

# Early Childhood Parents<sup>®</sup>

Shelton Youth Service Bureau

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*make the difference!*



## Outdoor learning helps your preschooler celebrate spring

**T**he changes that take place every spring align perfectly with the changes preschoolers experience every day. That's why outdoor learning activities are a great way to foster your child's development this season.

With your child:

- **Investigate the wind.** Does your child know what blows around in the wind? Help him find out! Punch a hole in a plastic lid. Pull a piece of string through the hole and tie a thick knot at the base of the hole. 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.** This is a favorite springtime activity and it's easy to see why. You get to start something, tend it and watch it grow. Together, pick some plants that are easy to grow. Depending on your climate, plant outdoors or start seeds indoors. Talk about how to care for the plants and ask your child what would happen to them if he 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.

## A simple phrase can develop responsibility



Developing responsibility in preschoolers can be challenging, because they don't

like to interrupt their fun. But it's important to instill the idea that people need to finish their work *before* they can play.

Throughout the day, try using the phrase "when ... then" with your preschooler. In time, she will recognize it as a cue to fulfill her responsibilities.

For example:

- "When you are dressed for preschool, then you can have breakfast."
- "When you put your jacket on, then we can go to Jack's house to play."
- "When you pick up your dolls, then you can play with the blocks."
- "When you put on your pj's and brush your teeth, then we can read a story."

When your preschooler shows responsibility, be specific with your praise. Say something like, "It makes me happy to see you pick up your toys. I bet it makes you feel proud that you can do it by yourself."

## Read Dr. Seuss books to spark your preschooler's creativity



March 2 is the birthday of the late Theodore Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss. Celebrate the joy of reading and creativity he brought to so many children.

Here are a few books to read with your child and some fun activities to try after you read each of them:

- ***Oh, the Places You'll Go!*** Talk with your child about places he'd like to go. Have him draw or paint one of them. You might even consider taking a family field trip.
- ***Gertrude McFuzz***. Draw a bird on a piece of paper. Ask your child, "How many feathers should this bird have?" Help him draw feathers on paper, cut them out and glue them to the bird.

- ***My Book About Me***. Help your child use a paper bag to make a puppet that looks like him. Use yarn for hair and extra fabric for clothes.
- ***The Cat in the Hat***. Have your child draw a picture of the cat's tall red and white hat. Then ask him to draw other hats—those worn by baseball players, police officers, firefighters, etc.

**"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."**

—Dr. Seuss

## Making good decisions requires lots of patience and practice



Success in school (and life) hinges on the ability to make good decisions. When your child is in school, she will have to make lots of decisions—whether or not to observe classroom rules, whether or not to finish homework, etc. Her choices will affect her schooling and her future.

To get your child started on the path to good decision-making:

- **Offer choices.** Ask your child if she would like cereal or an egg for breakfast. Just make sure you find both options acceptable.
- **Ask for her advice.** You might ask your child to listen to music from two different radio stations and decide which you should listen to. Listen to the one she selects.

Your child will feel empowered by deciding something for you.

- **Get her involved in planning.** If your child is having a friend over, encourage her to plan what they could do together.
- **Offer explanations.** Making good choices takes lots of practice, and sometimes you will have to overrule your preschooler's decisions. When you do, be sure to take the time to explain *why*. Focus on the consequences of her choice. "I know you'd like to watch that movie, but it's scary and it would upset you. When you're older, we can think about it again."

**Source:** J. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, Ph.D., *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Are you making the most of your family mealtime?



Mealtime is full of opportunities for your preschooler to enjoy learning. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're making the most of mealtime:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you let your child help with food preparation, including measuring, pouring and mixing?**
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you give your child a few responsibilities, such as counting items and setting the table?**
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you sit with your child at the table, discussing topics that matter to her and responding to what she says?**
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you model table manners, such as putting your napkin in your lap and saying *please* and *thank you*?**
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you mention concepts that your child is learning? The plate is *round*. The milk is *cold*. The eggs are *yellow*.**

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you're using mealtimes to teach your preschooler important lessons. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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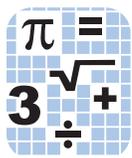
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Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# Use manipulatives with your child to give numbers meaning



Parents are proud to hear their preschoolers count to 10. But educators want children to do more than just recite numbers. They

want children to understand what numbers represent.

The best way to give numbers meaning is to use objects—what educators call *manipulatives*. Try these math activities with your preschooler:

- **Count aloud while you work.** “One, two, three”—as you sort through the mail. Count the buttons on your child’s shirt as you button them.
- **Give your child cups** to play with in the bathtub or sandbox. Experiment with the concepts of *more vs. less*, *empty vs. full*, *all vs. none*.

- **Put some small objects** on the table. Ask your child, “How many are there?” Help him touch each one as you both count aloud. Then mix up the objects, remove a few and count again.
- **Ask your child to arrange** a set of objects from *biggest* to *smallest*. Then ask him to arrange them from *smallest* to *biggest*.
- **Write the numbers 0 to 10** on index cards (one number per card). Give your child some paper clips. (Be sure he doesn’t put them in his mouth!) Ask him to attach the correct number of clips to each card. Then ask him to put the numbered cards in order.
- **Have your child sort buttons** by size and shape, number of holes or color. Supervise as he does this.

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



Misbehavior certainly isn’t pleasant, but it is normal for preschoolers. It’s how they figure out

exactly what is expected of them.

To help your child learn from misbehavior:

1. **Create family rules together.** Talk with your child about the importance of family rules. Involve her in creating a short list of rules your family should follow. Consider her views, 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 disciplining your child,

always remember to do it in a respectful and loving way.

3. **Use consequences.** Natural and logical outcomes help your preschooler learn from mistakes. If she leaves a toy outside several times, for instance, it may get damaged in the rain.
4. **Offer choices.** Say, “Would you like green beans or corn with dinner?” instead of, “You have to eat vegetables tonight.” But stick to options that are OK with you.
5. **Reward your child** with praise and special time together when she behaves. She will soon realize that she gets more attention by behaving than she does by misbehaving.

**Q:** Sometimes when my son complains he doesn’t feel well in the morning, I can’t tell if he is really sick or if he is just trying to stay home from preschool. Often when I have let him stay home, by 10 a.m. he appears to be feeling fine. He spends the rest of the day playing and watching TV.

What should I do the next time he complains he’s sick before it’s time to go to preschool?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** It’s difficult to know what to do when a child says he feels sick and doesn’t want to go to school. You can’t always be 100 percent sure that your child is really ill.

Here’s a strategy to try the next time this happens:

1. **Give him a choice.** Ask your son to decide whether or not he is well enough to go to school. The choice is either to go to school or to stay home in bed getting well. No playing around the house.
2. **Be sympathetic.** If he really doesn’t feel well, he deserves a bit of TLC. But don’t overdo the attention and special services. The point is to create an environment where he can get well. Yet the environment should not be so rewarding that he prefers being sick to going to school.
3. **Reassess the situation.** If your son announces that he feels better an hour later and wants to get up, tell him you are delighted with the improvement. He can get dressed and go to preschool for the remainder of the day. Or he can remain in bed to continue recuperating. Express your hopes that tomorrow he’ll be completely healthy and ready to return to school.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Support your child's early reading skills



Most kids learn how to read between kindergarten and second grade. However, there are often a few advanced readers in a kindergarten class—which can make other parents anxious.

If your child isn't reading yet, don't worry—he'll get there! To support his budding reading skills:

- **Have a daily reading time.** Read stories and poems together. Sometimes, ask your child to retell a story in his own words. Or see if he can act it out.
- **Use artwork** to encourage reading. When your child draws a picture, ask him to tell you a story about it. Write down the story as he tells it to you.
- **Play word games.** Say, "I'm thinking of something that is red." See if your child can guess what you're thinking about. Or see who can come up with the longest list of rhyming words.

There are a few signs that a child may have reading problems. Talk to the teacher if your child can't do these things:

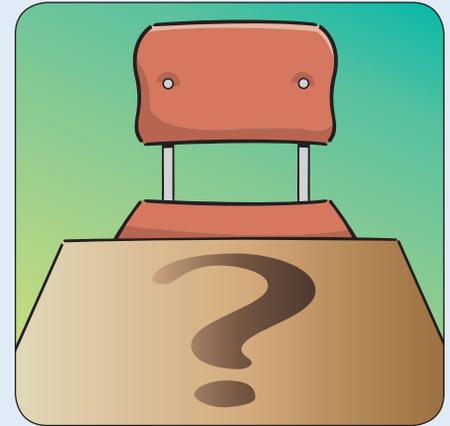
- **Tell left from right.** It's important when following the text in reading.
- **Identify common shapes** like circles and squares. This is the same skill he'll need to see the difference between the letter *d* and the letter *b*.
- **Recognize beginning sounds.** Say a word like *monkey* and emphasize the *mmm* sound. Have him repeat the first sound.

## Success in kindergarten begins with regular school attendance

**M**issing school too often can hurt students' success, even in kindergarten. When a child is late or absent, it affects other students, too. Frequent tardiness disrupts the class. And when a child is absent a lot, the teacher must use class time to help her catch up.

To limit how often your child is late or misses school:

- **Establish routines.** Choose a regular bedtime and wake-up time that gives your child plenty of sleep. Do as many morning tasks as possible before bedtime.
- **Show pride** when your child gets ready for school on time. If she tends to dawdle, set a timer and challenge her to "beat the clock."
- **Plan to take vacations** during school holidays. Even if your child completes schoolwork when she misses school, she



will still miss class discussions, group activities and other kinds of learning.

- **Schedule appointments** for after school and on weekends. These slots fill up quickly, so consider requesting them far in advance.
- Whenever your child does miss school, remember to talk with the teacher to find out what you can do at home to help her catch up.

## Help your kindergartner have a positive attitude about school



It's only natural that when your child enjoys something, he wants to participate in it. To build your child's love of school:

- **Ask him what he likes** best about school. Spend time every day talking about the very best part of your child's day.
- **Encourage him to bond** with his teachers. Talk about his teachers and how you really like them.

Remind your child that his teachers care about him and want to help him learn!

- **Help him get to know** his school friends better. Consider inviting a classmate to come over to play one day. Or allow your child to invite a school friend to participate in one of your family activities.

**Source:** J. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.