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Early Childhood Parents®

Shelton Youth Service Bureau

make the difference!



Give your preschooler many chances to learn through art

Your preschooler learns so much through art. She learns how to make decisions, such as which colors to use when creating a picture. She learns about cause and effect when she moves her crayon on paper to make a mark. And, through art, your child discovers new ways to express herself.

To help your child get the most from her art:

- **Resist the urge** to tell her what to create. The *process* of creating is more important than your child's final product.
- **Ask questions** to help her get started. If your child wants to draw a balloon but doesn't know where to begin, ask, "What shape is a balloon?" "What are the different parts of a balloon?"
- **Provide a variety** of art supplies. Look for things around the house—glue, fabric scraps, coffee filters, egg cartons, catalogs, paper towel tubes, string and yarn.
- **Be sensitive and patient.** Some preschoolers don't like to get their hands dirty or sticky, for example. That's OK. Introduce new art materials slowly.
- **Ask her to tell you** about what she made. What is it? How did she do it? How does she feel about it?
- **Offer specific feedback.** Don't just say, "That's pretty." Describe what your child has done. Talk about the colors and materials she used. Note what you like most.
- **Proudly display her work.** Put it on the wall or refrigerator. Send it to relatives.

Teach your child to respect differences



To get along in school, and in this world, your child must be able to relate to people who are different from him.

Make an effort to introduce him to people from different cultures and countries. Talk about their families, jobs and traditions and encourage your child to ask questions.

To expose your child to the beauty of different cultures:

- **Find child-friendly songs** with simple melodies from other countries. Sing them with your child.
- **Eat at restaurants** featuring foods and traditions from other cultures.
- **Read children's books** from a variety of cultures and places, like Barbara M. Jooesse's *Mama, Do You Love Me?*
- **Find books** that retell familiar stories, like Susan Lowell's *Three Little Javelinas*. It's a Native American rendition of the *Three Little Pigs*.
- **Decorate your child's room** with magazine and newspaper photos of children from other cultures who are his age.

Make learning fun by creating a special learning spot!



Preschoolers love small, comfy places. Why not combine this love with a bit of learning, too?

Consider creating a special learning spot for your child. This may even make her more eager to learn.

Here's how to create one:

- **Find a cozy space** in your home. It could be in the corner of your child's room, in an open closet or even in part of the kitchen.
- **Bring in pillows.** Add books, paper, crayons and other school supplies. Let your child pick a favorite doll or stuffed animal to be her learning buddy.
- **Find time** to share this special spot with your child often. Call it "learning time." You could read

and draw together. Make and use flash cards. Your child can practice writing letters and her name.

- **Encourage your child** to spend some time on her own in the learning spot. She could look through books or maybe teach her learning buddy something new she has learned!

"You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives."

—Clay P. Bedford

Teach your child about senses with taste and smell experiments



Without realizing it, many of us confuse our senses of taste and smell. They're so closely connected that sometimes we don't notice which sense we're using.

Here are activities that teach kids (and adults!) about taste and smell:

1. **Try to identify foods** by how they taste and smell. Have your child close his eyes and hold his nose. Place a small amount of fruit, such as orange, grapefruit, or lime on his tongue. Can he tell what it is? Now have him smell the food with his eyes still closed. It might be easier to identify this way.
2. **Make foods** with and without salt. You might be surprised to learn that a little salt can make sweet

foods taste sweeter. That's why it's in so many desserts. Make a cup of hot chocolate with milk, cocoa powder and sugar. Then make another cup, adding a pinch of salt. Which tastes sweeter?

3. **Keep track of things** you and your child smell for a day. It's fun to see how many he can recognize by smell, such as flowers, clean laundry, and food. Help him think of words that describe what he smells, such as *spicy* or *minty*.
4. **Share a fun fact** with your child: Different parts of the tongue taste certain things better. For example, the tip is extra sensitive to sweet things. The middle senses salty and sour best. And the back is sensitive to bitter tastes. Can you notice these differences when eating?

Are you adding learning to your child's play time?



It's easy to fill play time with learning—and you can do so without your child even knowing. Answer

yes or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child learn through play:

- ___ 1. **Do you talk** and listen to your child while playing?
- ___ 2. **Do you find** ways to play with your child creatively, such as by making up stories and doing art projects?
- ___ 3. **Do you build** small and large muscles with activities such as running, jumping, coloring and putting together puzzles?
- ___ 4. **Do you help** your child practice social skills by sharing, taking turns and using phrases such as *please* and *thank you*?
- ___ 5. **Do you make** time to read every day, choosing 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 play time with learning opportunities. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Outdoor play strengthens your preschooler's mind and body



As the weather gets warmer, your child is probably spending more time playing outdoors. And that's good news for

his brain and social development as well as his muscle development.

According to experts, playing outside with friends is a great way to encourage the pretend play that is so important between the ages of three and five. It helps your child learn:

- **Creativity.** When your child calls out, "Let's pretend we are riding horses!" he is thinking creatively. Then when he and his friends collect sticks to "ride" and start galloping around the yard, they are playing creatively.
- **Problem solving.** What happens when there are four children but only three sticks? Preschoolers

often figure out ways to cope. You may see them take turns with the sticks or look for another prop to use as a "horse." Or one child may pretend that he has "lost" his horse and is looking for it.

- **Social skills.** Children learn how to approach others and join in a group that is already playing. A child may use a startup cue, such as, "Giddy up ... I'm riding a horse, too." The children already in the group learn how to accommodate and include others that decide to join them as they play.

It is always important to supervise your child as he plays outside with friends. But it is equally important to give him opportunities to "figure things out" on his own.

Source: R. Pica, "Take it Outside!" Excellence Learning Corporation, niswc.com/ec_outdoorplay.

Q: I have heard that using consequences, rather than punishment, is a better way to discipline. I'd like to try this with my four-year-old, but I need help. How exactly are consequences different from punishment?

Questions & Answers

A: Great question! At first, punishment and consequences seem similar. But look deeper, and you will see some important differences.

Punishment:

- **Often happens in anger.** "You broke my vase! Go to your room!"
- **Often comes with a lecture.** "How many times have I told you not to run in the house?"
- **Does not always relate** to what happened. How does going to the bedroom relate to breaking a vase?

Consequences:

- **Include empathy.** "I know you feel bad about running in the house and breaking the vase."
- **Focus only on the behavior** at hand, without bringing up past mistakes. "You were running in the house, which is not allowed."
- **Relate directly** to the misbehavior. "I won't be able to buy you that book at the bookstore today because we need to save money to replace the vase."
- **Result in your child** learning an important lesson: If I run in the house, I may break something that needs to be replaced. Replacing things costs money that could be used for doing something fun.

If you make consequences the cornerstone of your discipline, you and your child will both benefit.

Four ways to celebrate Earth Day with your preschooler



April 22, 2017 marks the 47th annual Earth Day. This is the perfect time to teach your preschooler about the importance of

respecting the environment.

Here are four ways to help you and your child celebrate Earth:

1. **Plant something.** Planting is hands-on and teaches about needs. Plants need food, water and air to live, just as people do. Help your child plant flowers or vegetables in pots. She will be able to see the results of her efforts.
2. **Find new uses for old things.** No one has the space to keep *everything*, but converting a few things instead of throwing them out will teach your child about

repurposing. Reuse an empty jelly jar as a vase for flowers. Decorate paper bags to make book covers. Save plastic two-liter bottles for use as bowling pins for your child.

3. **Use natural materials** to create art. Go on a walk to find pebbles, leaves, feathers, fallen flower petals—anything your child thinks is pretty or interesting. Bring them home to make a collage, or to add to a picture.
4. **Talk some 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 that we can do to keep landfills from getting too full, such as recycling.

The Kindergarten Experience

Kindergartners are learning geometry?



Kindergarten math involves much more than numbers and counting. Many parents are surprised to find out that it also includes learning the basics of *geometry*.

In a nutshell, geometry is the study of shapes, sizes, patterns and positions. And your child probably knew a lot about it before she even started school!

When she names a shape she sees, your child is using geometry. When she uses words like *above*, *below*, *beside*, *in front of*, *behind* and *next to*, she's also using geometry.

There are many ways to reinforce kindergarten geometry. Here are just a few:

- **Go on a shape scavenger hunt.** Look around your home with your child and name the shapes you see: round table, rectangular place mat, square napkin. See how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find.
- **Learn about lines.** Talk about *horizontal lines* which run from side to side and *vertical lines* which run from top to bottom. Then give your child a few pictures or illustrations to look at. How many horizontal and vertical lines can she find?
- **Practice positional words.** Ask your child questions about the position of everyday objects. Is the dog *in front of* or *behind* the chair? Is the clock hanging *above* or *below* the shelf?

Build your child's social skills for success in elementary school

Teachers say social skills are more important to kindergarten success than being able to read or hold a pencil. Yet, they report that many students don't have these skills.

Kindergartners with strong social skills get along well with others, have self-control and are confident, all of which allows them to focus on learning.

While your child has many opportunities to practice social skills at school, you can also help him strengthen them at home.

Encourage your child to:

- **Play and cooperate with others** in a group. Invite school friends over or take your kindergartner to a playground.
- **Share with friends and family.** Encourage him to take turns,



let others play with his toys and offer to share treats.

- **Empathize with others' feelings.** Understanding how others feel will help him become more caring. Ask him how a character in a book feels after something bad happens.

Three strategies improve your kindergartner's language skills



Language is the bedrock of the kindergarten experience. Your child uses language to get and share information.

She uses it to express needs. She uses it to process what she hears. She uses it to begin to read. Practicing oral skills can help build a strong foundation for reading.

To strengthen your child's language skills:

1. **Spend time talking** to her each day. Face-to-face conversations will give your child practice

reading facial expressions that go with different kinds of language.

2. **Have her focus** on you when you are speaking to her. At school, the teacher will not accept your child looking out of the window. She wants students' eyes on her. Sometimes, have your child repeat back what you said.
3. **Practice following directions.** When your child can easily follow a one-step direction, such as "Please take off your coat," move to a two-step, such as, "Please take off your coat and hang it up."