

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENTER
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make the difference!



The new year is a great time to make learning resolutions

January is the perfect month to start over! Not only is it the first month of a new calendar year—it also falls right in the middle of the preschool year.

Use this time to look back on the first half of the year. Then, consider making some New Year's resolutions to boost your child's learning.

Your family could resolve to:

- **Get enough sleep every night.** Your preschooler needs 11 to 12 hours of sleep each night in order to grow and thrive. This is especially important for children who have given up napping!
- **Read together every day.** Have a regular read-aloud time for the entire family. Or, set aside time for family members to sit together and read quietly.
- **Limit screen time.** If your child indulged too much over break, it's time to cut back. Preschoolers should have no more than one to two hours of screen time per day—which includes time spent watching TV, playing video games and using a tablet or computer.
- **Eat a fruit or vegetable** (or both!) at every meal.
- **Take part in activities** that help your preschooler learn but are also fun, such as putting together jigsaw puzzles, building with blocks and playing board games.
- **Take trips in your community** that also offer fun and learning for your child. Go to the public library to check out books or attend story time. Go to a local park to identify animals and plants.

Building motor skills leads to school success



Children use their muscles to accomplish tasks at school. They use them for

everything from writing their names to catching a ball.

To help your child develop the motor skills he'll need for kindergarten, encourage him to:

- **Move to music.** Play songs that involve movement, such as "I'm a Little Teapot." Do big and small movements, such as bending and clapping.
- **Play Follow the Leader.** Take turns leading each other around. Include actions, such as flapping arms, hopping and marching.
- **Make believe.** Role-play different careers, such as a reporter, cook or athlete. Use props that encourage muscle use, such as writing utensils, plastic measuring cups and sports equipment.
- **Be artistic.** Plan art projects that involve drawing, gluing, cutting, lacing, painting and more.

Source: R. Pica, "Learning by Leaps and Bounds: Why Motor Skills Matter," *Young Children*, NAEYC.

Do 'educational' apps really help your preschooler learn?



There are countless "educational" apps available for young children today. A whopping 72% of the top apps available in Apple's App Store fall under the toddler/preschool category. Many parents wonder if these apps are actually educational—or merely entertaining.

Researchers have identified four characteristics of effective learning apps. So before you download a new app for your child, make sure it:

1. **Requires your child to think** and use information—rather than just tap or swipe.
2. **Holds your child's interest** without being distracting. Apps with lots of sound, movement or other visual elements can actually distract from learning.

3. **Encourages your child to connect** new information to his daily life.
4. **Allows your child to interact** socially with others. Children learn best by interacting with parents and peers. Take time to talk with your child before, during and after he plays.

Source: K. Hirsh-Pasek and others, "Putting Education in 'Educational' Apps: Lessons From the Science of Learning," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Association for Psychological Science, niswc.com/ec_app.

"Many apps marketed as educational are basically the equivalent of sugary foods."

—Kathy Hirsh-Pasek,
Temple University

Let your child experience new things by using different senses



Does your preschooler know about the five senses—*sight, hearing, touch, taste* and *smell*? She will learn more

about these concepts when she is in kindergarten, but now is a great time to introduce them to her.

Show your child that she can use her senses to investigate new things. Place a piece of fruit or a vegetable on the table. If possible, pick one she hasn't tried before. Then ask your child five questions:

1. **What do you see?** Have her look at the item and describe it in words. For example, "It's red and shiny."
2. **What do you hear?** Fruits and vegetables don't make noise, but have your child tap it with

a spoon or her finger. What does it sound like?

3. **What do you feel?** Let her touch the item and describe how it feels. Is it soft or hard?
4. **What do you smell?** Have her smell the item and describe its scent. Does it smell sweet?
5. **What do you taste?** Have her take a bite and describe the taste. Challenge your child to connect her senses, too. If she thought the fruit smelled sweet, did it taste sweet, too? What sound did it make when she bit into it?

While this activity works well with food, it's important to remind your child to *never* put anything into her mouth without asking you first!

Are you helping your preschooler build math skills?



You use math all day long, and eventually your child will, too. Are you introducing your child to math concepts in everyday life? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you count things** and actions aloud? "How many dolls do you have?"
- ___ 2. **Do you ask math questions?** "Grandpa has two crackers. If he gives you one, how many will he have left?"
- ___ 3. **Do you sort all kinds of items?** "Which sock matches this one?" "All the red blocks go here."
- ___ 4. **Do you point out numbers?** "I see the number 5 on that sign!" "I spy a 3. Can you find it?"
- ___ 5. **Do you use math words** in conversation? "You have two books and I have one. You have *more* than I have."

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're working hard to build math skills. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Self-control is an essential ingredient for school success!



Nearly every child has a “meltdown” now and then. But once your child gets to kindergarten, she

will need to know how to control herself. Helping her learn that now will be one of the best things you can do to prepare her for school.

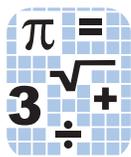
To encourage self-control:

- **Keep surprises to a minimum.** Why do teachers print out daily schedules and tape them to the wall? Because children love—and need—routines. Give your child a little advance warning when a big change is coming. She’ll behave better if she has had time to get used to the idea.
- **Give your child choices.** Allow her to make some decisions within acceptable limits. This gives her a sense of control but

also teaches her that she can’t just do whatever she wants.

- **Offer a hug.** Sometimes an upset child just wants to know that someone cares about her feelings. A hug can help dry tears in a hurry. Then encourage your child to use her words to *tell* you what’s wrong instead of kicking and screaming in frustration.
- **Remain calm.** If your child has a tantrum in public, remove her from the situation until she calms down. Say as little as possible. Don’t let her think that throwing a fit is the way to get attention or get her way.
- **Reward mature behavior.** Give your child lots of praise when she shows she can deal with frustration without falling apart. Praise her if she uses her words to tell you she is angry instead of throwing her toys like she may have done in the past.

Recognizing patterns builds important mathematical skills



Quick: What is math about? You probably thought, “Numbers.” That isn’t wrong. But math is also about

patterns, the sequence in which those numbers repeat themselves that makes them meaningful.

So if your child can line up a red crayon, then a blue one, then a red one and then a blue one, he is actually performing an essential math skill.

To reinforce the concept of patterns, have your child:

- **Look at the calendar.** Point out how every month begins with the number one.
- **Read a rhyming book.** Rhymes are actually patterns of words.
- **Look for patterns at home.** Start with your child’s own clothes. Fabrics and wallpaper often contain patterns, too.
- **Look at books in the library.** Explain that the way books are lined up is part of a pattern. This helps people find them.
- **Learn a simple sequence**, such as *clap, clap* (clap twice), *slap, slap* (slap thighs twice). Add other motions as this gets easy, but always repeat them in the same order.
- **Sing songs** with repeating phrases, such as “B-I-N-G-O.”

Q: My son currently goes to preschool and will be turning five this May. Next month, I have to let the preschool know whether he will be returning next year or heading off to kindergarten. How do I know if my son will be ready for kindergarten or not?

Questions & Answers

A: Many parents in your situation are wondering the same thing. You may be surprised at what actually makes a child ready for kindergarten. It is not whether he can read, add or subtract. It has more to do with enthusiasm, independence and getting along with others.

A child entering kindergarten should:

- **Have a desire to learn** and be excited to begin tackling subjects such as reading and writing.
- **Know how to express himself.** Your child should be able to carry on a conversation and talk about himself and his experiences. (If your child has special needs or is an English language learner, you should contact the elementary school to discuss resources.)
- **Listen and follow directions.** Most kindergarten teachers would say this is a top priority.
- **Be somewhat independent.** He should be able to use the bathroom, put on his coat and wash his hands by himself.
- **Get along with others.** Sharing and taking turns are necessary skills for any well-functioning kindergarten classroom.

If your child can do these things now, or you feel confident he will in the next six months or so, then he will be ready for kindergarten!

The Kindergarten Experience

Ask interesting questions to boost thinking



Every day is filled with opportunities to help your kindergartner think. As you observe the world together, talk about what you see and ask your child questions.

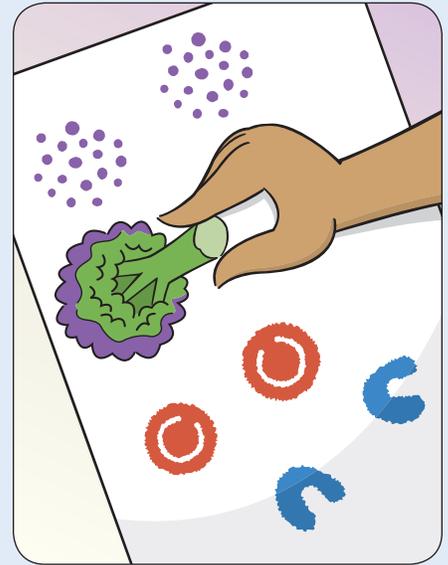
Answering interesting questions helps your child build the thinking skills she needs to be successful in school. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- **What are some things** that make your classroom special?
- **If you could change** one school rule, what would it be? Why?
- **What rules do you think** everyone in the world should follow? Why?
- **What are some things** that make our family special?
- **What is something** you have learned in school that will help you when you are older?
- **What makes someone** a good friend?
- **Who do you know** that is a good friend?
- **If you could go anywhere**—even to a different time—where would you go?
- **If you could make** any animal talk, what animal would it be? What might it say?
- **What would you do** if you were invisible?
- **What is your favorite season**—winter, spring, summer or fall? What do you love about it?
- **If you could receive any gift** in the world, what would it be?
- **If you could give any gift** in the world, what would it be?

Explore textures, shapes and colors with your kindergartner

The next time your child says he wants to paint, reinforce what he's learning about colors, patterns and textures by creating:

- **New colors.** Check out a library book about the color wheel. See how mixing primary colors (red, yellow and blue) creates secondary colors (green, orange and purple). Try it together!
- **Veggie patterns.** Have your child dip sliced vegetables, such as carrots, celery, potatoes and broccoli, into paint and then press them onto paper. Discuss what you notice about their patterns.
- **Touchable art.** What happens when you mix textures with paint? Have your child add salt or sand to paint. Brainstorm about what else he could add, such as crushed cereal.



- **Lots of dots.** Instead of painting with lines, have your child paint with dots. Start by using a pencil to draw a shape. Then have your child use a cotton swab to cover the shape with dots of paint.

Reinforce learning by nurturing your child's natural curiosity



If you have a kindergartner, you probably hear one question a lot: "Why?" Your child doesn't ask

this to irritate you—she is just curious about everything.

Curiosity leads to learning, so it's important to nurture it in your child. Here's how:

- **Be patient with her questions.** Say, "I don't know but let's find out!" Then help your child find information in a book or online that can answer her questions.

- **Celebrate her discoveries.** Spotting a red bird outside may not be exciting to you. But it is to your child if she is seeing one for the first time. Say, "Wow, look at that!" Never show boredom or disinterest—this can crush your child's natural desire to learn.
- **Redirect when necessary.** If your child is mixing paints and making a huge mess, say, "Those are some cool colors you're making. But let's take a minute and put this newspaper down under your work."