Early Childhood Parents®
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Clarke County School District
make the difference!

# Promote brain growth with back-and-forth conversations

Preschoolers who engage in frequent conversations with family members not only strengthen language skills, they also develop the brain power needed for school success.

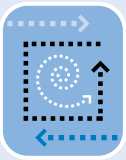
That's the finding of research on language exposure in early childhood. Scientists concluded that back-and-forth conversations build brain pathways—which, in turn, boost children's ability to think and learn.

To strengthen your preschooler's brain power:

- **Discuss everything** you do together throughout the day. Describe your actions and feelings. Encourage your child to do the same.
- **Follow your child's lead.** Focus on the words and objects that your child is focusing on at the moment.
- **Ask open-ended questions,** such as, "Why do you like playing with your stuffed animals?" Give your child plenty of time to respond, then add a comment and ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation going.
- **Be an active listener.** When your child speaks to you, stop what you're doing and pay attention.
- **Speak clearly** and use correct grammar. Avoid using baby talk.
- **Seek guidance.** If you have any concerns or questions about your child's language development, talk to your pediatrician.

**Source:** R.R. Romeo and others, "Beyond the 30-Million-Word Gap: Children's Conversational Exposure Is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function," *Psychological Science,* Association for Psychological Science.

## Teach your preschooler about time



Time is a difficult concept for young children to master. It is abstract—your preschooler can't see it, hear it or touch it. Truly understanding time requires higher-order thinking skills.

Here are two activities to help your child learn the concept of a "day." (Learning smaller amounts of time, such as hours and minutes, comes later.)

1. **Provide a calendar** or make one together. Each morning, ask your preschooler to cross off the day before with a marker or apply a fun sticker over it. This shows that the preceding day is over, and you have begun a new one.
2. **Make a paper chain** to help your child count down the number of days to a special event. Hang it in a noticeable spot. Each night, have your child tear off one link. Explain that just as the chain is growing shorter, so is the amount of time until the special event. Each time your preschooler tears off a link, the event is one day closer!

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# Instill a love of learning while having some family fun

Every month is the perfect month to instill a love of learning in your preschooler. It's easy to do. One learning activity each day—just a few minutes daily all month long—can help your whole family get into the habit of learning.

Here are some activity ideas to get started:

- **Have a family reading night.** Do this often, since reading is the foundation for learning. Let your child look at a favorite book while you read something you enjoy. After 10 minutes or so, ask your child to tell you about the book. Then, read it aloud together.
- **Practice math at mealtimes.** Place a raisin on the table and say to your child, "Here is one raisin." Add two more raisins and ask, "Now how many do you have?" Show how the two halves of a sandwich are rectangles (or triangles). What shape do they make when your child puts them together?
- **Create a weekly craft challenge.** Together, find things around the house to reuse for a project. Your child could cover empty cans (with no sharp edges) with paper to turn them into pencil holders.
- **Exchange notes with family.** Your child can tell you what to write, then draw a picture. Family members can respond in writing.

> **"Try to learn something about everything and everything about something."**
>
> *—Thomas Huxley*

# Five steps can help you address your preschooler's misbehavior

Misbehavior certainly isn't pleasant, but it is normal for young children. It's one of the ways they figure out exactly what is expected of them.

To help your preschooler manage behavior:

1. **Create family rules together.** Talk about the importance of having rules. Involve your child in creating a short list of rules your family should follow. Consider your child's ideas, but remember that you make the final decision.
2. **Be firm, fair and consistent.** Once you decide which rules are most important, stick to them. When correcting your child, reinforce the behavior you want to see in a loving way.
3. **Use consequences.** Natural and logical outcomes help children learn from mistakes. If your child leaves a toy outside and it gets damaged in the rain, don't rush out to replace it.
4. **Offer choices.** Ask, "Would you like green beans or broccoli with dinner tonight?" instead of saying, "You have to eat vegetables tonight." Stick to options that are all OK with you.
5. **Reward positive behavior** with praise and time together. Your preschooler will soon realize that positive behavior results in more attention than misbehavior.

# Are you boosting your preschooler's independence?

It is a natural instinct to shelter young children. However, allowing them some freedom to explore and build independence prepares them for school and other responsibilities.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're balancing your child's safety and freedom:

1. **Do you supervise** your child's playtime with friends without hovering over them?
2. **Do you turn mistakes** into learning opportunities by asking questions, such as "If you had a chance to do it over, what's one new strategy you would use?"
3. **Do you give your child** a chance to solve minor problems before you step in to help?
4. **Do you show interest** in your child's opinions and respect them, even if you disagree?
5. **Do you play** with your child but also encourage independent play?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are encouraging independence. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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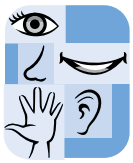
# Help your preschooler enjoy spring with outdoor learning



The changes that take place every spring are similar to the changes preschoolers experience every day. That's why outdoor learning activities are great for fostering your child's development this season. Head outside together to:

- **Investigate the wind.** Does your child know what blows around in the wind? Find out together! Punch a hole in a plastic lid. Pull a piece of string through the hole and tie a thick knot at one end to secure it. Help your child rub petroleum jelly on the lid and hang it from a tree branch. Check after 30 minutes and see what the wind blew onto the lid.
- **Plant.** Show your child how to start something, tend it and watch it grow. Together, pick some easy-to-grow seeds such as radishes. Depending on your climate, start them indoors or plant them outside in the ground. Demonstrate how to care for the plants and talk about what would happen to them if your child stopped taking care of them.
- **Keep track of animals.** As the plants around you start to turn green, you and your child will notice more animals returning. At first, you may not see them. But if you listen, you may hear them. Listen for the chirping of birds as they come back to your area. You and your child may hear the "ribbit"of the frogs and the sounds that different insects make. Listen for sounds in the morning and right before your child goes to bed. Write down what you hear.

# Earth Day activities teach young children to care for the planet

Earth Day (April 22) is a worldwide celebration of our amazing home! Take this opportunity to teach your preschooler about the planet and how to be a friend to it. You can celebrate by establishing habits at home that are fun and educational:

- **Make a family commitment** to conserve Earth's resources. Have your child turn off the water when brushing teeth and turn off the lights when leaving a room.
- **Talk about trash.** What happens to things after we throw them away? Show your child a garbage truck and explain that it is hauling trash away to a big dump, called a landfill. Talk about some things we can do to keep landfills from getting too full, such as recycling.
- **Find new uses for old things.** No one has the space to buy new things and keep everything else. Teach your child to repurpose a few things instead of throwing them out. Reuse an empty jelly jar as a vase for flowers. Turn old water bottles into bowling pins. Decorate paper bags to make puppets.
- **Read together.** There are many children's books about caring for the Earth. Here are a few to try:
  - » *If You Come to Earth* by Sophie Blackall.
  - » *Thank You, Earth: A Love Letter to Our Planet* by April Pulley Sayre.
  - » *Alba and the Ocean Cleanup* by Lara Hawthorne.
  - » *Our Planet! There's No Place Like Earth* by Stacy McAnulty.

## Questions & Answers

**Q: I can never tell if my child is really sick or just trying to stay home from preschool. On the times I have allowed my child to stay home, the sickness seems to disappear by 10 a.m., and I find my preschooler playing and watching TV. What should I do the next time my child complains of feeling sick before it's time to go to preschool?**

**A:** It's difficult to know what to do when young children say they don't feel well and want to stay home from school. If you aren't 100 percent sure that your child is really ill:

- **Follow the school's protocols** for illness. If your child will have to stay home from school, explain that means staying home in bed getting well. No videos or playing around the house.
- **Be sympathetic.** If your child really doesn't feel well, provide loving care. But don't overdo the attention and special services. The point is to create an environment where your preschooler can get well—not one that's so rewarding that staying home is more fun than to going to school.
- **Be consistent.** If your child feels better an hour later and wants to get up, say you are delighted with the improvement, ut your child needs to remain in bed and continue recuperating. Express your hopes that tomorrow your child will be completely healthy and ready to return to preschool. This will teach your child that staying home sick is different from staying home to play.

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# The Kindergarten Experience

## Keep your child motivated all school year long

As the school year winds down, many kindergartners need a motivation boost to remain focused on learning. Try these strategies to help your kindergartner finish the school year strong:

- **Stay engaged.** When families are involved in education, kids do better in school. Talk about school, monitor schoolwork and communicate with the teacher regularly.
- **Have a positive outlook.** Say that you believe your child can succeed in school. And if your student struggles, work with the teacher to find solutions.
- **Promote independence.** Give your child age-appropriate freedoms—choosing between two places to read, or whether to do math before or after dinner, for example.
- **Correct mistakes** in positive ways. "You spelled everything right except these two words! I bet you can learn them with practice" is more motivating than "You seem to struggle with spelling."
- **Give specific compliments.** It's better to say, "Your report is written so neatly. I can read it easily. That's important" than "Nice handwriting."
- **Add more to learning.** Let school lessons spark your imagination. Visit educational websites with your child. Take a trip to the state capital, plant a window garden or calculate distances between points on map together.

## Reviewing assignments gives families a window into learning

When kindergartners bring home schoolwork, it's a way for families to learn more about what their children are learning and how they are doing in school. Reviewing your child's work also gives you a chance to:

- **Stay involved** with your child's learning. Discuss what kind of work your child is doing. Look for ways to apply new skills to real life. For example, "If you have a cookie and I give you one of my cookies, how many will you have?"
- **Monitor progress.** Families are often the first to raise concerns about their child's learning. It is helpful to discuss them with the teacher. "Max is having trouble identifying shapes. How can I help my child develop this skill?"
- **Build a learning routine.** Showing that schoolwork matters now can foster a positive attitude towards learning that will benefit your child in the years to come. Knowing that you take learning seriously will motivate your child to work hard at it

## Five activities can build your kindergartner's self-confidence

Self-confidence can have a positive impact on your kindergartner's academic and social life. When students believe in themselves, they're more likely to take on challenges, persevere through frustration and achieve goals.

To build self-confidence, celebrate your child's effort, progress and achievements. Consider these ideas:

1. **Create a mini-museum.** Hang your child's art, writing, test papers and certificates on a designated wall. Change the "exhibits" often.
2. **Send fan mail.** Praise your child's efforts in a note, poem or riddle.
3. **Make a date.** Each month, devote one day to doing something your child enjoys and does well.
4. **Have a testimonial dinner.** Let your child sit at the head of the table and have each family member say something nice about the honored guest.
5. **Interview your child.** Ask questions such as, "What are you most proud of right now?" "What is one thing you are better at now than you were last month?"