



Encourage your preschooler to talk about ideas & actions

When young children start school, teachers want them to talk about what they think, what they imagine and what they've done. This way of talking and sharing is encouraged because it's how preschoolers learn new things, make friends and feel confident in their new classroom.

To help your child develop strong communication skills:

- **Ask about your child's drawings.**
Write the explanation underneath the drawings, then read it aloud.
- **Talk about your day in detail.**
Instead of saying, "We're going out," try, "We are going to the store after lunch to buy some fruit and bread. You can help me pick them out."
- **Help your child recount something** in sequence to demonstrate how

one event follows another. For example, ask your child, "What are some things you do *after* dinner and *before* bed?" Offer a prompt if necessary: "You brush your teeth. What do you do after that?"

- **Ask specific questions** about your child's day. If the class went out to the playground, prompt your child to recall more of that experience:
 - » *What exactly did you do on the playground?*
 - » *Did you like playing on the swings or on the slide more?*
 - » *Who was playing with you on the playground?*

Source: N. Gardner-Neblett and K.C. Gallagher, *More Than Baby Talk: 10 Ways to Promote the Language and Communication Skills of Infants and Toddlers*, The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute.

Create a special learning space for your child



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. To get started:

- **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 select a favorite stuffed animal as a learning buddy.
- **Spend time in this spot** with your child. Call it "learning time." You could read and draw together. Or, your child could also practice writing letters.
- **Encourage your child** to spend time in the learning spot without you. While there, your preschooler could look through books or pretend to teach the learning buddy something new.
- **Rotate materials regularly** to keep it fresh. Every few weeks, swap out some of the books, art supplies or learning games.

Autumn leaves are wonderful learning tools for your child



There are many ways to turn fall leaves into fun learning experiences.

Even if the peak of autumn leaves is behind

you, there's still plenty of magic to be found on the ground. Help your child:

- **Collect different kinds** of leaves and count them.
- **Sort leaves** by size, color and shape.
- **Match leaves.** Set out two or three of each kind of leaf. Let your child find the matches.
- **Make leaf rubbings.** Put a leaf under a sheet of paper. Rub the paper with crayon and watch a leaf appear.
- **Read picture books** and poems about trees and leaves.

- **Create hand leaves.** Trace your child's hands onto pieces of construction paper in fall colors. Cut them out to make fall leaves.
- **Have a leaf race.** Use straws to blow leaves across the table. See who can blow a leaf across the table first.
- **Play Leaf Hide and Seek.** Hide a leaf in the room and ask your child to find it. Say *hot* as your child gets close and *cold* when moving away.

"Play is our brain's favorite way of learning."

—Diane Ackerman

Show your preschooler how to investigate using five senses



Does your preschooler know about the five senses—*sight, hearing, touch, smell* and *taste*?

Children will learn more

about these concepts when they are in kindergarten, but now is a great time to introduce them.

Explain to your child that people use their senses to explore new objects. To demonstrate, give your child a piece of fruit, such as an apple, then ask these five questions:

1. **What do you see?** Have your child look at the apple and describe it in words. "It's red and shiny."
2. **What do you hear?** Have your child tap it with a spoon or finger. What does it sound like?
3. **What do you feel?** Have your child touch the apple and describe how it feels. Is it soft or hard?

4. **What do you smell?** Have your child smell the apple and describe its scent. Does it smell sweet?
5. **What do you taste?** Have your child take a bite and describe the taste.

Next, challenge your preschooler to connect the senses:

- **If the apple smelled sweet**, did it taste sweet, too?
- **What sound** did the apple make when biting into it?
- **Does the inside** of the apple feel different than the outside?

Then, ask your child to compare and contrast the apple with other fruits or vegetables. How is a banana or a carrot different from an apple when you use all five senses?

While this activity works well with food, it's important to remind young children *never* to put anything into their mouths without asking!

Are you raising a preschooler who is eager to learn?



Children are born with a desire to explore their world. Helping them hold onto that curiosity is key, because that's how they

will keep growing and learning.

Are you keeping your preschooler's natural curiosity alive? Answer yes or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **Do you model curiosity** by wondering about things out loud when your preschooler is with you?

___2. **Do you encourage your child** to ask questions, and respond with "That's a great question!"

___3. **Do you give your child** things to explore, take apart and put back together? Provide supervision.

___4. **Do you help your child** use a magnifying glass to examine things— pinecones, newsprint, walls, carpet, dirt?

___5. **Do you take adventure walks** with your child to see how many new things you both can find?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are keeping your preschooler's spirit of wonder alive. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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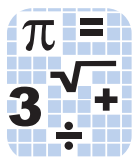
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Use a variety of manipulatives to give math concepts meaning



It's exciting when your preschooler can count to 10. However, to be ready for kindergarten math, it's also important for

your child to truly grasp what numbers represent.

One way to give numbers and math concepts meaning is to use objects—what teachers call *manipulatives*. Try these fun 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.
- **Ask your child to arrange** a set of objects from *biggest* to *smallest*. Then, ask your child to arrange them from *smallest* to *biggest*.
- **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, “How many are there?” Help your child touch each one as you both count aloud. Then, mix up the objects and count again.
- **Write the numbers 0 to 10** on index cards (one number per card). Ask your child to place the correct number of small stickers on each card. Then, challenge your child to put the cards in numerical order.
- **Have your child sort buttons** or other small objects by size and shape, number of holes or color. Supervise for safety.

Responsibility and autonomy are keys to academic success



When children behave and think independently, they are being *autonomous*. Studies show that this trait, combined with

responsibility, leads to school success.

Children who have learned responsibility and autonomy are better adjusted. They tend to make friends more easily, too.

To help your child develop autonomy:

- **Assign regular chores.** Your child could sort laundry, feed a pet or set the table. Demonstrate how to do the chore first, and help the first few times. Then, let your child do it independently.
- **Keep expectations realistic.** Try to see things from your child's point of view. A four-year-old cannot make complex decisions or handle

responsibilities that have more than a few steps.

- **Offer choices.** Within limits, let your child decide what clothes to wear, what chore to do or what book you'll read together.
- **Give reasons.** Explain why you want your preschooler to do something. For example, it's important to pick up your clothes to keep them clean and neat.
- **Avoid using bribes.** Don't say, “If you pick up your toys, I'll take you out for ice cream.” Rather than teaching respect or responsibility, bribes encourage children to focus on what they can get.

Source: A.C. Vasquez and others, “Parent Autonomy Support, Academic Achievement, and Psychosocial Functioning: a Meta-analysis of Research,” *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer Science+Business Media.

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

Questions & Answers

A: Great question! At first, punishment and consequences seem similar. But when you look deeper, 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?

On the other hand, consequences:

- **Acknowledge feelings.** “I know you feel bad about 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 take you to the play arcade today because we need to use that money to replace the vase.”
- **Result in your child's** 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.

The heart of discipline is all about making expectations clear and then applying thoughtful consequences when your child's behavior needs redirecting.

The Kindergarten Experience

Support your kindergartner's reading skills



Most children 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 students' families anxious.

If your child isn't reading yet, don't worry! There are plenty of ways to support budding reading skills right at home. You can:

- **Have a daily reading time.** Read stories and poems together. Ask your child to retell a story from memory or act it out.
- **Practice phonics.** Help your child connect sounds to letters. For example, point out the letter "B" and make the "buh" sound. Or, ask your child to identify words that start with the same sound.
- **Play word games.** Say, "I'm thinking of something that starts with the letter B." 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 is not able to:

- **Tell left from right.** This skill is crucial for following along with text while reading.
- **Identify common shapes** like circles and squares. This is the same skill used 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 your child repeat the first sound.

Offer encouragement as your kindergartner practices writing

Any time children purposefully make marks on paper, they are developing their writing skills. Pay attention to your child's writing and offer encouragement through each stage. If your child is:

- **Scribbling**, say, "Tell me about this!" You may be surprised at the thought your child put into it.
- **Writing letters** that don't make up words, say, "Tell me what you wrote." Write the words correctly below your child's letters.
- **Writing beginning and ending consonants**, such as "DG" above a picture of a dog, say, "Yes, D and G are sounds in the word *dog*." Then, write the word correctly.
- **Writing real words**, read the words together and offer praise. (Misspellings are OK at this age.)

The key is to make writing a natural and enjoyable part of your child's day.



Set up a "post office" with paper and envelopes, or create a "restaurant" where your child takes orders. These activities make writing feel fun and give it a clear purpose.

Strategies help distracted kindergartners regain focus



Your child has been in kindergarten for a few months now. What should you do if the teacher lets you

know that your child is having a difficult time paying attention in class? First, stay calm.

Sometimes, a few simple strategies can improve kindergartners' focus:

- **Change seats.** Ask if your child can be seated close to the teacher and away from the windows and doors. Sights and sounds from outside may distract your child.

- **Talk about the school day.** Ask the teacher for the class schedule and review it with your child each morning. Anticipating activities may help your child concentrate.
- **Work with the teacher.** Are there specific times your child tends to be distracted? Does your child tune out during long lists of spoken instructions, for example? By sharing information and working together, you will be able to help.

If you become concerned about your child's overall ability to focus, talk with your child's pediatrician.