

# Early Childhood Parents<sup>®</sup>

March 2022  
Vol. 26, No. 7

Cornbelt Educational Cooperative

*make the difference!*



## Self talk may lead to improved behavior and communication

**Y**ou may have noticed your child talking to herself. Should you be worried? Experts say *no*. Self talk is common and normal among kids between the ages of two and five.

In fact, some research shows that this kind of private speech can be beneficial to young children. Private speech can help kids:

- **Complete tasks successfully.** Studies have shown that some children perform motor tasks better when they talk to themselves out loud than when they are silent. Encourage your child to think out loud and “talk herself through” a task.
- **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. Be sure to encourage your child to speak softly when talking to himself in school settings to avoid disrupting others.

- **Build communication skills.** Self talk helps children prepare for conversations with others. But be sure that your child also has plenty of opportunities to communicate with you, other family members and friends.

Source: M. Gholami and others, “Article Private Speech and Cognitive Development: A Review of the Two Theories,” *IIOAB Journal*.

## Playing board games teaches valuable skills



Stuck inside on a cold day? Consider playing a board game with your child. Not only will you have fun—

you will reinforce some basic skills your preschooler needs for school.

Your child will learn how to:

- **Take turns.** During a board game, everyone gets a turn—something that may not happen during casual play. Your child will learn to wait patiently while each player takes a turn.
- **Think strategically.** He will learn how to make decisions in the game that will be to his best advantage. This is an important concept in making everyday decisions throughout life.
- **Play fair.** Remind him that cheating is never fair—even when things don’t go his way. How would he feel if you cheated in order to win? Playing fair teaches your child the importance of honesty.
- **Be a good sport.** Tell him that it doesn’t matter if he wins or loses. It only matters that he has fun. Talk about ways to be a humble winner and a gracious loser.

## Play to your child's mood and interests to boost attention span



You may have noticed that your preschooler's attention span varies according to the situation.

He may spend 10 minutes listening to a story, but only 10 seconds listening to your instructions. While this can be frustrating, it's normal.

To increase attention span:

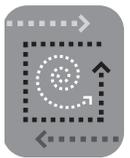
- **Consider your timing.** Is your child tired or hungry? If so, it's probably not the best time to introduce a challenging activity, such as learning a new game.
- **Expand on interests.** If your child has a favorite television show, read stories about the characters. If he's excited about starting school, have fun playing school with him.

- **Plan "me too" activities.** Certain activities are not likely to hold a preschooler's attention—such as watching a sibling's sports game. So involve your child in a related activity that requires focus, such as counting snacks for players.
- **Consult experts.** If you're worried about your child's attention span, talk to his preschool teacher or his pediatrician.

**"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."**

—Graham Greene

## Teach the concept of time with calendars, paper chains and books



The concepts of time can be challenging for young children to master, because understanding it requires higher-order

thinking skills.

To develop your preschooler's sense of time:

- **Keep a calendar** in her room. Let her mark special days with stickers. Explain that calendars are read from left to right. Each morning, ask your child to cross off the day before. This helps her learn that the preceding day is over, and a new one has begun.
- **Use time-related words** when looking at the calendar: "Let's put a sticker on *tomorrow*." "We went to visit Grandma *yesterday*." "You have soccer on *Tuesdays*." "Your birthday is on *March 20*." "Today is *Friday*."
- **Count how many days** there are until something fun. "Aunt Liz will be here in eight days!" Then, make a paper chain with one link for each day. Hang it in a place you and your child will notice. Each night, have your child tear off one link. Explain to her that just as the chain is getting shorter, so is the amount of time until the special event.
- **Read books about time.** Ask the librarian to help you find books about days, weeks, months and even years. Try:
  - » *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle.
  - » *Chicken Soup with Rice: A Book of Months* by Maurice Sendak.
  - » *Cookie's Week* by Cindy Ward.
  - » *Can We Play: A Pop-Up, Lift-the-Flap Story About the Days of the Week* by Mara Van Der Meer.

## Are you helping your child build reading skills?



Reading with your preschooler is one of the most effective ways to prepare her for school and build her interest

in reading. Are you making the most of your reading time together? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you read with your child** every day at a time when she is relaxed and interested, such as at bedtime?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you read books** your child likes, even if she picks the same favorites over and over?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you visit the library** often to check out books and look for children's activities on their website?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you point out** common words to your child, such as *stop*, *go* and *the end*?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you ask your child** questions about the stories you read together and encourage her to ask you some questions, too?

### How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're actively promoting your preschooler's reading success. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Early Childhood  
**Parents**  
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

For subscription information call or write:  
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
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a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Preschoolers need to develop self-control for school success



Nearly every child has a meltdown now and then. But once your child gets to kindergarten, he will need to know how to control himself. Helping him learn that now will be one of the best things you can do to prepare him for school.

To promote self-control:

- **Keep surprises to a minimum.** Why do teachers print out daily schedules and tape them to the wall? Because children love—and need—routines. Give your child a little advance warning when a big change is coming. He'll behave better if he has had time to get used to the idea.
- **Give your child choices.** Allow him to make decisions within acceptable limits. This gives him a sense of control and teaches him that he can't just do whatever he wants.
- **Offer your child a hug.** Sometimes an upset child just wants to know that someone cares about his feelings. A hug can help dry tears in a hurry. Then, encourage your child to use his words to *tell* you what's wrong instead of kicking and screaming in frustration.
- **Remain calm.** If your child has a tantrum in public, remove him from the situation until he calms down. Say as little as possible. Don't let him think that throwing a fit is the way to get attention or get his way.
- **Reward mature behavior.** Give your child lots of praise when he shows he can deal with frustration without falling apart. Praise him when he uses his words to tell you he is angry instead of yelling and throwing his toys like he may have done in the past.

## Boost your preschooler's letter recognition with tape art



Young children who know many letters when they start kindergarten tend to have an easier time learning to read.

Your preschooler can practice making letters out of lots of different materials—yarn, clay, pasta, dough, glitter glue and even tape.

To make tape letter art:

1. **Collect supplies**, including paper, paint, a paintbrush and tape that can be removed from paper. Try masking tape, drafting tape, blue painter's tape or transparent tape that pulls up easily.
2. **Have your child use the tape** to "spell" her name on paper. Help her cut or tear the right-sized pieces and form the letters. The letter A will need two long pieces and one short one. Curvy letters, such as S and P may look a bit boxy or pointy, but that's OK.
3. **Have your child paint** a design on and around the tape, keeping in mind that the tape will be removed. The more paint she puts on the page, the better. Then help her carefully lift the tape and watch her name stand out!
4. **Think of additional ways** to use this art technique. Your child could spell other words or use tape to make designs, such as a fence in front of a flower garden. When the tape is pulled up, the white space becomes the focus.

**Q:** My four-year-old son does not seem as talkative as his brother was at this age. Should I be worried? What language skills are typical for a four-year-old?

### Questions & Answers

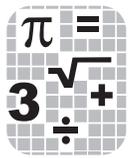
**A:** Every child is unique, and that includes the rate at which they develop language skills. There are, however, some language milestones and skills to listen for.

Most four-year-olds:

- **Enjoy talking** and asking questions. Some have a hard time stopping once they get going.
  - **Use language** in different ways. They might like to sing and recite nursery rhymes in addition to using normal speech.
  - **Are usually understood** by people outside their own family. Grammar and usage aren't perfect, but people can understand what the child means to say without having to ask parents to clarify.
  - **Are starting to use various tenses.** "I jumped up high." Or, "I'm going to Drake's house."
  - **Can give basic information.** They can say their first and last names. They can tell you a sibling's name or the name of a favorite friend. They may even be able to say the name of their street or their address.
  - **Use some prepositions.** "My kitty is *under* the table." "I put my toys *in* the toy box."
- If your son is doing most of the above, his language skills are likely just fine. But it never hurts to ask an expert. Check in with his preschool teacher or his pediatrician. They can tell you if your child's language skills are age-appropriate.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Relate numbers and math to the real world



When you show your child that the things she is learning in school are also important in the real world, she will be

even more motivated to learn.

This is especially true when it comes to math. To connect math to your child's daily life:

- **Use numbers in conversation.** "We need three potatoes. One, two, three." "We live two houses away from Maria."
- **Cook or bake something.** Show her how to measure an ingredient. Point out the number on the measuring cup. Or, count as you cook—the number of teaspoons of an ingredient, the number of pots and pans.
- **Use the calendar.** Show your child today's date. Each day, count down together to a day she is looking forward to, such as an upcoming holiday or a visit from a friend or relative.
- **Play a card game.** Take the face cards and jokers out of a deck and divide the remaining cards, face down, between you and your child. Take the first card from your pile and turn it face up, and have your child do the same. Can she tell you which number is bigger?
- **Do the laundry.** Ask your child to sort the clothing by color. Or, you might have her separate items by category (socks and towels).
- **Measure her.** How much does she weigh? How many inches tall is she? Find out together and track her growth for a few months.

## Reading comprehension may improve with movement

Reading is often thought of as a calm activity. However, research suggests that children 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 with your child or let him 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.

## March is the perfect month to investigate the wind together



Does your kindergartner know that there is more than just air blowing in the wind? To help him find out what else is being blown around, conduct an experiment together. Then, on a windy day:

1. **Gather some plastic lids**, string and petroleum jelly.
2. **Punch a hole** near the edge of each lid. Pull the string through the hole and tie it. Make a loop on the other end of the string big enough to hang from a branch.

3. **Rub petroleum jelly** on one side of each lid. Then go outdoors and hang the lids from different places where they can blow in the wind.
4. **Wait 30 minutes.** Then, go back outside and check the lids.
5. **Use a magnifying glass** to investigate. What did the wind blow into the lids? He may find bits of leaves, dirt, paper and even insects stuck in the petroleum jelly.
6. **Ask your child** why he thinks these things are in the wind. Explain that the wind is strong enough to pick them up and carry them along.