



Self-talk can lead to improved behavior and communication

It's common for young children between the ages of two and five to talk to themselves. Experts refer to this as self-talk or private speech. Rather than being a cause for concern, this behavior can actually benefit your child's development.

Research suggests that private speech can help children:

- **Complete tasks successfully.** Studies have shown that some children perform motor tasks better when they talk to themselves about them out loud than when they are silent. Encourage your child to think out loud and "talk through" tasks at home.
- **Improve behavior.** Children who have attention problems often talk
- to themselves more often than other children do. While this can be annoying, it's important to realize that private speech may help these children improve their behavior and stay on task. Remind your child to use a quiet voice when engaging in self-talk, especially in school settings.
- **Build communication skills.** Self-talk helps children prepare for conversations with others. But be sure that your preschooler also has plenty of opportunities to communicate with you, other family members and friends.

Source: A. Mulvihill and others, "Preschool children's private speech content and performance on executive functioning and problem-solving tasks," *Cognitive Development Journal*.

Bring out the scientist in your child



Young children are curious about the world around them, which makes them natural scientists!

Show your child that science is for everybody by doing some experiments together. Try these two fun activities:

1. **Ocean magic.** Fill a jar half-way with water and add a few drops of blue food coloring. Then, add baby oil until the jar is three-quarters full. Put a toy animal in the jar, close the lid tightly and shake.

Explain to your child that oil and water don't mix together. When the water moves, it pushes the oil around, which makes shapes like ocean waves for the toy to ride.

2. **Electrical attraction.** Run a dry comb through your child's dry hair several times. Then, hold the comb next to a thin stream of water. The water should move toward the comb.

Explain that your child's hair put a special kind of electricity into the comb—*static electricity*—which attracted the water.

Help your child develop a sense of responsibility with chores



Instilling a sense of responsibility in children lays a foundation for future success. When you assign age-appropriate

chores and tasks, you empower your preschooler to help the family and develop essential skills. Performing chores:

- **Helps children learn** new skills and improve with practice.
- **Lets children contribute** to the family in a meaningful way, which helps them feel capable.
- **Strengthens thinking skills**, such as the ability to plan ahead, solve problems and remember simple directions.

When assigning chores:

- **Choose one or two** that are appropriate for your child's age.

- **Do the job together first.** Break it down into simple steps. After a few times, let your child try it alone.
- **Offer encouragement.** Your child won't do the job perfectly. But effort and progress deserve praise! If you must redo the job, do it when your child is not present.
- **Thank your child** for being responsible and be specific about why you appreciate the help.

"The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence."

—Denis Waitley

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 patterns 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, your child is practicing an essential math skill.

To reinforce pattern recognition, 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 books are lined up according to a pattern that 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 patterns.** Your preschooler can arrange blocks by color, objects according to size. Or, your child can string beads.
- **Read a book about patterns**, such as *A-B-A-B-A: A Book of Pattern Play* by B.P. Cleary.

Are you showing your preschooler how to be a giver?



Through giving, children learn valuable social skills, such as caring about others and connecting with them.

Giving is a habit you can easily promote at home throughout the year. Are you developing this habit in your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **Do you talk to your child** about the importance of giving to those who are less fortunate?

___2. **Do you take your child** with you when you volunteer your time and explain why you think the work is worthwhile?

___3. **Do you encourage your child** to do nice things for friends, classmates and teachers?

___4. **Do you make giving** a year-round commitment, not just something you do during the holidays?

___5. **Do you help** when your family does or shares?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child is on the way to becoming a giving person. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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Spring offers preschoolers fun learning opportunities



The changing seasons offer many opportunities for young children to investigate and learn.

It's easy to engage your child in some fun spring learning activities. Together, you can:

- **Observe the weather.** Talk about the weather with your child each morning before preschool. Look outside and discuss whether it is sunny, cloudy, windy or rainy. Then, open the door and feel the air. Is it warm? Does it feel chilly? Next, talk about how to dress for the weather. Which clothes would keep your child comfortable today?
- **Play outdoors.** Do you know your child's favorite outdoor game? Play it together. Discuss ways to be a good sport—win or lose.
- **Grow plants.** Plant a few flowers or herbs in pots with your child. If you have more room, consider helping your child plant a small garden or flower bed.
- **Learn about baby animals.** Many animals give birth in the spring. If you live near a farm or a zoo, consider planning a visit to see some baby animals. If not, ask your librarian for books about animals and their babies. Try *Baby on Board: How Animals Carry Their Young* by M. Berkes.

Books have the edge when it comes to building vocabulary



According to research, reading books aloud to your preschooler may be the best way to build vocabulary. What makes

the process such a powerful tool for boosting word smarts? Among other things, hearing stories read aloud offers children:

- **Exposure to unfamiliar words.** Children hear new words during conversations, but they encounter even more of them in stories. In fact, children are up to three times more likely to learn an unfamiliar word from a book than from a conversation with a family member.
- **Examples of new ways to use familiar words.** Chances are, you use the same words and phrases over and over when talking to your preschooler—it's only natural! However, listening to stories gives your child the opportunity to hear

even common words used in different or unexpected ways.

- **Clues to how grammar works.** Reading exposes your child to the "rhythm" of sentences. It also lets your preschooler see what words and letters look like on a page. That information will come in handy when learning to read.

Of course, you should still have conversations with your child. There is no substitute for the warmth and comfort of heart-to-heart exchanges. Plus, by demonstrating how to speak with someone, you're helping your child develop a valuable social skill.

However, when you want to focus on sharpening your preschooler's vocabulary, break out the books and read together!

Source: D.W. Massaro, "Two Different Communication Genres and Implications for Vocabulary Development and Learning to Read," *Journal of Literacy Research*, SAGE Publications.

Q: My preschooler is getting ready to turn four and is trying to give up afternoon naps. "I'm not sleepy," my child claims, and then is cranky from dinner time until it's time for bed. I can't go anywhere in the afternoon because my preschooler instantly falls asleep in the car. How can I make sure my child gets enough sleep at the right times?

Questions & Answers

A: Despite your child's protests, you are right. All the signs you describe indicate a child who needs more sleep!

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that kids three to five years of age get 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Few things are more important to a child's growth and success than adequate sleep.

To help your child get more rest:

- **Try an earlier bedtime.** Some families are tempted to keep children up later because they work during the day and want to spend time with their kids in the evening. This is understandable, but may not be the best option if your child is cranky the whole time.
- **Follow a routine.** First, try giving your child lunch at the same time every day. After a week of this, try having your preschooler lie down right after lunch. It's natural for kids to get a bit sleepy right after lunch, and you may find that your child will go back to napping.
- **Insist on quiet time.** If your child absolutely won't fall asleep, at least enforce rest. For one hour after lunch, have your child spend quiet time in a quiet bedroom with books and screen-free toys.

The Kindergarten Experience

Activities make geography come to life for kids



Learning about geography makes it easier for children to relate to the world around them. Here are some educational and fun activities to boost your kindergartner's interest in geography:

- **Help your child** draw a map of how to get from your home to school, the grocery store or a friend's home. Then, follow the map and see if it's accurate.
- **Walk outside** and identify *north*, *south*, *east* and *west*, as well as *northeast*, *northwest*, *southeast* and *southwest*. Ask your child to use these words to describe where things in your town are located. "School is *northeast* of my house."
- **Point out street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Street names may be alphabetical: Adams St., Bay St., etc. Help your child recognize the patterns.
- **Encourage your child** to collect objects from countries around the world. Postcards and coins are easy items to collect and store.
- **Talk about where** your child's ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. If possible, learn about the routes that led family members to where you are now.
- **Talk about where** household items came from. Have your child read labels to see where items were made. A toy may have come from China. A box of cereal may have a Michigan or Illinois address. Together, locate these places on a map.

Reading comprehension may improve with movement

Reading is often thought of as a calm activity. However, research suggests that kindergartners can improve their comprehension and memory by moving around and acting out parts of the stories they hear.

Acting out a phrase or a short passage can help children make connections between the words on a page and real actions. Physically crawling, for example, can help a young child understand the word *crawl* better.

After reading a story together:

- **Play dress up.** Dress up as characters. Use props from around the house and reenact exciting scenes.
- **Do a dramatic reading.** Act out the story as you read it aloud. Take turns or let your kindergartner perform the whole thing. Use exaggerated actions and tones to bring the story to life.



- **Plan a puppet show** and act out a few scenes from the story with your child.

Source: M.P. Kaschak and others, "Enacted Reading Comprehension: Using Bodily Movement to Aid the Comprehension of Abstract Text Content," *PLOS ONE*, Public Library of Science.

Inspire your child to write an acrostic poem about the spring



April is National Poetry Month—a wonderful opportunity to spark your kindergartner's creativity and nurture a love of language.

One engaging way to do this is by exploring the art of acrostic poetry. An acrostic poem is a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word when read vertically.

To make one, help your child:

1. **Write the word *spring*** vertically down the left side of a piece of paper.
2. **Ask your child** to think of spring-related words that start with each of the letters in the word *spring*. For example, *sun* for the letter S and *plant* for the letter P.
3. **Spend time observing spring** together if your child has trouble thinking of words. What does your child see inside? Outside? While doing errands? Bring the poem with you, and help your child write down words.
4. **Have your child** add illustrations once the poem is completed and then share it with family.