

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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make the difference!

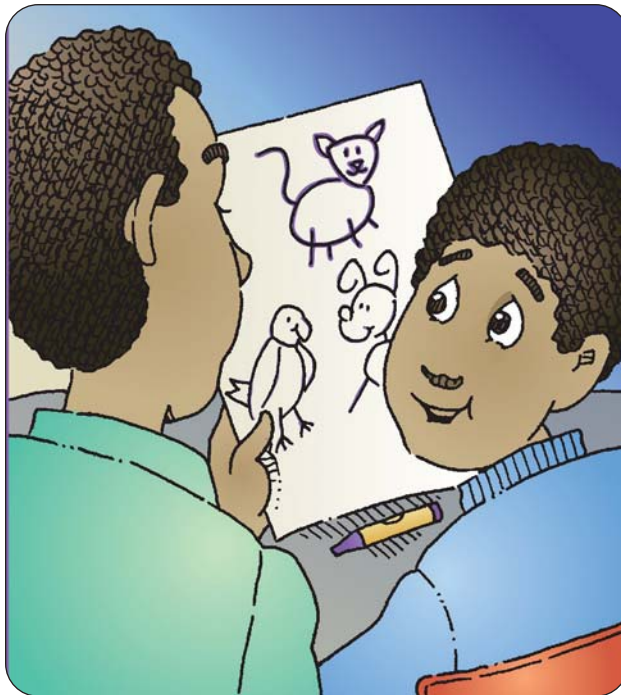
Organizing thoughts prepares your preschooler for writing

As early as first grade, your child will be given a topic and asked to write about it. Teachers won't expect polished prose at that age, but they will look to see if your child can write a few sentences while staying on the topic. "My favorite color is yellow. The sun is yellow. Bananas are yellow."

Staying on the topic requires organization. You can prepare your preschooler for writing by helping him learn to organize his thoughts.

Here's how:

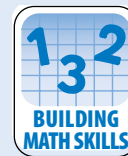
- **Ask your child questions** that require him to think about categories. "Can you name three things that are red? Can you name four farm animals?"
- **Combine drawing** and categorizing with your child. Drawing is another important step toward writing. For example: Draw a simple picture of a cat. Then say to your child, "Look, I drew a cat. This is a pet. Can you draw two other pets?"
- **Get moving!** Your child can use his body to help organize his brain.



Ask your child to walk toward you. Then say, "You are walking. What is another way you can move?" If he is not sure, suggest *running* or *hopping*. This will help him get the idea and he may then be able to come up with another way of moving on his own. Or say, "Fish swim. What do other animals do?" Encourage him to demonstrate animal movements such as *crawling*, *jumping* and *wiggling*.

Source: Claudia Jones, *Parents are Teachers, Too: Enriching Your Child's First Six Years*, ISBN: 0-913589-35-7 (Williamson Publishing Co., www.idealsbooks.com).

Turn mealtime into a secret math lesson



Preschoolers love to help in the kitchen and it is the perfect place to learn about math. Turn meal

preparation into a natural math lesson.

Here's how:

- **Discuss measurements.** Let your child help you measure a cup of flour or a teaspoon of salt. You can even alter a recipe together. "This recipe is too small. We need to double it. It calls for one cup of milk. What's one cup plus one cup?"
- **Notice changes.** Talk about how a food starts (such as a whole onion) and how it ends up (one cup of onion). Suggest that your child take "notes" about interesting facts. She might draw an onion and write "= 1 cup" or draw a stick of butter and write "= ½ cup."
- **Use math words.** Say things like, "Can you *divide* that in *half* for me?" "Does this need *more* or *less* salt?" "Let's *add* some sugar."

Source: Susan K. Perry, Ph.D., *Playing Smart*, ISBN: 1-57542-095-3 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

Help your preschooler strengthen muscles by playing fun games



Playing is one of the best ways to build kids' muscles, but occasionally preschoolers complain there's "nothing to do" or "no one to play with."

Before boredom strikes, step in with fun activities such as:

- **Thumbs down.** What if people didn't have thumbs? Find out by listing tasks on slips of paper. Put them in a container and take turns pulling them out. (No thumbs allowed!) Then see if you can do the tasks, such as throw a ball or eat with a spoon, without using your thumbs.
- **The chicken challenge.** Tuck a bandanna, sock or other small cloth into each player's back pocket. When you call "Go,"

players must act like chickens. One arm can be used for flapping a "wing," but the other must try to grab another player's "tail."

- **Clean-up course.** Before you put away summer toys, use them to make a safe and silly obstacle course. Kids might jump over a hose, blow a string of bubbles, draw a face inside a hula hoop with chalk, and then ride a tricycle to a "finish line."

Source: "Games for Ages 3–5," DisneyFamily.com, <http://family.go.com/entertainment/pkg-games-3-5/>.

"Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win."

—Jonathan Kozol

Remember that video games count as screen time, too!



Kids spend more time, on average, watching TV and playing video games than they spend in any other activity besides sleeping.

Setting limits on the amount of time your preschooler spends playing video games is as important as setting TV limits. Not doing so can unfortunately lead to real trouble in the future.

An April study from Iowa State University found that a few children actually become addicted to video games. Less ability to pay attention in school is one of the symptoms researchers found.

You should:

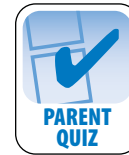
- **Pay attention to total time** your child spends in front of a screen. It should be no more than two

hours a day. If she wants to play video games, she will need to cut back on TV or other screen time.

- **Look at the game.** Most games come with ratings now. Any game your child plays should carry a rating of *E*, which stands for *Everyone*.
- **Set limits**, perhaps with a timer, for video game time. Thirty minutes is plenty.
- **Give a warning.** Five minutes before time is up, tell your child that video game time is nearly over. Sticking with the limits should be a condition for allowing your child to play.

Source: Donna St. George, "Study Finds Some Youths Addicted to Video Games," The Washington Post, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/19/AR2009041902350.html?nav=emailpage.

Are you teaching your child how to make friends?



One of the most challenging and exciting parts of growing up is making friends. Getting along with people makes life fun! It also helps kids succeed in school, work and life.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you're helping your child with this important task:

- ___ **1. Do you make plans** for your child to be around other children?
- ___ **2. Do you practice sharing**, taking turns and other social skills at home?
- ___ **3. Do you talk about others'** feelings to help your child build empathy? "Sam lost his toy. He looks sad. How can we help?"
- ___ **4. Do you set an example** by being kind and patient with your child and others?
- ___ **5. Do you give compliments** when your child is friendly? "You gave Lucy one of your cookies. That was generous. It made her happy!"

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're building friendship skills. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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See your everyday surroundings through your preschooler's eyes



Never miss an opportunity to recognize that what is run-of-the-mill to you may be new and exciting for your child.

The next time you have a day off to spend with your child, try thinking as he does—what can you find, right in your own neighborhood or town, that he would love?

Try a few of these fun and free activities:

- **Visit your local chamber of commerce.** This organization can be an amazing resource and most people never take advantage of it. Has a new playground opened? Is there a public flower garden you didn't know about? A building with a cool fountain outside, where kids can watch birds splash, or throw a penny in?

The chamber of commerce has the answers to these questions.

- **Enjoy the time of year.** October can be a great month to be outside with your child, since it's usually not too hot or too cold. Look around and you'll see seasonal places he can explore. (Think outdoor market, or pumpkin patch.) You only have to pay to buy, not to walk around and look.
- **Go to the library.** Story hour may be tried and true, but the library often offers more. Many have times for crafts and other activities. Some have community exhibits such as a terrarium or other display of nature. Go and see what you might have missed.

Source: Catherine Newman, "Winter Staycation," *FamilyFun*, February 2009 (Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.familyfun.com).

Caring is the cornerstone of your preschooler's character



Caring is the foundation for all the pillars of character parents and teachers want to see in children. If a child

doesn't care, she will never see the point of being responsible. Honesty, and other virtues too, only happen when your child cares about doing the right thing.

Here are some ways to build the caring trait in your preschooler:

- **Care for your child.** This is not just about basic needs, or even just about love. Sympathize with your child. Let her know you understand her feelings, even if they result in behavior you must correct her for. Express interest in things she likes.

- **Help your child think of others.** This can be hard for young children, but they can learn. Ask questions like, "Do you think Jen might want to play? She looks a little sad sitting over there by herself."
- **Be specific about caring and non-caring.** If you see your child hurt someone's feelings, call her on it. Tell her exactly why what she did was not caring. Talk about what she could have done instead. On the other side, your child's caring actions deserve your notice, encouragement and praise.

Source: Jenny Friedman, *The Busy Family's Guide to Volunteering*, ISBN: 1-58904-012-0 (Robins Lane Press, www.gryphonhouse.com).

Q: My sister is a teacher and says rude and disrespectful behavior in the classroom frustrates her. When my child enters kindergarten, I want him to know I expect good behavior in the classroom! I would love any tips to reinforce this at home.

Questions & Answers

A: Educators so appreciate parents like you. Many share your sister's concerns about students who sometimes lack respect for rules and other people.

Proper classroom behavior is much like what you expect at home. One big difference—home has a few familiar people. A school classroom has 20 or more your child must get along with.

Teach your child:

- **To just be nice!** It sounds simple. But if your child is truly nice—speaking kindly to his teachers and classmates, waiting his turn, sharing—behavior problems may be few.
- **How to handle frustration.** This is a little tougher. At home, your child has his room or another place to go if he is working through a "meltdown." At school, he is expected to keep it together. Practice using words to express feelings. Calming techniques like deep breathing can also help.
- **That some family behavior may not be okay for school.** School is more formal than home. Parents and children may kiss each other at home, but there is no kissing at school. Or, at home, he might get a bite of what you're eating, but taking someone else's food is a no-no at school.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Volunteering builds comfort in kindergarten



When children begin kindergarten, they aren't the only ones who have to adjust. Parents often feel unsure about how they fit into the school routine.

Volunteering is a great way to get comfortable with the class, the teacher and the school. It also shows your child, "School is important to our family!" If volunteers haven't been requested, or if you missed a chance to sign up, ask how you can help. You might be able to:

- **Read to students.** Before reading to the class, ask whether the teacher provides books or whether parents are expected to bring them in.
- **Help with small groups.** Kindergarten students often break into small groups that rotate around the room, completing different tasks. A parent may supervise one group.
- **Help with events.** Field trips, plays and class parties would not be the same without parents. You might offer to plan, make costumes, chaperone, decorate or provide goodies.
- **Assist with tasks.** Extra helpers are often needed for odd jobs, such as walking students to activities, welcoming visitors, setting up snack or working in the library or computer lab.
- **Pitch in after school.** If you're unavailable during school hours, consider preparing class materials or coordinating other volunteers.

Prepare your kindergartner for a successful school day

A great day for your child begins the night before school. Most children this age need about 11 hours of sleep to wake up rested and alert. Add a healthy breakfast in the morning, and your child will be ready for a productive day of learning. What else can you do?

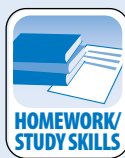
- **Show confidence** in your child. Starting kindergarten is a huge step, especially for children who are not used to being away from parents for long stretches of time. Your child needs to know you believe she will do fine.
- **Have a routine.** Children find comfort in the familiar. Now, when so much is changing, a routine at home—dinner, bath, teeth, story, bed—will reassure your child.



- **Encourage friendships.** Invite a classmate your child likes over to play. Children who have a solid friendship at school feel better about going each day, and often do better as a result.

Source: Meri Wallace, *Keys to Parenting Your Four Year Old*, ISBN: 0-8120-9745-9 (Barron's Educational Books, www.barronseduc.com).

Kindergarten homework can set the tone for school success



There is no "right answer" when it comes to assigning homework in kindergarten. Some teachers begin on day one. Others ease into it after several months. Still others put it off until first grade.

Whenever your child starts receiving assignments, make the most of them! Promote habits that lead to long-term success, such as:

- **Divide big jobs into small parts.** Sometimes teachers give out weekly packets to finish by Friday. Plan how to break up the tasks (such as one page per day).

- **Take pride.** Compliment your child for being grown up enough for this important job. Be supportive, interested and confident that he can handle (and enjoy) this responsibility.
- **Include his name.** Before your child begins, have him write his name on the paper. Forgetting to do this is a common mistake. He deserves credit for his work!
- **Stay organized.** Pick a time and place to work together. When and where does your child concentrate best? Also choose a special spot for assignments so they're never lost.