yuill and others, "The Relation Between Parenting, Children's Social Understanding and Language," Economic and Social Research Council.

Are you boosting your preschooler's ability to learn?



Young children naturally want to learn. But how much they learn depends a lot on their families.

Are you doing things that stimulate your child's learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you build** your child's thinking skills by asking her to help you solve problems? Ask questions, such as, "What's the best way to ...?"

___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to use all her senses: to look, listen, feel, taste and smell?

___ **3. Do help your child** have new experiences, such as taking a virtual tour of an art museum together.

___ **4. Do you suggest** your child sit at a table or desk when she is working on something? This can help her focus on what she's doing.

___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions? You can look up the answers together.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're stimulating your child's learning. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Research shows that taking naps can improve your child's learning



You're not the only one who could use a nap. Your child could, too! According to research, young kids who take regular naps

have an easier time learning new things. Not only that, their memories are stronger, so they retain what they've learned much better. That's because, during sleep, the brain "replays" what it took in that day, creating solid recollections.

Unfortunately, many children stop taking naps once they reach preschool age. That's a shame, because kids this age need 11-13 hours of sleep each day, and they may not get it all at night. Naps are a great way to make up for missing shut-eye.

To encourage your child to take naps:

- **Create a routine.** Whether she has preschool every day or not, have your child wake up around the same

time each morning and go to bed at the same time at night. Also assign a regular time for her to nap. The more consistent her sleeping habits, the better rested she will be overall.

- **Offer calm surroundings.** Your child may have trouble drifting off if the TV is distracting her or all the lights are on. Turn them off and consider playing some quiet music in the background. A soothing atmosphere is ideal for napping.
- **Limit caffeine.** No, your child doesn't drink coffee. But does she sip soda or iced tea, or eat chocolate and other candy? Don't let these sleep-stealers interfere with her ZZZs!

Source: M. Sandoval and others, "Words to Sleep On: Naps Facilitate Verb Generalization in Habitually and Nonhabitually Napping Preschoolers," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

Praising preschoolers for being smart can lead to dishonesty



Sure, you want to praise your child when he learns something new. But be careful *how* you do it. If you celebrate how smart he is, your good intentions could backfire.

Researchers believe that when young children hear "You're so smart" all the time, they can feel pressured to *prove* they're intelligent. That means they might be more willing than others to cheat at games and other activities.

This doesn't mean that patting your child on the back for a job well done will turn him into a cheater. But it does mean you should pay attention to *how* you praise him—and *what* you praise him for.

When praising your child:

- **Avoid labels.** Resist the urge to tell him he's the "smart one," while his sibling is the "creative one" or the "athletic one." When a child feels his identity is tied to a label, he might try to preserve that label at all costs.
- **Focus on effort** instead of talent. Did he work hard on an art project? Congratulate him on his actions. "You really colored carefully!" Don't chalk it up to some inborn ability by saying, "You're always so good at art." If you do, he may indeed think he must always be good at it.

Source: L. Zhao and others, "Praising Young Children for Being Smart Promotes Cheating," *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.

Q: When my son was a toddler, I thought I had the boldest, most outgoing child in the world. A year later, we've had a complete turnaround. He cries when I leave the house. He's afraid of clowns, monsters and the dark. What happened to my carefree little boy?

Questions & Answers

A: Your son has gone through a new phase of cognitive development. As a toddler, your child had few fears because it simply didn't occur to him that he should be afraid. He didn't yet have the ability to wonder whether monsters might be real, or if there might be something lurking in the dark.

Now, though, he can consider all sorts of possibilities—and some of them scare him. He can even worry that either you or he will get hurt if you're apart from one another, which is probably why he doesn't like you to leave him.

It's likely these fears won't last too long. For most fears, attention and reassurance will help your child cope.

To promote a sense of safety:

- **Monitor TV and videos.** This is not the time for anything even mildly scary.
- **Keep your absences brief**, if possible, while your child's fears are at their height.
- **Say, "I love you and I am going to keep you safe, even when you're asleep."**
- **Be playful.** If your child loves pretend, use "anti-monster spray" (a spray bottle of water mixed with a spritz of perfume) in his room at night. Or, inspect the closets and drawers before turning out the light. Add a night light in his room, too.

If your child's fears persist, make an appointment with his pediatrician.

The Kindergarten Experience

Teach your child how to listen and speak in turn



Listening to others and waiting for a turn to speak are essential skills for school. If 25 students were always

talking at once, children could never learn!

If you encourage and model polite talking and listening skills at home, your child will be more likely to use them in a school setting, too.

As a family, you can practice these communication skills:

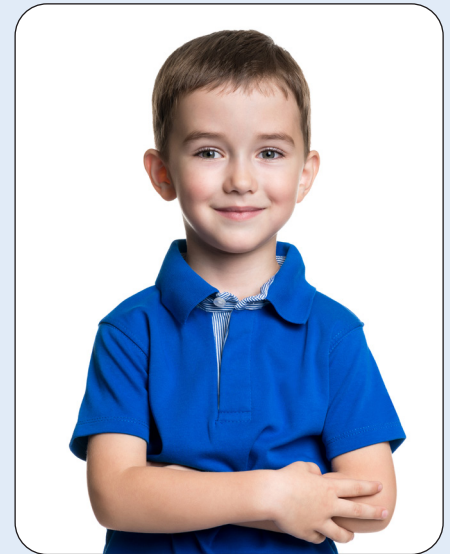
- **During mealtimes.** Family meals offer the perfect opportunity for your child to learn conversation skills. Give family members a chance to tell something about their day. Do not allow others to speak while someone else is talking.
- **During story time.** You know it's important to read with your child. It encourages her to learn to read. But it also teaches her to listen and pay attention. Ask questions about the story. "Can you tell me which part you liked best in the story?" "Does this story remind you of any other stories we've read?"
- **During playtime.** Games such as Simon Says have been around forever because they are fun and they teach young children to listen carefully. Many board games encourage talking, listening and taking turns. You can also sing your child's favorite song using the syllable "la" instead of singing the words. See if your child can listen carefully and guess the song you are singing.

Support your kindergartner's emerging independence

Can you believe your child is almost halfway through his kindergarten year? You may be noticing a big change in him. Many children seem so much more mature after months of kindergarten instruction and responsibilities.

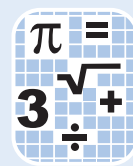
Even as you help your child with learning activities, you can encourage his newfound independence. Expect him to:

- **Get dressed by himself.** It's OK to help with buttons and tying shoes.
- **Clean up after himself.** He should put books and toys away when he's finished with them. He should also keep his schoolwork area neat.
- **Get things for himself.** Provide a sturdy step stool. Store things he needs, like cups for water, in low drawers he can easily reach.
- **Hang up his jacket** and put his shoes away.



- **Help prepare his breakfast or lunch.** He can pour dry cereal into a bowl, get the milk out of the refrigerator and peel a banana. For lunch, he can make a simple sandwich.

Playing with blocks reinforces your child's math skills



You can help your kindergartner lay a strong foundation for math by encouraging her to play with blocks.

Here are just some of the math skills she can learn:

- **Pattern recognition.** Many math concepts are based on patterns. Your child is practicing patterns as she stacks up a red block, then a yellow block and then another red block. Create a pattern and ask your child to copy it. Then let her create a pattern and you copy it.
- **Addition and subtraction.** When building a tower, your child may add a block, or decide it's too big and remove one. This also helps her learn about the concepts of *more* and *fewer*. Ask your child to add two blocks to her tower, or to take two blocks off. Does her tower have *more* or *fewer* blocks now?
- **Shape identification** and how shapes fit or stack together. Ask your child questions such as, "Is this block a square or a rectangle?" Recognizing shapes is the basis for geometry and other higher math.