

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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Routines and limits build your child's school-readiness

Young children need time to play, explore, dream, create and relax. But psychologists agree that kids benefit most from doing these things as part of a structured day.

Routines and limits at home provide that needed structure. They also support academic success and can boost your preschooler's attention span.

Here's how to get started:

- **Follow routines consistently.** Adequate sleep, healthy meals and quiet play all help your child pay attention. Establish a regular nap time and bedtime that allows your child to get at least 11 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Serve meals and snacks at predictable times. Promote daily quiet time,

free from scheduled activities, loud noises and screens.

- **Set a few basic rules** and consequences. Your child's ability to follow rules will affect her success in school. When she follows rules, she is controlling her behavior—which results in a greater ability to stay focused and learn.
- **Practice transitions.** The ability to move smoothly from one activity to the next is another valuable school skill. Give your child notice when it's time to switch activities. This will ease her anxiety and improve her concentration.

Source: Mary Louise Hemmeter and others, "Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: A Conceptual Model for Intervention," *School Psychology Review*.

Make reading time a priority in your family



When you read with your child daily, you're doing much more than preparing him to read independently. You're also boosting his chances of success in writing, language and math.

However, in one study, only 51 percent of parents said they read to their preschoolers every day—a drop from 69 percent just five years earlier. Researchers link the decline to preschoolers' increased use of digital devices.

Experts recommend that you:

- **Set limits** on your child's recreational use of screen devices.
- **Find time to read together** every day. Make this a fun part of your routine. Read books with enthusiasm. Let your child turn the pages.
- **Visit the library together** in person or online. Attend events for kids and ask the librarian to make recommendations.
- **Surround your child** with words. Keep a variety of reading materials handy so your child can enjoy them anytime.

Source: A. Flood, "Only Half of Preschool Children Being Read to Daily, UK Study Finds," *Guardian News*.

Do educational apps really help your preschooler learn?



There are countless “educational” apps available for young children today. Many parents wonder if they are actually educational—or merely entertaining.

Researchers have identified four characteristics of effective learning apps. So before you download a new one for your preschooler, make sure it:

- 1. Requires him to think** and use information—rather than just tap or swipe.
- 2. Holds his interest** without being distracting. Apps with lots of sound, movement or other visual elements can actually obstruct learning.
- 3. Encourages him to connect** new information to his daily life.

- 4. Allows him to interact** socially with others. Talk with your child before, during and after he plays. To find a list of quality educational apps, check out Common Sense Media at www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/best-preschool-apps.

Source: K. Hirsh-Pasek and others, “Putting Education in ‘Educational’ Apps: Lessons From the Science of Learning,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Association for Psychological Science.

“Many apps marketed as educational are basically the equivalent of sugary foods.”

—Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

Props can enhance your child’s imagination and pretend play



When your child is engaged in pretend play, she is developing skills that will help her in school and in life.

Imaginative play boosts creativity, communication and concentration.

Consider adding a few props to make playtime even more fun. Try:

- **Menus.** Pretend you’re visiting a restaurant. Create menus or use an old take-out menu from a restaurant. Take turns pretending to be the customer and the server.
- **Books.** Imagine you’re going to the library to find books. What would you like to read? Set out books you have at home. Then take turns “checking them out.”
- **Signs.** Create a “construction zone.” What signs would you see? With your child, make signs that say *stop*, *go*, *slow* and more. Then let your child direct traffic.
- **Phones.** Make a pretend phone call to your child and ask her questions about her day. Discuss the importance of speaking loudly and clearly when talking on the phone.
- **Stuffed animals.** Line up a few stuffed animals and pretend you are in a classroom. Take turns being the teacher and a student.
- **Pots, pans and a wooden spoon.** Ask your child to pretend she is making something on a cooking show. Have her explain what she is doing to her audience.
- **Dress-up clothes.** Gather some hats, sunglasses, shoes and coats. Ask your child to dress up as someone and then give you hints about who she is pretending to be.

Are you helping your child learn from mistakes?



Mistakes are a part of learning, and learning to handle them will help your child overcome challenges in school.

Are you raising your child to have a positive attitude about mistakes? Answer *yes* or *no* to find out:

- 1. Do you set** realistic expectations for your preschooler? That way, you avoid correcting her so much that she gets discouraged.
- 2. Do you talk** to your child about your expectations?
- 3. Do you ask** your child if she needs help when you see she’s made a mistake or is having trouble?
- 4. Do you let** your child know that everyone makes mistakes?
- 5. Do you tell** your child that mistakes give her a chance to correct herself and get it right the next time? For example, if she spills her milk, say, “Don’t worry. Next time, try pouring it slowly and then it won’t spill.”

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are teaching your preschooler to think positively about mistakes. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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Have fun with science by turning your bathtub into a laboratory



Most preschoolers love to splish and splash in the bathtub. While they're there, they can also learn

some important science concepts.

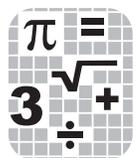
To turn your tub into a science lab, gather together some of these "science" tools: sponges, plastic boats, empty plastic bottles, a small rock, a spoon, straws, plastic pitchers, a large plastic bowl, bubble bath solution and rubber animals.

When your child is in the tub, encourage her to:

- **Guess which items** will sink and which ones will float. Then, have her test her predictions.
- **Use the pitchers** to pour and measure. Talk about the meanings of *full*, *half full* and *empty*.

- **Fill one container** with water and another with only soap bubbles. Talk with her about the concepts of *heavy* and *light*.
- **Pour water** into the plastic bottles. Ask your child, "Which has more water?" "Which has less?" Have her pour each bottle's water into a bowl to verify her predictions.
- **Float a large bowl** on the water. Help your child count how many rubber animals she can put into her "boat" before it sinks.
- **Pour a small amount** of bubble bath solution into the bowl and add water. Help your child use the straw to blow into the soapy water. How big can she make the bubbles? Talk about what causes the bubbles to form.

Recognizing patterns builds your preschooler's math smarts



If someone asked you what math was about, you might say *numbers*. While that's true, math is also about *patterns*.

It is the sequence in which those numbers occur and repeat that makes them meaningful.

So if your child can line up a red crayon, then a blue one, then a red one and then a blue one, he is actually practicing an essential math skill.

To reinforce the concept of patterns, have your child:

- **Look at the calendar.** Point out how every month begins with the number 1.
- **Read a rhyming book.** Rhymes are actually patterns of words.
- **Look for patterns** at home. Can your child recognize patterns on clothing? How about on other fabrics?
- **Look at books** in the library. Explain that the way books are lined up is part of a pattern. This helps people find them.
- **Learn a simple sequence**, such as *clap, clap* (clap twice), *slap, slap* (slap thighs twice). Add other motions as this gets easy, but always repeat them in the same order.
- **Sing songs** with repeating phrases, such as "B-I-N-G-O" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes."
- **Make his own patterns.** He can arrange blocks by color, objects according to size, or he can string beads.
- **Read a book** about patterns, such as *A-B-A-B-A: A Book of Pattern Play* by B.P. Cleary.

Q: I have heard a lot about the importance of fostering healthy self-esteem in young children. What exactly does this mean and how can I do it?

Questions & Answers

A: There are many misconceptions about self-esteem. Some people believe that self-esteem is a form of conceit. Or that people with high self-esteem think they are better or above everyone else.

None of that is true. Self-esteem has two main parts, both of which are important for success in school and in life:

1. **Competence.** This simply means that your child believes he can accomplish things. It's having a "can-do" attitude.
2. **Self-worth.** This means your child feels that he is a valuable person.

To strengthen your preschooler's self-esteem:

- **Tell him** often that you love him, just for who he is.
- **Listen to him.** When you are having a conversation with your child, give him your undivided attention.
- **Make your home** a safe, happy and cooperative place. Have fun with your child, but also share work with him. Chores are an effective way to increase your child's sense of competence.
- **Praise him carefully.** If you only praise positive results, your child will get the idea that he has worth only when he does something right. Instead, praise your child when you see that he is putting forth his best effort.
- **Practice firm,** fair and consistent discipline. Proper discipline builds a sense of safety, love and self-esteem.

The Kindergarten Experience

Why attendance in kindergarten really matters



Even before the pandemic, regular attendance for kindergartners was lower than for students

in later school grades. Yet consistent attendance may be more important in kindergarten than in any other year.

The first year of school is the time to instill the habit of attending school regularly. Whether classes are in person or online, kindergarten attendance affects future academic achievement. The only way your child can succeed in school is to be in class.

It's up to you to make sure your child attends school on time, every day, unless she is sick or there is an emergency. Here's why:

- **Early reading instruction** begins in kindergarten. This has an impact on how quickly and easily children will learn to read.
- **Teachers have an easier time** identifying students' strengths and weakness when they interact with children every day. Then, they can support those strengths and provide specific help as needed.
- **Attending kindergarten classes** helps ELL students become fluent. Children whose first language is not English can benefit from hearing instructions in English. They gain fluency by speaking with classmates and teachers.

Let your child know that you expect her to be in school every day. If you tell her it's important to you, it will be important to her, too.

Source: The Absences Add Up Campaign, *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*.

Social skills are essential for a positive school experience

Hybrid and remote learning have changed the way many students interact. However, children's ability to get along with teachers and classmates influences their learning and their overall school experience.

According to kindergarten teachers, children need support from home to strengthen important social skills, such as:

- **Recognizing authority.** Your child should follow rules at home as well as in school. Review the school rules together.
- **Helping.** Expect your child to pitch in with age-appropriate tasks at home, such as setting the table.
- **Expressing emotions** appropriately. Frustration and anger are difficult feelings to manage. Teach your child to use words rather than actions to say how he feels.



- **Using names.** Role-play some situations, such as introducing himself to a new classmate. "Hi, I'm Josh. What's your name?"
- **Communicating.** Spend plenty of time talking with your child. Ask about school and listen attentively.

Promote kindergarten success by providing support at home



Your child's academic success gets a boost from the support you give learning at home. Make it a point to:

- **Tell your child** that school is a top priority. Talk about how school was important in your life.
- **Establish routines** to make mornings stress free. Have your child set out her clothes and school materials the night before.
- **Make sure your child** wakes up in time to have a healthy breakfast every morning.
- **Ask your child** to teach you something she is learning in school. This reinforces her learning.
- **Show pride** in your child's schoolwork. Praise her efforts and new skills. Display her work on the refrigerator or wall.
- **Support your child's teacher.** Don't say things that undermine her authority or your child's respect for her.
- **Encourage reading.** Read to your child at least 20 minutes a day. Let her see you enjoying your book or article.