

Early Childhood Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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Create a learning environment at home for your preschooler

As a parent, you are your child's first and most influential teacher. The activities you and your child do together set the stage for her academic success.

To create a learning environment at home:

- **Look for concrete ways** to help your child learn concepts. For example, your child comes home and says, "We counted to four at school!" Reply, "That's great! We need four plates on the table for dinner. You can put the plates on and we'll count them together."
- **Review and expand** upon concepts. If your child is learning shapes, say, "I see circles and squares in this room. Can you bring me something that is a circle and something that is a square?" Once that is done, say, "Did you

know that a triangle has three sides? Let's look for one of those, too!"

- **Engage your child's senses.** Each day, talk with her about what she sees, hears, feels, smells and tastes. Help her learn the words that describe these, such as *loud*, *rough*, *salty* and *sour*.
- **Give your child** plenty of opportunities to practice social skills. Social skills are a big part of the curriculum in preschool and kindergarten. But some experiences, such as learning to be a good host and a polite guest, are best accomplished outside of school.

Source: Jennifer R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher: Insights for Parent Involvement*, ISBN: 1-56822-998-4 (Instructional Fair, a division of School Specialty Publishing, www.schoolspecialtypublishing.com).

Encourage your preschooler to show gratitude



Being thankful is more than a courtesy. It's a mind set that changes how kids look at life. To

help your preschooler enjoy gratitude:

- **Say thanks with pictures.** Have your child draw pictures of things he appreciates. Or take photos and let your child dictate the captions.
- **Role-play.** Act out situations that involve thanks. What should your child say when he receives a present? What if he already has the item? What if he doesn't like it?
- **Be creative.** Help your child make and send thank-you cards. Encourage him to give thanks by saying kind words and doing favors.
- **Imagine.** What would it be like without certain conveniences? Try baking bread for a week instead of buying it. Or walk to a nearby store instead of driving. Then enjoy a new sense of gratitude for everyday gifts.

Source: Wayne Parker, "Teaching Children to be Grateful," About.com, <http://fatherhood.about.com/od/valuesandspirituality/a/gratitude.htm>.

Make your preschooler aware of the different jobs people do



Your child has years before he goes out to work, but young children enjoy and benefit from learning *about* work.

Explain to your child that most people worked hard in school to get the jobs they have today.

You can bring the working world to your child's world if you:

- **Discuss jobs** that may already be familiar to your child (teacher, doctor). Can he name some things these people do?
- **Make a game** as you take him on errands. Everywhere you go, ask him to point out someone who is working. Tell him their job titles and what they do. At the end of the day, ask which he thinks would be the most fun place to work.

- **Arrange for your child** to visit your workplace or that of another adult in the family. A short visit is plenty. While he is there, point out that just as he has school and home, most adults have a workplace and home. He will probably enjoy seeing the place where you go when you are not with him.

Source: Sandra Parker Coates and others, *Families Learning Together At Home and In the Community: Building Adult Knowledge and Children's Skills*, ED210113 (The Home and School Institute, www.megaskillshsi.org/introduction.html).

“What a father says to his children is not heard by the world, but it will be heard by posterity.”

—Jean Paul Richter

Proper praise can make a big difference in your discipline



Studies show that praise is a key part of discipline success. But what kinds of praise work best?

Parenting expert Alan

Kazdin, Ph.D., explains that effective praise is:

- **Upbeat.** When you praise your preschooler, sound excited.
- **Specific.** Describe *exactly* what your child did right.
- **Physical.** Reinforce your message with something like a gentle hug, smile or thumbs-up.
- **Dependent.** Use praise when it's meaningful and earned.
- **Instant.** Make sure praise is directly connected to your child's good behavior.
- **Frequent.** Take advantage of opportunities to compliment your

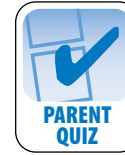
child. You should praise your child more often than you criticize!

Parents sometimes mistakenly add criticism to praise. For example, “I asked you to put on your pajamas, and look! Hooray! You got them on!” (There's the praise.) “Too bad you didn't do that last night.” (There's the criticism.)

Instead, keep it positive. And don't worry that you might sound too happy. Kazdin promotes enthusiasm and says, “Enthusiastic praise, however sincere you may feel it to be, is always much more effective than sincere punishment, which is the usual alternative.”

Source: Alan E. Kazdin, Ph.D., *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, ISBN-13: 978-0-618-77367-1 (Houghton Mifflin Company, www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com).

Are you making patience a priority in your home?



Family life is so busy that it's easy to forget the value of patience. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're

using patience to teach important lessons:

- ___ **1. Do you give your child time** to master new skills, such as pouring drinks or zipping her jacket?
- ___ **2. Do you stay calm** when your child is upset? Model how you want her 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?** Routines and schedules prevent impatience and pushing kids to “hurry up.”
- ___ **5. Do you forgive yourself** and others? Make it a point to learn from mistakes and be positive about the future.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child is benefiting from your patience. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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How can you choose the right books to read with your child?



Reading together should be an everyday activity. And the National Center for Family Literacy thinks this is worth celebrating.

November 1 is National Family Literacy Day.

To encourage parents, the Center has suggestions for choosing the right book for your child:

- **Match books** to your child's interests. If he likes trains, he might like a picture book about trains. Or try one of the Thomas the Tank Engine stories by Rev. W. Awdry and Christopher Awdry.
- **Pick stories** your child can relate to. Finding something in a book that reminds you of your own life is an important comprehension skill. Your child may enjoy a book

about playing with friends. A book about an event like the first dental visit could work, too.

- **Choose a book** without words for a change! Your child can become the author. He can look at the pictures and tell the story.

Your local library is a great source for books, of course. But if you want your child to have his own library, you can do this without spending much money.

Check out garage sales. Attend book sales sponsored by the library itself. Consider going to a school book fair—you are building your child's library and helping the school at the same time.

Source: Tips for Parents, "Choosing Books for Kids," National Center for Family Literacy, www.familit.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=gtJWJdMQIsE&b=1988675&ct=2086307.

Q: I've read articles about critical thinking and that many children grow up lacking this skill. I'd like to help my child with this but it sounds so complicated. I'm not sure I'm qualified.

Questions & Answers

A: Of course you are! Critical thinking does sound like a fancy term, but much of it has to do with imagining, figuring and questioning. Most children do these every day, naturally. All you have to do is encourage your child a bit.

Here are some ideas for you:

- **Don't rush in** to fix everything for your child. For example, your child has put her shirt on inside-out. Put her in front of the mirror and say, "Uh-oh. Isn't there supposed to be a picture of a flower on your shirt?" Give her a chance to realize what went wrong and take care of it.
- **Take a few extra minutes** with story time. After reading, ask your child questions about the story and the characters. Questions that inspire critical thinking start with phrases like, "How do you know that ..." or "What would happen if ..."
- **Ask questions** about your child's work. Ask, "What is the girl doing in your picture?" or "Why does she have a dog instead of a cat?"
- **Give your child** time each day to play alone with simple toys such as wooden blocks. This play gives your child the chance to be creative. It also lets her experiment with new approaches. For example, if the block tower falls down, she can find a new way to build it.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

Know how your child will learn on the journey to kindergarten



Your child will mentally develop by leaps and bounds from the time he turns three to the time he is ready to start kindergarten as a five-year-old.

Between ages three and four, your child can:

- **Put similar objects in groups.**
- **Match colors.**
- **Make towers of blocks** or line them up from biggest to smallest.
- **Understand parts and wholes.** (One slice of pizza is a *part*, the entire pizza is the *whole*.)
- **Draw something representative.** A stick figure is a man, a round body and head with a tail could be a dog.
- **Work on an activity** for up to 15 minutes (this varies).

- **Listen, watch and learn** from a preschool teacher.
- **Give first and last name and age.**
- **Begin to understand** the difference between *today* and *yesterday*.

Between four and five, your child can:

- **Rhyme words.**
- **Identify many colors.**
- **Understand** that things happen in order.
- **Produce** a much more detailed drawing. The man may have a hat and clothes; the dog may have a collar.
- **Count to at least five**, and often much higher.
- **Give name of street and town.**

Source: Public Broadcasting System, "The Whole Child, ABCs of Child Care—Cognitive," PBS.org, www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/cognitive.html.

The Kindergarten Experience

Parents are key to kindergarten reading success!



During kindergarten, children's reading skills often grow by leaps and bounds. The teacher gets plenty of credit,

but so do you and your child. After all, you've been talking and reading together for years, building a critical foundation for success.

Now that kindergarten has begun, it's time to reinforce your groundwork. When you read together every day:

- **Discuss** what you're going to read. Who wrote it? Who illustrated it? Is it true? What will it be about? Also notice how the book is organized. For example, does it have a table of contents or an index?
- **Be creative.** Instead of simply reading the book start to finish, stop to notice things. What does a word mean? Which words rhyme? What might happen next? Also let your child recite favorite parts.
- **Ask questions afterwards.** Have your child summarize the story. Ask, "What did you like about the story?" "Would you change anything?" Relate the book to real life, too. If it's about birds, go bird watching the next day.
- **Have fun.** Reading shouldn't feel like "work." Choose books and activities that appeal to you and your child. And remember the power of your enthusiasm. It's contagious!

Source: C. Ralph Adler and Elizabeth Goldman, *Shining Stars: Kindergarteners Learn to Read* (National Institute for Literacy: The Partnership for Reading, www.nifl.gov).

Encourage your kindergartner to become more independent

Your child has now completed about two months of kindergarten and you have probably seen a big change in him. Many children seem so much more mature after several weeks of going to "big school," walking through the hallways and perhaps even riding a school bus.

Your child is becoming more independent, and this is good news. Encourage this newfound independence by letting your child:

- **Dress himself** (except for small buttons and tying shoes).
- **Get things for himself.** Provide a sturdy step stool. Store things he needs, like cups for water, in low drawers he can easily reach.
- **Give you the papers** from his backpack.



- **Empty his lunch box.**
- **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.

Source: Sue Ryono, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success*, ISBN: 1-55254-170-3 (Brighter Vision Publications, www.brightervision.com).

Fix kindergarten attendance issues quickly in three steps



You and your child have worked hard to prepare for kindergarten, but now she says she hates it and refuses to go! It's all you can do to get her out the door in the morning. This is a battle you have to win. But how?

It's important to:

1. **Consider the past.** If your child didn't attend preschool, this transition may be especially tough. If she went to preschool, notice what has changed. Is the school day longer? Is she making friends? Is she comfortable with the teacher?

2. **Meet with her teacher.** Discuss which areas seem most stressful for your child. Some kids have trouble socializing, while others may find it difficult to concentrate on quiet activities.
3. **Make a plan.** Choose strategies for helping your child through this difficult period. In addition to addressing specific concerns (such as encouraging new friendships or working on kindergarten skills at home), you might set up a reward system for smooth school mornings.

Source: Dr. Susan Goldman, "Help! My Child Dislikes School," *greatschools*, www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/507.