

Early Childhood Parents[®]

make the difference!



Create a learning environment at home for your preschooler

As a parent, you are your child's first and most influential teacher. The activities you and your child do together set the stage for her academic success.

To create a learning environment at home:

- **Look for concrete ways** to help your child learn concepts. For example, your child comes home and says, "We counted to four at school!" Reply, "That's great! We need four plates on the table for dinner. You can put the plates on and we'll count them together."
- **Review and expand** upon concepts. If your child is learning shapes, say, "I see circles and squares in this room. Can you bring me something that is a circle and something that is a square?" Once that is done, say, "Did you

know that a triangle has three sides? Let's look for one of those, too!"

- **Engage your child's senses.** Each day, talk with her about what she sees, hears, feels, smells and tastes. Help her learn the words that describe these, such as *loud*, *rough*, *salty* and *sour*.
- **Give your child** plenty of opportunities to practice social skills. Social skills are a big part of the curriculum in preschool and kindergarten. But some experiences, such as learning to be a good host and a polite guest, are best accomplished outside of school.

Source: Jennifer R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher: Insights for Parent Involvement*, ISBN: 1-56822-998-4 (Instructional Fair, a division of School Specialty Publishing, www.schoolspecialtypublishing.com).

Do you know what discipline should teach?



According to many experts, discipline should teach your child good behavior and the ability to be "competent, caring and "in control." To encourage these qualities:

- **Set age-appropriate limits**, but give your child freedom within them. Let him try new things, make choices and take on responsibilities.
- **Do kind things** and talk about why this is important. How does it make other people feel? How does it make your child feel? Spend time being grateful each day.
- **Be a role model** for your child. In addition to telling him what to do, show him how to behave. When you're angry, for example, stay calm. Point out other role models, too.
- **Compliment** your child's successes. Speak up when he does something right. Be specific. "You put your books in the bookcase. How grown up!"

Source: Barrie Gillies, "Let Your Child Soar," *Parents*, December 2008 (Meredith Corporation, www.parents.com).

Help your child think about the stories you read together



Your child is reading when he *says* the words on the page, *knows* what they mean and *understands* the story they tell.

You can help your child if you:

- **Read him part of a story** without showing the pictures. Have him close his eyes and imagine what something in the story looks like. Ask, “The kids went on a merry-go-round. What colors do you think the horses were?”

- **Look for words** your child is not familiar with. When reading a story, point them out and help him understand their meanings.
- **Ask your child questions** about a story. Begin questions with *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why* or *how*. “What did the boy do every night after dinner?”

Source: Michael H. Popkin, Bettie B. Youngs and Jane M. Healy, *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds*, ISBN: 1-880283-15-8 (Active Parenting, www.activeparenting.com).

Schedule special time to spend with your child on a regular basis



Don't let your hectic schedule keep you from spending quality time with your child.

Preschoolers learn from their relationships

with others. But their interactions with their parents are the most important.

You are your child's greatest teacher. You can help her feel safe enough—emotionally and physically—to try new things. The more secure she feels, the more she'll explore.

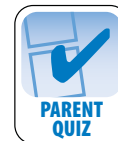
Making “appointments” with your child ensures that other activities don't dominate your calendar.

Here's how to get started:

- **Brainstorm together.** Think of things you enjoy doing with each other. Making something? Going hiking? Going camping? Watching a ball game?
- **Think of things you love doing** that you'd like your child to appreciate. Eating Chinese food. Fishing. Collecting.
- **Make a list of things** your child most wants to do.

- **Mark your calendar** to do at least one thing each month. Pick a date and stick to it.
- **Refer to the list** when any free time or a free night turns up.

Are you helping your child learn from mistakes?



Learning how to handle mistakes will help your preschooler succeed in school. Take this quiz to see if you're raising your child to have a positive attitude about mistakes. Answer *yes* or *no*.

- ___ **1. I have high yet reachable expectations** for my child.
- ___ **2. I talk about my expectations** with my child.
- ___ **3. I ask my child** if she needs help when I see she's having trouble.
- ___ **4. I let my child know** that everyone makes mistakes.
- ___ **5. I tell my child** that making a mistake gives her a chance to correct herself and get it right the next time.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child will learn more because she doesn't fear making mistakes. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.



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Teach your preschooler how to respect boundaries and limits



Research shows that young children respond well to clear expectations and consequences. They feel secure when adults are calm and matter-of-fact about what they may and may not do. When adults are consistent in this way, children learn to respect boundaries. As a natural result, they also respect those who set the boundaries.

To grow this respect:

- **Don't treat boundaries** as a punishment. Rather than saying, "Get your hand off that cake!" say, "I know the cake looks good. But we stick to one treat a day."
- **Consider your preschooler's** developmental level. What looks like disrespect in young children

is more likely to be an age-related lack of skills or self-control. Take the time to teach and practice the lacking skill with your child.

- **Give choices.** Children do deserve some control over their lives. Give two choices you approve of and let your child decide. This is win-win.

Source: Jolene L. Roehlkepartain and Nancy Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, ISBN: 1-57542-070-8 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

"I talk and talk and talk, and I haven't taught people in 50 years what my father taught by example in one week."

—Mario Cuomo

Know how your child will learn on the journey to kindergarten



Your child will mentally develop by leaps and bounds from the time he turns three to the time he is ready to start kindergarten as a five-year-old.

Between ages three and four, your child can:

- **Put similar objects in groups.**
- **Match colors.**
- **Make towers of blocks** or line them up from biggest to smallest.
- **Understand parts and wholes.** (One slice of pizza is a *part*, the entire pizza is the *whole*.)
- **Draw something representative.** A stick figure is a man, a round body and head with a tail could be a dog.
- **Work on an activity** for up to 15 minutes (this varies).

- **Listen, watch and learn** from a preschool teacher.
- **Give first and last name and age.**
- **Begin to understand** the difference between *today* and *yesterday*.

Between four and five, your child can:

- **Rhyme words.**
- **Identify many colors.**
- **Understand** that things happen in order.
- **Produce** a much more detailed drawing. The man may have a hat and clothes; the dog may have a collar.
- **Count to at least five**, and often much higher.
- **Give name of street and town.**

Source: Public Broadcasting System, "The Whole Child, ABCs of Child Care—Cognitive," PBS.org, www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/cognitive.html.

Q: I've read articles about critical thinking and that many children grow up lacking this skill. I'd like to help my child with this but it sounds so complicated. I'm not sure I'm qualified.

Questions & Answers

A: Of course you are! Critical thinking does sound like a fancy term, but much of it has to do with imagining, figuring and questioning. Most children do these every day, naturally. All you have to do is encourage your child a bit.

Here are some ideas for you:

- **Don't rush in** to fix everything for your child. For example, your child has put her shirt on inside-out. Put her in front of the mirror and say, "Uh-oh. Isn't there supposed to be a picture of a flower on your shirt?" Give her a chance to realize what went wrong and take care of it.
- **Take a few extra minutes** with story time. After reading, ask your child questions about the story and the characters. Questions that inspire critical thinking start with phrases like, "How do you know that ..." or "What would happen if ..."
- **Ask questions** about your child's work. Ask, "What is the girl doing in your picture?" or "Why does she have a dog instead of a cat?"
- **Give your child time** each day to play alone with simple toys such as wooden blocks. This play gives your child the chance to be creative. It also lets her experiment with new approaches. For example, if the block tower falls down, she can find a new way to build it.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance in kindergarten is linked to success



Approximately one in 10 kindergartners is chronically absent from school. But does attendance in kindergarten really matter?

Yes! Research shows that missing 10% or more of the school year is linked to trouble with achievement in first grade. (Both excused and unexcused absences count.) To prevent attendance problems:

- **Ask the school** about attendance policies. What is an excused or unexcused absence? What is a tardy? Check school calendars before planning appointments and trips.
- **Create routines** that make it easier to get to school on time. Prepare school bags, lunches and outfits at night. Establish a regular sleep schedule.
- **Seek help** if issues such as transportation, illness or child care make getting to school difficult. Community programs may be able to help.
- **Keep in touch** with your child's teacher. If your child needs to miss school, the teacher might suggest at-home activities or resources.
- **Enroll your child** as soon as possible if you're moving from one area to another. The sooner your child gets to school, the more your child can learn.

Source: Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html.

Encourage your kindergartner to become more independent

Your child is now about halfway through kindergarten and you have probably seen a big change in him. Many children seem so much more mature after a few months of going to "big school," walking through the hallways and perhaps even riding a school bus.

Your child is becoming more independent, and this is good news. Encourage this newfound independence by letting your child:

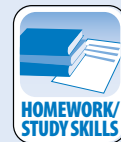
- **Dress himself** (except for small buttons and tying shoes).
- **Get things for himself.** Provide a sturdy step stool. Store things he needs, like cups for water, in low drawers he can easily reach.
- **Give you the papers** from his backpack.
- **Empty his lunch box.**



- **Help prepare his breakfast or lunch.** He can pour dry cereal into a bowl, get the milk out of the refrigerator and peel a banana. For lunch, he can make a simple sandwich.

Source: Sue Ryono, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success*, ISBN: 1-55254-170-3 (Brighter Vision Publications, www.brightervision.com).

Help your kindergartner develop homework habits that will last



Having homework in kindergarten used to be unthinkable. But now that schools focus more on standards and testing, kindergarten work is more intensely academic. And that often includes homework.

Many kindergarten teachers wait until the second half of the school year before giving homework. If so, your child may soon be bringing some home.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **It shouldn't take long.** Expect your child to spend 10 minutes on it.
- **It should be fun.** Help your child develop a positive attitude about homework. Be enthusiastic and make it fun.
- **It's mainly for practice.** These short homework assignments will help your child establish a homework routine that will benefit her in first grade and beyond.

Source: Carol Wright, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success: Kindergarten*, ISBN: 1-55254-169-X (Brighter Vision Publications, www.brightervision.com).