



Pretending to read boosts reading readiness skills

Young children love to be read to. But some love it even more when *they* read to you. Although most preschoolers aren't able to read just yet, they can pretend.

Pretending to read helps children build recall skills, print awareness and confidence—crucial elements of reading readiness. Studies show that it also builds their internal motivation to learn how to read and write.

To encourage pretend reading, follow these steps:

1. **Find a book** that features simple pictures and contains text with rhythm and rhyme.
2. **Read the book together often.** Your child will likely memorize all or parts of the book.

3. **Pause while you're reading.**

Point to a picture. Ask your child to tell you what it shows.

4. **Stop before you say a word or phrase**—perhaps one that repeats or rhymes. See if your child can fill in the word.

5. **Omit more words and phrases** until your child is telling the story.

6. **Ask your child to “read” the story** to you. Help as needed. Remember, your child isn't really reading, so don't insist on the exact words.

Once your preschooler becomes proficient “reading” one book, it's time to pick another book and start again.

Source: C.M. Cassano and S.M. Dougherty, *Pivotal Research in Early Literacy: Foundational Studies and Current Practices*, Guilford Press.

Follow these teacher tips for school success



Educators want children's early school years to be the absolute best they can be. Here are a few

helpful suggestions from seasoned preschool teachers:

- **Establish routines** at home. Children thrive when they have regular times to eat, sleep, play, read, etc.
- **Set limits** on recreational screen time. Excessive unsupervised screen activities negatively affect kids' language development, literacy skills and cognitive abilities.
- **Encourage** playing by the rules. Talk about the rules in your child's classroom. Never say that you think a rule is silly.
- **Stay up-to-date** on school news. Read the information the school and the teacher send home.
- **Tell the teacher** if something is going on with your child—both little things and big.
- **Be positive.** Avoid saying negative things about school or the teacher in front of your child.
- **Make sure** your child's schedule is balanced and includes time to relax with family.

Focus on four keys to teach your preschooler perseverance



Children need to have perseverance to learn and excel in school.

Learning how to stick with tough challenges

gives young children the confidence they need to succeed.

You can help your child develop this trait by focusing on motivation, practice, support and modeling:

1. **Motivation.** What makes your preschooler tick? What doesn't? Does your child love books? Is sitting still challenging? Match learning activities to your child's personality.
2. **Practice.** Give your child practice tackling obstacles. When children have opportunities to push through challenges, they see that it's worth the effort.

3. **Support.** Plan for success. Outline steps your child can take to reach a big goal. When your child struggles or fails, keep cheering and praise progress.
4. **Modeling.** Set an example. You don't have to make everything look easy. Instead, show your child that you are willing to keep trying and finish difficult tasks. Send the message: "I'm going to give this my all, no matter what."

"Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

—John Quincy Adams

Music helps your preschooler build valuable school skills



There is almost no limit to what your child can learn from music. And there are a wide variety of ways to incorporate

music into daily activities.

Music can help your preschooler:

- **Identify emotions.** Some songs sound happy, others sad, still others calm and relaxed.
 - **Strengthen language skills.** Learning lyrics introduces your child to new vocabulary.
 - **Identify patterns** and recognize when the chorus will appear.
- To help your preschooler get the most benefit from music:
- **Have at least one time** of the day when your child can expect to hear music. It could be on the car ride to preschool, during playtime or just before bed.
- **Give your child opportunities** to move to music. This is even more fun for preschoolers if they have something to wave as they move. Long strips of fabric or scarves work perfectly.
 - **Blend music** with other creative activities. For example, let your child listen to music while painting or drawing.
 - **Expose your child** to rhythm. Demonstrate how to clap hands in time to the beat of your child's favorite songs.
 - **Ask your child questions** about music. *What sounds do you hear? What instruments can you identify?* This helps develop listening skills and vocabulary.

Source: J.R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher: Insights for Parent Involvement*, Instructional Fair, TS Denison.

Are you helping your child deal with separation?



Separating from family, even for a few short hours of preschool, isn't always easy for a young child.

But learning to adjust to a family member's absence helps build confidence and the ability to handle change—necessary components of childhood development.

Are you helping your child handle separation anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you acknowledge** your child's feelings by listening and saying that you understand?
- ___ 2. **Do you allow** your child to bring something familiar to preschool for comfort, such as a piece of a blanket?
- ___ 3. **Do you talk** about the exciting things your child will be doing in preschool while you are away?
- ___ 4. **Do you let** your child know when you will return—and then arrive on time?
- ___ 5. **Do you follow** a short goodbye ritual and then avoid lingering?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child handle separation. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Teach your child about senses with taste and smell experiments

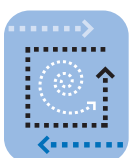


We've all experienced it: A stuffy nose makes even our favorite foods taste bland. It's because our senses of taste and smell are closely connected.

To help your child explore these two important senses:

- **Try to identify foods** by how they taste and smell. Have family members close their eyes and hold their nose. Place a small amount of fruit, such as orange, grapefruit or lime, on each of their tongues. Can they tell what it is? Now have them smell the food with their eyes still closed. It might be easier for family members to identify the fruit by smell.
- **Make foods** with and without salt. A little salt can make sweet foods taste sweeter. That's why it's in so many desserts. Make a cup of hot chocolate with milk, cocoa powder and sugar. Then, make another cup the same way, adding a pinch of salt. Ask your child, "Which do you think tastes sweeter?"
- **Keep track of things** you and your child smell for a day. How many things you can recognize by smell, such as flowers, clean laundry and food items? Help your child think of words that describe the smells.
- **Talk about tongues.** Explain how the tongue is covered in thousands of tiny bumps called taste buds. These taste buds are like messengers that send signals to the brain. There they mix with smell signals from the nose to help us recognize flavors.

Fine-motor skills are essential for kindergarten readiness



Little hands need strong, coordinated muscles to tackle everyday tasks, such as drawing, coloring, buttoning and

zipping. Research shows that helping children develop the fine-motor skills for these tasks also prepares children for kindergarten.

Here are some activities to try:

- **Cover a baking sheet** with a thin layer of shaving cream, sugar or salt. Let your child use a finger to draw letters, numbers or shapes.
- **Fill a spray bottle** with water and head outside. Your child can squeeze the nozzle to spray water on the fence, grass, sidewalk and flowers.
- **Challenge your child** to use tongs or tweezers to move cotton balls or other small items from one cup or bowl to another. Together, count how many your child transfers without dropping any. Then try again!
- **Make a "buried treasure" box.** Fill a shoebox or clear plastic box about halfway with uncooked rice or dry beans. Bury small objects in the filling (paper clips, erasers, toys, etc.). Can your child use a spoon to scoop up each treasure?
- **Show your child** how to use a hole-puncher to punch holes around the edges of a paper plate. Then, your preschooler can thread yarn through the holes and across the plate to make a colorful design.

Source: M. MacDonald and others, "Relations of Preschoolers' Visual-Motor and Object Manipulation Skills With Executive Function and Social Behavior," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, Taylor and Francis Ltd.

Q: The preschool teacher says my child has trouble interacting with other children during free play and argues with them or avoids them. How can I help?

Questions & Answers

A: Many preschool children need a little help to develop their social skills. To promote these skills:

- **Play with your child.** Aim for spending at least 10 minutes a day on the floor together with toys. When your child starts playing, join in and encourage interaction. Or, think of a pretend game to play together. For example, the toy animals are going to hop on the toy cars and go on an adventure.
- **Schedule playdates.** Some children are more comfortable in a one-on-one interaction than in a group. Invite a friendly child over to play with your child. Invite only one at a time, and keep the playdates short at first—one hour or two. Make sure there are enough toys for both children. Plan something special for the last 15 minutes, such as a puppet show.
- **Talk about the experiences** once they are over. If your child says, "Max wouldn't play race cars with me," you could ask, "Did you and Max want to play with the same car?" If so, talk to your child about taking turns.

If Max wanted to play something different, talk with your child about first playing what Max wants to play, then suggesting something else to play. Consistent practice strengthens preschoolers' social skills. However, if you are concerned about your child's development, talk with your pediatrician.

The Kindergarten Experience

Restock books on regular trips to the library



Stocking a home library for your kindergartner is a wonderful idea, but it's not realistic for every family

due to budget or space constraints. The good news is, your child can still have a continuous fresh supply of new books for free! All it takes is a regular trip to your local library.

To make the most of library trips:

- **Review library rules.** Remind your child, "We use quiet voices so we don't disturb others who are reading."
- **Bring a tote bag** from home so your child can carry books to the check-out desk and then home independently.
- **Help your child** get a library card. Getting a card will give your child a sense of pride and increase excitement about checking out books.
- **Announce ahead of time** how many books your child can take home. This will eliminate power struggles at the check-out desk.
- **Talk with the children's librarian.** Encourage your child to ask a question, such as, "Do you have books about animals?"
- **Find a spot in the library** to sit and review the materials your child has selected. Let your child look through them and make final selections.
- **Establish a special place** at home to keep library books. Talk about the importance of taking care of books and returning them on time so that other children can enjoy them, too.

Help your kindergartner have a positive attitude about school

It's natural for children to want to continue activities they enjoy, and learning should be no different. The key to unlocking your child's full potential is to foster a love of learning and school. Try these ideas:

- **Ask your child** open-ended questions, such as "What do you like best about school?" Talk about how much your child is learning there.
- **Encourage your child** to respect teachers. Talk about what your child can learn from them. Say that teachers care about helping your child learn.
- **Help your child** develop meaningful relationships with school friends. Consider meeting a classmate at a local playground or park. Let your child to invite a



school friend to join in one of your family's weekend 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.

Six strategies lead to effective parent-teacher conferences



A conference with your child's kindergarten teacher is an exciting opportunity to learn about how your child

is doing in school and to share valuable information with the teacher.

To help things go well:

1. **Talk with your child beforehand.** Is there anything in particular your child would like you to discuss with the teacher?
2. **Arrive prepared.** Bring a list of questions and thoughts for the teacher. You are the "expert" on your child, and your input can help the teacher.
3. **Be on time.** Conferences are often scheduled back-to-back. Arriving late will reduce the amount of time you have with the teacher.
4. **Maintain a positive outlook.** You and the teacher are on the same team. If your child is struggling, solving the problem is easier when you and the teacher work together.
5. **Ask questions.** If you are confused about any elementary school terms or concepts, speak up.
6. **Set goals.** Ask what you can do at home to support your child's learning. Plan to keep in touch with the teacher about your child's progress.