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EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENTER
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make the difference!



Research highlights three ways to raise a strong reader

Few things point to success in school more than being a strong reader. While it may be a few years before your preschooler learns how to read, there are things you can do now to build her reading readiness:

- 1. Read aloud with your child** every day. This is an opportunity to spend time together as well as to improve her literacy skills. Kids look forward to daily time with parents—which is also a great time to encourage a love for reading.
- 2. Demonstrate *how* reading works.** Research shows that making your child aware of the structure of the printed page can improve her reading ability. Say, “We read from the left side of the page to the right side of the page. Then we begin again on the left.”

Point to the sides of the page as you do this.

- 3. Point out letters and words.** Research shows that making your child aware of letters and words can help with reading, spelling and understanding books later on. Point out familiar letters, such as the letters in her name. Help her see the connection: “This word starts with the letter A. That’s the same letter that starts your name, Andrea.”
As your child learns the letters, move on to familiar words. Look in the text for words your child sees often, such as *stop*, *milk* or *love*.

Sources: J. Rasicot, “Study: Tweaking Reading Aloud Could Boost Reading Skills Later,” *Education Week*, nswc.com/study_tweak; S.B. Piasta and others, “Increasing Young Children’s Contact With Print During Shared Reading,” *Child Development*, nswc.com/research_literacy.

Observe life’s tiny treasures with your child



Preschoolers have a way of helping adults appreciate little things in nature, such as the beauty of a spider web, a rock or a fallen leaf.

Maximize your child’s interest and enthusiasm by exploring the world together. You can even turn it into a learning game. Here’s how:

- 1. Bring a camera** or drawing supplies to record what you discover. Encourage your child to look for interesting items. Say, “Let’s find 10 things outside that we’ve never noticed before!”
- 2. Take or draw a picture** when your child sees something new. “There’s a bird’s nest in that tree!” or “Oooh, that’s a huge ant hill!” Let your child help record the memory.
- 3. Look at the pictures** when you get home. Review and talk about what they are. Then take turns covering most of each picture. Can your child guess what he’s looking at? Challenge other family members to figure it out, too.

Experts reveal the benefits of 'private speech' for preschoolers



You may have noticed your child talking to himself. Should you be worried? Experts say *no*. "Private speech" is common and normal among children between the ages of two and five.

In fact, research shows that private speech is also beneficial to your child and you should encourage it. Private speech can help him:

- **Complete tasks successfully.** Research shows that five-year-olds perform motor tasks better when they talk to themselves out loud than when they are silent. Encourage your child to think out loud and "talk himself through" a task.
- **Improve behavior.** Children who have attention problems often talk to themselves more often than other children do. While this can annoy parents and teachers, it's

important to realize that private speech can help these children improve their behavior and stay on task. Encourage your child to speak softly when talking to himself in school settings to avoid disrupting others.

- **Build communication skills.** Private speech helps children prepare for conversations with others. Be sure that your child also has plenty of opportunities to communicate with you, other family members and friends.

Source: A. Winsler and others, "Should I Let Them Talk?: Private Speech and Task Performance Among Preschool Children With and Without Behavior Problems," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier Inc.

"A child seldom needs a good talking to as a good listening to."

—Robert Brault

Music is great for boosting your preschooler's language skills



Most young children love to sing. That is good news because singing is a wonderful way to expand communication. Here are some fun music activities to enjoy as a family:

- **Learn as many nursery rhymes as you can.** Have your child help you find some at the library. Teach them to your child and sing them together as often as possible. Try to sing at least one a day. Combining nursery rhymes with an activity, such as *Ring Around the Rosy*, encourages active play and builds muscles, too.
- **Experiment with different types of singing,** such as singing in a round. (This is when each person sings the same melody, but starts at a different time.) Songs that work well for this include *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* and *Are You Sleeping?*
- **Introduce your child to your favorite music.** (Make sure lyrics are age-appropriate.) Your child will enjoy sharing music with you as she learns to sing along with parts of the song.

Source: B. Daniel, *The Playful Preschooler: 130+ Quick Brain-Boosting Activities for 3- and 4-Year-Olds*, Instructional Fair.

Are you putting the power of routines to work?



Routines make life easier for families. They also help children develop habits that lead to school success. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you're putting the power of routines to work:

- ___ **1. Have you set regular sleep and wake-up times** that ensure your child gets enough rest?
- ___ **2. Do you read with your child every day?** Research shows this is one of the best ways to prepare her for school.
- ___ **3. Do you eat at least one meal as a family each day?** Conversation around the table is one of the best ways to boost your child's vocabulary!
- ___ **4. Do you exercise regularly?** Find activities you and your child like, such as playing tag or taking walks.
- ___ **5. Do you visit the library at least once a week and check out books?**

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're encouraging positive routines. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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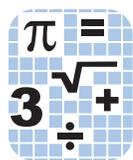
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Help your preschooler build a strong foundation for math



When you practice math skills with your preschooler, you're not just preparing her for kindergarten, you're

preparing her for life.

To start building a strong math foundation, teach your child about:

- **Numbers.** When you count aloud, count actual things. "How many crackers do you have?" "How many steps are there?" You can also play a matching game. Match the number on an index card with another card that contains the same number of stickers.
- **Volume.** Have fun with plastic measuring cups. Measure recipe ingredients, water in a bathtub,

or sand in the sandbox. As you empty and fill the containers, talk about which ones have *more* or *less* than others.

- **Organization.** It's fun for preschoolers to sort things into groups, such as blocks, laundry or toys. You might say, "Your dolls go in this basket. Your stuffed animals go in that one." Or "This pile is for your clothes. Mommy's clothes go in the other pile."
- **Size.** Gather a group of similar things, such as cups. Help your child arrange them in order. Use math words that compare, such as *tall*, *taller* and *tallest* or *small*, *medium* and *large*.

Asking questions can strengthen your preschooler's thinking skills



It's a cold November morning. You go into your child's room to help him get dressed. When you enter, you find he's

already dressed in his favorite T-shirt and shorts. "I picked out my outfit all by myself!" he says proudly.

The bad news? His sense of how to dress for the weather has a long way to go. The great news? His thinking skills are thriving! Your child made a plan and carried it out—an indicator of higher-level thinking.

Here are some ways to build your preschooler's thinking skills:

- **Offer open-ended choices.** This is different than asking your child if he wants oatmeal or waffles for breakfast. In an open-ended choice, all the ideas are his. "What are you going to draw on your paper? I can't wait to see."

- **Ask "Why?"** Turn the tables on your child by asking *him* this question every once in a while. "You always have a big smile on your face when you play with your trucks. Why do you like to play with them so much?" If he answers, "Because they're fun," ask him, "What's fun about them?"
- **Encourage reflection.** This goes beyond your child telling you what he did at school today. When he reflects, he also shares his feelings about what he did. "Your teacher said you were unhappy when Taylor jumped in front of you in line today. Why do you get sad if someone takes your place in the line?"

Source: A.S. Epstein, "How Planning and Reflection Develop Young Children's Thinking Skills," National Association for the Education of Young Children, "niscw.com/plan_reflect."

Q: My son is nearing his fourth birthday. He wants to give up his afternoon nap. He says he is "not sleepy," but I'm not sure. I can't take him anywhere in the afternoon because he falls asleep in the car instantly. He is also cranky from dinner time until it's time for bed. How much sleep does he need, and how can I encourage enough sleep?

Questions & Answers

A: Despite your son's protests, you are right. All the signs you describe indicate a child who needs more sleep than he is getting.

Most four-year-olds need at least 12 hours of sleep. Depending on bed and wake times, some of that may include a nap. Few things are more important to a child's growth and success than adequate sleep.

Here are some ways to help your child get more rest:

- **Try an earlier bedtime.** Some parents are tempted to keep a child up later because they work outside the home and they want to spend time with him. This is understandable, but may not be the best option if your child is cranky the whole time.
- **Follow a routine.** First try giving your child lunch at the same time every day. After a week of this, try having him lie down right after lunch. It is natural to get a bit sleepy right after lunch, and you may find that he will go back to napping.
- **Insist on quiet time.** You can't force a child to sleep. So if he absolutely won't, at least enforce rest. For an hour after lunch, have him spend quiet time in his room with books and stuffed animals.

The Kindergarten Experience

Try 10 strategies to boost success in kindergarten



If there were a top 10 list for kindergarten success, what would it consist of? Here are some popular strategies from education experts:

1. **Make reading a priority.** Reading with parents daily helps kids build language skills and practice critical thinking.
2. **Encourage writing skills.** Show pride as your child goes from scribbling to tracing to writing letters.
3. **Do math often.** Note how it's part of everyday life. "Let's count how many apples we have."
4. **Practice listening.** To set a good example, make eye contact, avoid interruptions and show interest. Do activities that require listening, such as reading aloud.
5. **Get involved.** Support the teacher by volunteering and saying positive things about school.
6. **Communicate with the teacher.** Your child will do best if you and the teacher stay in touch.
7. **Develop routines.** It's critical for students to arrive at school rested, well fed, on time and ready to learn.
8. **Spend time at school.** Get to know staff, students and fellow parents.
9. **Build responsibility.** Give your child age-appropriate choices and responsibilities.
10. **Discuss school every day.** Ask open-ended questions so your child can provide details.

Kindergarten homework can build important school habits

Many parents are surprised when kindergartners have homework. "Is it really important at this age?" they wonder.

Homework assignments are more than a review of academic skills. They're also a chance for parents to:

- **Stay involved** with learning. Discuss what kind of work your child is doing. Look for ways to apply new skills to real life. For example, "If I give you one of my cookies, how many will I have left?"
- **Monitor progress.** Parents are often the first to raise concerns about their child's learning. This is extremely helpful to the teacher. "Mason is having trouble identifying shapes. How can I help him work on this skill?"



- **Develop critical habits.** Homework will be part of your child's life for many years to come. He'll need self-discipline to make the most of it. Establish important routines now, such as studying at the same time and in the same place every day, to set the stage for future success.

Show your kindergartner ways to prepare for a spelling test



Spelling tests will likely be part of your child's entire elementary school career. However, spelling is not a natural skill. Your child will need to practice. Here's how:

- **Involve her senses.** Many children learn better if they use more than one strategy. So, have your child spell the words out loud. Have her write them. Have her shape them out of play dough.
- **Practice rhyming** with your child. In the early grades, teachers often choose spelling words from "word families." These are words that sound the same, such as *cat*, *bat*, *rat*. Tell your child, "These words end with *at*." Help your child make the connection between the way the word sounds and the way it looks.
- **Do a practice test.** The day before the test, see how many words your child can spell. Focus the rest of studying on words that were difficult.