



Show your preschooler that math is a regular part of life

Early childhood is a great time to show your child that math is not only fun, it's a regular part of daily life, too. Nearly everything we do involves math. Each time we get dressed, for example, we follow a sequence. That's a basic math skill.

Here are some other ways to help your child become aware of the math that's all around:

- **Look for numbers everywhere.** Search together for numbers your child knows. If your child doesn't recognize numbers yet, point them out. "That big sign has a number 2 and a number 5 on it!"
- **Look for patterns.** Help your child find patterns on sheets, curtains and clothing. "Your shirt has a red stripe, then a yellow stripe, then

a red stripe, then a yellow stripe. That's a pattern."

- **Estimate.** Say to your child, "I think you can finish your sandwich in 10 bites. Let's see." Then, help count the bites as your child takes them.
- **Have a "shape of the day."** In the morning, show your preschooler a shape, such as a circle. All day long, point out circles you see. Offer praise when your child points one out.
- **Follow sequences.** Preschoolers love routines and knowing what's going to happen next. Talk about the course of the day. "First, I'll drop you off at preschool. After school is over, Grandma will pick you up. Then you will go back to her house to play."

Ask questions to boost problem-solving skills



When it comes to helping young children learn to think problems through, the key may

lie not in what you *tell* them, but in what you *ask* them. Asking the right questions encourages kids to come up with their own solutions.

Use questions to guide your preschooler through the process. Here's how:

1. **Encourage your child to state the problem.** Ask questions such as, "What's going on?"
2. **Try to get your child to come up with solutions.** Ask, "What do you want to do about that?"
3. **Help your child think about consequences.** "You could try that. What do you think might happen if you did?"
4. **Ask about alternatives.** "Do you have any other ideas?" It's OK if your child doesn't solve the problem or come up with the "right" answer. The idea is to promote independent thinking first, rather than simply supplying the answers.

Source: M.B. Shure, Ph.D., Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along with Others, Gallery Books.

Model listening skills to help your child build language skills



Sometimes it feels like preschoolers talk nonstop—and it can be hard to follow what they're saying! But

listening to them is one of the best things you can do to promote learning.

When you actively listen and engage with your child, you're modeling a crucial skill for school success: listening to understand.

To show you're really listening:

- **Remove distractions.** Give your child your full attention. Put down your phone, turn off the TV and make eye contact.
- **Be patient.** When your child is talking to you, avoid interrupting. It takes time for preschoolers to organize their thoughts and put them into words.

- **Ask questions** to show you're trying to understand. Restate what you heard to make sure you got it right. "It sounds like you're telling me you were mad because your friend wouldn't share a toy. Is that right?" This helps your child feel heard.
- **Pay attention** to body language. Take note of your child's tone of voice, facial expressions and behavior. Often, it's not *what* children say, it's *how* they say it.

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."

—Stephen Covey

Spark your child's creativity by making valentines together



This Valentine's Day, give your child the gift of art and creativity. Sit down with your preschooler and create some fun, artistic valentines together. You can:

- **Tape a scrap of textured cloth** to a table. Lace works well. Put a sheet of thin white paper on top. Give your child a red crayon to rub on the white paper so that the texture of the scrap underneath appears. Then, fold the paper and turn it into a card, or cut it into a heart shape and glue it to the front of a card.
- **Paint on unusual surfaces.** For example, your child could paint on foil with thick red paint. Cut out a heart from the painted aluminum foil, and glue it to the front of a folded piece of paper.
- **Cut out heart shapes.** Let your child trace and color the shapes. Show how to overlap the shapes to make different designs. Your child can also use the shapes to make people or animals. Experiment with different materials for tracing, such as paints and chalk.
- **Create a woven heart.** Help your preschooler cut out the shape of a heart from a piece of sturdy construction paper. Use a hole-punch to make holes all along the edge of the heart. Then, let your child weave a piece of yarn or colorful ribbon in and out of the holes.
- **Challenge your child** to think of other ways you can make valentines together. Anything goes!

Are you helping your child learn during playtime?



Playtime provides an opportunity for young children to explore, think creatively and learn new skills. Answer

yes or *no* to the questions below to see if you are making playtime a learning experience:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** and listen to your child during playtime?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** creative play, such as making up stories and doing art projects?
- ___ **3. Do you strengthen** your child's large and small muscles with activities such as running, jumping, coloring and putting together puzzles?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child practice cooperation skills like sharing, taking turns and using phrases such as *please* and *thank you*?
- ___ **5. Do you make** time to read every day and choose books that your child wants to read again and again?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are filling playtime with learning opportunities. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Published monthly September through September.
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a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Strong motor skills prepare your child for school activities



Motor skills are the physical abilities people need to manipulate their bodies. Large (gross) motor skills

require the development of major muscles in the legs, back and arms. Small (fine) motor skills involve the smaller muscles in the hands, wrists, fingers and eyes.

The more developed these muscles are, the easier it will be for your child to learn to read, write and participate at school.

To strengthen motor skills, have your child:

- **Zip and button** clothing.
- **Turn pages of books.**
- **Draw and color** with large crayons, pencils and washable markers.

- **Cut with safety scissors** (under your supervision).
- **Pretend to be different animals.** Leap like a frog or hop like a kangaroo.
- **Squeeze and form clay** or play dough into shapes and letters.
- **Finger paint.**
- **Build with blocks.**
- **Roll and catch a ball.**
- **String beads on laces.**
- **Dress and play with dolls** and action figures.
- **Pick up pennies** from a table (under supervision, of course).

Be patient and let your preschooler attempt tasks independently. Notice and praise your child's accomplishments to build a sense of pride and self-confidence.

Focus on your preschooler's interests to build attention span



The ability to focus on an activity is a vital skill for school success. Children find it easier to pay attention to activi-

ties that interest them, so choose an activity your child enjoys. Then, look for ways to keep your child focused on it for increasing periods of time.

Here are some ideas:

- **Extend your story time.** Instead of looking at a short book, try reading a longer story or a beginning reader's chapter book over a period of several nights. Each night, remind your child of where you are in the story. Then, explain that tomorrow night, you are going to read on and find out what happens to the characters.
- **Work together on a jigsaw puzzle.** Try one with about 25 pieces. Remember, there is no need to finish a puzzle in one sitting! Attention span also involves coming back to a project after you have put it aside. Move on to more complicated puzzles once your child masters these.
- **Do a multi-step art project.** Help your child shape an animal out of clay. Allow the clay to dry and harden. On another day, let your child paint the animal. After the paint dries, help your child glue on yarn for fur or bits of paper for eyes.
- **Try baking together.** Choose a simple recipe with several steps, such as one for cookies or muffins. As you work through the recipe together, help your child focus on each step and see the project through to the end. The best part? You and your child get to eat the results!

Q: Later this month, I must decide if I will register my child for kindergarten or for another year of preschool. I'm just not sure my child will be ready for kindergarten. What should I consider as I make this decision?

Questions & Answers

A: You are not alone. Many families wonder if their children have the maturity needed for a successful year in kindergarten. One reason may be an undue focus on academics.

Academic skills are only part of what children need to enter kindergarten. So what else do they need? Three key elements of kindergarten success are:

1. **Self-control.**
 2. **Social skills.**
 3. **Enthusiasm for learning.**
- Children who have these three things, or are making progress toward them, should be able to:
- **Wait their turn.**
 - **Follow** directions from the preschool teacher and other adults.
 - **Contain strong emotions** by counting to 10 or taking five deep breaths.
 - **Get along** with classmates and friends.
 - **Work alone** on class projects under the teacher's direction.
 - **Concentrate** on a task for a few minutes at a time.
 - **Manage** basic personal needs, such as hanging up coats and using the bathroom.
 - **Sit still** and enjoy listening to an adult read a short story.

If you are still unsure if your child will be ready for kindergarten, or if you have concerns about development, make an appointment to talk with the preschool teacher or your pediatrician.

The Kindergarten Experience

Show your child the benefits of volunteering



Volunteering together is a practical way to help your kindergartner learn about community service and the responsibility of giving back to your community.

To involve your child:

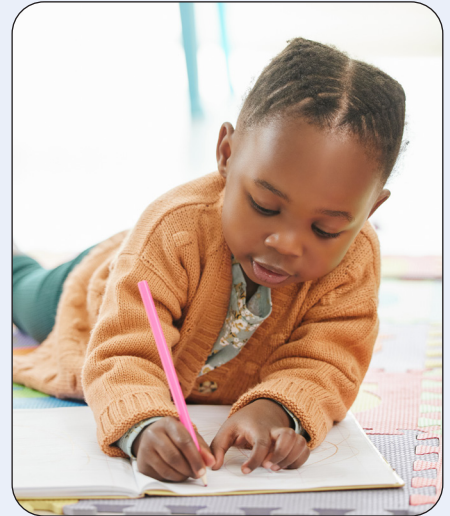
- **Talk about helping.** Discuss how your child's efforts can make a difference. This will make your kindergartner feel powerful and motivated to contribute.
- **Introduce your child** to people who help others for a living. Talk to police officers, fire fighters or emergency paramedics. Ask them to tell your child how they serve the people in your community.
- **Look for books and stories** about community service. Ask your librarian for some suggestions. Read them with your child and talk about how helping others also makes the helper feel good.
- **Select one or two** community service activities in your area to do with your child. You could collect canned goods for a food pantry. You could visit an elderly neighbor. Your example of service is a powerful way to teach your child about your values.
- **Make it fun.** If your child loves animals, see if you can donate old blankets to an animal shelter. If your child loves the outdoors, perhaps you could pitch in at a park.
- **Make giving a tradition.** Instead of always asking what your child *wants*, ask what your child *wants to give*, such as gently used clothing or toys.

Perseverance is important in kindergarten and beyond

Kindergarten students are expected to settle down and complete the jobs they're given. They can't always jump from one activity to another if they get frustrated or bored. They must learn to persevere and finish what they start.

To foster perseverance:

- **Encourage your child to engage** in quiet activities at home. Give your child time to read and work alone.
- **Let your child struggle** a bit when working on a task. If you always jump in to help, your child won't develop a "can do" attitude. Suggest trying different strategies to figure out a solution.
- **Let your child run around** and be noisy after finishing a task. This helps your child learn that playing comes after the work is done—similar to having to wait until recess to let off steam at school.



- **Manage materials.** If your child is drawing, offer only a few pieces of paper at a time. This encourages your child to be more intentional with work and discourages giving up easily and starting over.

Motivate your kindergartner without resorting to bribes



Adults sometimes make deals with children.

"If you put all of your books away, I'll take you to the library." "If you

share with your sister, I'll give you a cookie." Deals like these may seem like effective motivators for kids. Unfortunately, they're not.

When adults present ideas to young children in this way, they are offering a *bribe*—not motivation. A bribe doesn't teach respect or responsibility. Instead, it teaches kids "If I do what this person wants, I will get something for it."

To avoid falling into the bribe trap:

- **Change the way** you say things. For example, use the word *when* instead of *if*. This puts the emphasis on what you expect your child to do, rather than allowing a choice.
- **Explain why the action** is helpful or valuable. "When you put your books away, they don't get stepped on or lost. Then we won't waste time looking for your library books and we will have time to read an extra story."

Source: J. Pawel, *The Parent's Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, Ambris Publishing.