

# Early Childhood Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Shelton Youth Service Bureau

*make the difference!*



## Enriching experiences can boost your child's intelligence

**M**ore and more research shows that a child's intelligence—once thought to be fixed and determined by genetics—actually continues to develop through childhood and into adulthood. Parents play a critical role in that change—not just in the genes they pass on, but in the experiences they give their children.

Keep these points in mind:

- **The brain grows significantly** during the preschool years. This is the time to lay a foundation for learning—not to overwhelm your child with academic knowledge. You can lay that foundation by talking to your child and taking her places with you. Read together and encourage creative play.
- **Learning by doing is critical.** To you, sorting socks may be a boring chore. But when your

child does it, she is learning to compare and classify. Setting the table helps your child recognize patterns. Measuring ingredients helps her practice a key math skill. Feeding a pet fish boosts fine motor skills and a feeling of satisfaction in accomplishing a task.

- **Relationships matter.** A child who feels connected to other people is also likely to feel connected to learning. Demonstrate your love for your child with words and actions. Give her your undivided attention and listen attentively when she talks. This will help her feel secure and develop the self-confidence she needs to take on learning challenges.

**Source:** A. Stuart, "Can You Boost Your Child's IQ? What makes kids smart may surprise you," WebMD, [nswc.com/ec\\_brain.boost](http://nswc.com/ec_brain.boost).

## Introduce your preschooler to journal writing



Having your child keep a journal when he can hardly write his name may sound odd.

However, preschoolers don't have to know how to write to get involved in this activity.

To help your child get started with journal writing:

1. **Give him** a blank sheet of paper.
2. **Ask him to tell you** about something he did today. Prompt him, if necessary: "You went to the park today. What did you do there?"
3. **Have him draw** a picture of the event.
4. **Ask him to tell you** about his drawing. Under the drawing, write down a sentence or two to capture your child's words.
5. **Explain to your child** that the words tell about the picture. Encourage him to "write" something, as well—even if he just makes a few marks. Over time, you will likely see letters and real words emerge from your child's marks.

Repeat this process often. Save the pages and staple them into a book.

## Teach your preschooler the importance of being a good sport



Many children begin organized sports in early childhood—some by age four or five. Even if your child doesn't play a sport, it is important for her to learn how to be a good sport. Children need to be taught how to win and lose gracefully, whether in a game of tag or a game of basketball.

To foster sportsmanship:

- **Focus on fun.** Sports are competitive, but young children do not play in world championships. They participate in sports to learn, have fun and get exercise. If your child does this, she's a winner, no matter what the score.
- **Practice good manners.** Even when adults focus on fun, children are aware of who does "well" and who does "not as well." Teach

your child to say "good game" or "good job" to her teammates and her opponents—win or lose.

- **Empathize.** Let your child know that it is OK to feel frustrated—and that you understand. "Sometimes you catch the ball, and sometimes you don't. It's hard to feel good when you don't catch it, but don't give up!"

**Source:** I. Kamber, "The Importance of Sports for Children," Novak Djokovic Foundation, [niswc.com/ec\\_good.sport](http://niswc.com/ec_good.sport).

**"It is your response to winning and losing that makes you a winner or a loser."**

—Harry Sheehy

## Celebrate Library Lovers' Month by sharing the love of books



February is the month for valentines, but it's also the month for loving the library—that treasure trove of books that gives all of us the chance to read and learn about anything we choose.

Perhaps your child has already begun to experience the library. Continue to encourage his reading and set him on a lifelong path of loving books and the library.

To build your child's love for the library:

- **Check with your local library** for programs geared toward kids your child's age. Plan to attend together whenever you can.
- **Consider your child a reader** (being a reader-in-training

counts!). Say things like, "Let's read the sign: E-X-I-T, exit. Exit means the way out."

- **Help your child think of you as a reader.** Explain the ways you read for work and for fun. Let him see you reading something every day.
- **Set aside an area of your home for reading and writing.** Keep newspapers, magazines, books, picture books, crayons, pencils and paper there. Encourage your child to feel that spending time in this spot is a special activity.
- **Read rhyming books together often.** Rhyming helps your child become aware of the relationship between letters and sounds. This is an important step toward reading readiness.

## Are you helping your child respect belongings?



At school, students must respect others' belongings, such as books, toys, crayons and furniture. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're encouraging this behavior:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you give** your child places to keep belongings, such as a bin for blocks or a container for crayons?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you make** cleaning up a habit? "Before we get out a new game, let's put away the one we just played."
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you talk** about the benefits of respecting others' belongings? "If you treat Grandpa's piano gently, I'm sure he'll let you play it again."
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you notice** when your child treats belongings well? "Thanks for putting your books on the shelf. That will keep them in great condition!"
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you set** an example by caring for household items, including your child's belongings?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are building your child's respect for property. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# Encouraging your child to ask questions promotes learning



Active learners do not just take knowledge in. They are always trying to find out more. Most preschoolers do this

by asking a constant stream of questions.

While all of those questions can frustrate parents, they are an important part of a child's development. Here are three ways to encourage your child to continue asking the questions that lead to learning:

## 1. Play guessing games like I Spy.

Ask your child to think of an object in the room, one you can both see. Tell her you will have to guess what it is. Do so by asking questions. "Is it blue? Is it on the floor? Can we eat it?" Once your child completely understands the

game, reverse roles. You think of something, and have her ask the questions to guess what it is.

2. **Choose a category.** For example, say, "Birds fly. Can you tell me something else that flies?" Or, "Which animal says *Moo*?" If your child answers correctly, keep going. "What does the pig say?" Let your child ask you questions, too.
3. **Read books together** that contain questions, such as *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss. Encourage your child to repeat the questions and answers with you. "Could you, would you, with a fox? I could not, would not with a fox!" Point out that each time the character asks a question, he learns something new.

**Source:** L. Noda and others, *Off to a Great Start*, Wright Group, a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

# Use a variety of materials to create homemade valentines



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 and have him rub on the white paper so that the texture of the scrap underneath appears. Fold this and turn it into a card, or cut it in a heart shape and tape it to the front of a card.
- **Paint on unusual surfaces.** Consider having your child paint on foil with thick red paint. Cut

out a heart from the painted aluminum foil, and tape it to the front of a folded piece of paper.

- **Cut out heart shapes.** Let your child trace and color the shapes. Show him how to overlap the shapes to make different designs. He can also form them into heart "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. Using a hole-punch, 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.

**Q:** I am overwhelmed by all the expensive and fancy educational toys I see in the stores. Will my child's learning suffer because I can't afford to fill her room with such toys?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Not at all. Education experts have long maintained that the best toys for children are the simplest ones.

Why? Because a child has to use her thinking skills to decide how she will play with them.

The best toys:

- **Spark creative play.** Toy animals, dolls and toy cars are examples. When she plays with them, your child can make up stories and pretend. The toys don't have to be expensive. Children can turn something as simple as a cardboard box into hours of creative fun.
  - **Can be shared.** It's fine for kids to play alone sometimes. But they also need to play with other children to build social skills. A simple toy, such as a ball, can be used for both.
  - **Are safe.** Toys with lots of little parts or sharp edges are much more likely to cause accidental injury to your child than simpler toys, like blocks.
  - **Hold a child's interest.** A wooden train set, for example, is something a child will probably come back to again and again. Each time she approaches it, she will think of a new way to play with it.
- A few basic enjoyable toys—along with books and puzzles—are all your child needs. They will help her develop many of the skills she will need to be successful in school.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Be mindful when you are speaking about your child



Parents are often careful about the words they say to their child. They don't want to hurt their child's self-image.

But sometimes this goal is forgotten when talking with other adults. A parent might say to a kindergarten teacher, for example, "Olivia isn't great at math," while Olivia is sitting nearby. Ouch.

To avoid damaging your child's self-esteem and motivation to learn:

- **Realize your child is listening**—even when you think she isn't. Your kindergartner may not hear everything you say, but she picks up on a lot, even if she doesn't show it. She may also misinterpret what she hears because of her age.
- **Respect your child's feelings.** It's unlikely that you would complain about a friend while she is standing right there. You shouldn't gripe about your child in her presence, either.
- **Choose your words carefully.** Imagine how your words could make your child feel—or how you'd feel if you heard someone say them about you. Put a positive spin on things: "Subtraction is challenging for Olivia, but she never gives up. How can we make it easier for her?"
- **Let your child overhear** you saying nice things about her. "Olivia helped her sister pick up her room. She's such a caring big sister."

## Perseverance is important in kindergarten and beyond

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

To help your kindergartner stay on task:

- **Encourage your child** to engage in quiet activities at home. Give him time to read or work alone.
- **Let your child struggle** a bit when he's working on a task. If he's used to your jumping in to help, he won't develop a "can do" attitude.
- **Don't always let your child stop** when he's fed up. Instead, encourage him to try different strategies to solve the problem.



- **Give your child** only a few pieces of paper when he wants to draw. Don't let him throw away 10 drawings before he really gets started.
- **Let your child run around** and be noisy when he completes a task. He'll learn that he can let off steam after work at home, and be more likely to wait until recess to let off steam at school.

## Make the most of your parent-teacher conference



A conference with your child's kindergarten teacher is an exciting opportunity to learn about your young student. To help things go well:

- **Arrive prepared.** Bring a list of questions or thoughts for the teacher. You are the "expert" on your child, and the teacher depends on your input.
- **Be on time and upbeat.** Don't miss a minute of this time dedicated to your child's success. You and the teacher

are a team. If your child is struggling, solving the problem will be easier when you work together.

- **Ask questions.** It's natural to be confused about certain elementary school terms. Speak up if you have questions.
- **Make plans.** It's wonderful to hear how your student is doing, but set goals, too. What can you do at home to support his learning? Plan to keep in touch with the teacher about your child's progress.