

Early Childhood Parents® make the difference!

Cornbelt Educational Cooperative

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Beat the winter blues with engaging activities for kids

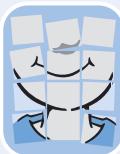
Winter is a great time to explore with your preschooler, whether you're playing indoors or outside. Here are a few seasonal activities you can do together to help your child learn about colors, numbers, science and nature:

- **Enjoy a winter picnic.** Bundle up and head outdoors with a thermos of hot soup. Talk about animals, plants and other natural things you and your child see. Or, spread a blanket inside and serve a healthy lunch on it. You can even turn your picnic into a reading party!
- **Have fun with cookie cutters.** Ask your child to trace around each cookie cutter with a pencil. Look at the shapes they make. Then, place the cutters in a paper

bag and see if your child can bring out the cookie cutter that matches each shape just by feel.

- **Listen to the sounds of winter.** Take a walk and talk about what you hear. Perhaps you hear boots crunching on snow, rain splashing or wind whistling.
- **Be winter detectives.** Help your preschooler identify the signs of winter in a cold climate, such as freezing weather, less daylight, bare trees, people wearing warm clothing and smoke rising from chimneys.
- **Count pairs.** Gather several pairs of mittens or gloves. Or, cut pairs of mittens out of different colors of paper. Mix them up. Have your child sort them back into pairs.

New Year's resolutions are for kids, too!



Should preschoolers make some New Year's resolutions of their own? The American Academy of Pediatrics says yes.

This group of doctors for babies, children and teens has specific ideas to offer, too. Your preschooler could resolve to:

- **Spend more time** looking at books and less time on digital devices.
- **Wash hands** regularly—especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- **Pick up toys** after playing.
- **Be kind to animals**, including any family pets.
- **Be active** five times a week or more. Make a list of enjoyable activities, such as playing tag, jumping rope or riding a big wheel.
- **Brush teeth** twice a day.
- **Be nice to classmates** who need a friend or look sad or lonely.
- **Talk with a trusted adult** when feeling scared or in need of help.

Source: "Healthy New Year's Resolutions for Children & Teens," American Academy of Pediatrics.

Encourage your child to ask questions that lead to learning



Active learners don't just absorb knowledge—they actively seek it out. For most preschoolers, this takes the form of a constant stream of questions.

The next time your child hits you with a rapid-fire round of questions, remember that curiosity is a sign of an active, engaged learner. Instead of feeling frustrated, encourage this natural questioning that leads to so much discovery. Here's how:

- **Play guessing games** such as I Spy. Ask your child to think of an object in the room, one you can both see. Explain that you will guess what it is by asking questions. "Is it blue? Is it on the floor? Can we eat it?" Once your child understands the game, reverse roles. You think of something, and have your child ask the questions to guess what it is.

- **Choose a category.** For example, say, "Birds fly. Can you tell me something else that flies?" Or, "Which animal says *Moo*?" If your child answers correctly, keep going. "What does the pig say?" Let your child ask you questions, too.
- **Read books together** that contain questions, such as *Why?* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger. Point out that each time the character asks a question, he learns something new.

Source: L. Noda and others, *Off to a Great Start*, Wright Group, a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

"The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge."

—Thomas Berger

Are you teaching your child how to follow rules?



Children who are expected to follow rules at home have an easier time following rules when they get to school.

Answer yes or *no* to the questions below to see if you are teaching your preschooler how to follow rules:

1. **Do you have a few basic rules** that help life run smoothly? The list should be short so your child doesn't get confused or overwhelmed.
2. **Do you follow routines** that help your child cooperate? Doing things the same way daily makes them easier for kids to remember.
3. **Do you explain rules simply?** Be clear and specific. "Say *please* and *thank you*" is better than "Be polite."
4. **Do you always enforce rules?** Bending the rules confuses children.
5. **Do you adjust rules** when your child is ready? As your preschooler matures, show pride and confidence in new abilities.

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are doing a great job encouraging your child to respect rules. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

Strong motor skills prepare your child for school activities



Preschoolers do all sorts of things with their bodies—from running and jumping to drawing and writing.

Control over these actions, known as motor skills, is crucial for your child's development. Motor skills lay the groundwork for everything from playground fun to academic success.

To strengthen them, have your child:

- **Zip and button** clothing.
- **Cut with safety scissors** (under supervision).
- **Squeeze and form** clay or play dough into shapes and letters.
- **Build with blocks.**
- **Dress and play with** dolls and action figures.
- **Finger paint.**
- **Draw, paint and color** with large crayons, pencils, paintbrushes and washable markers.
- **Pretend to be different animals.** Ask your child to like a frog or hop like a kangaroo.
- **Turn pages of books.**
- **Tear paper into small strips** or pieces.
- **String beads on laces.**
- **Squeeze water out of sponges** during bath time.
- **Pick up pennies** from a table (under supervision, of course).

Be patient and let your preschooler attempt tasks independently. Notice and praise your child's accomplishments to foster a sense of pride and self-confidence.



Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Boost responsibility by using a simple phrase with your child



Developing a sense of responsibility in young children is a process. It begins by teaching them that people need to finish their work *before* they can play.

One effective way to do this is by using the phrase “when ... then” throughout the day. Over time, your preschooler will begin to associate this phrase with a cue to complete tasks before moving on to another activity. Here are some examples:

- “When you put your jacket on, then we can go to Jack’s house to play.”
- “When you put on your pj’s and brush your teeth, then we can read a story together.”

- “When you are dressed, fed and are ready to leave for preschool, then you can play with your stuffed animals.”
- “When you pick up your trucks, then you can play with the blocks.”
- “When you gather your library books, we can go to the library.”

When your preschooler demonstrates responsibility, say something like, “It makes me so happy to see you pick up your toys. I bet it makes you feel proud that you can do it all by yourself.”

This type of specific, positive reinforcement helps your child connect actions with a feeling of pride and accomplishment.

Making wise decisions requires lots of patience and practice



Success in school hinges on the ability to make good decisions. Your child will have to make lots of decisions, such as whether or not to observe classroom rules, whether or not to finish assignments, etc. Those choices will affect your child’s education and future.

To provide your preschooler decision-making practice:

- **Offer choices.** Would your child like to have yogurt or an egg for breakfast? Should your family go to the park or to the library on Saturday? Which book should you read at bedtime?
- **Ask for advice.** Children feel empowered when they are asked to decide something for others. You might ask your child to listen to music from two different radio stations and decide which you should listen to.
- **Involve your child in planning.** If you are hosting a playdate, help your child plan what the children could do together. Make a list of acceptable activities to choose from, like building with blocks or doing a puzzle. This gives your child a sense of ownership while still providing structure.
- **Offer explanations.** Making well-reasoned choices takes lots of practice, and sometimes you will have to overrule your preschooler’s decisions. When you do, be sure to take the time to explain *why*. Focus on the consequences of a choice. “I know you’d like to watch that movie, but it’s scary and it would upset you. When you’re older, we can think about it again.”

Source: J. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, Ph.D., *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Q: My child is in the last year of preschool and will be starting kindergarten in September. The teacher has suggested we spend the rest of this school year working on self-control. How should we do that?

Questions & Answers

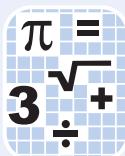
A: Kindergarten teachers understand that five-year-olds are still learning, and they don’t expect perfect behavior. However, children will have a smoother school experience if they learn key skills like waiting their turn, following directions and expressing their feelings in appropriate ways.

To develop self-control, encourage your preschooler to:

- **Wait.** At this age, children should not expect adults to immediately take care of every desire. For example, don’t end a phone call just because your child asks for a snack and a drink. Say, “Unless you are hurt or something bad is happening (such as a fire), you need to wait until I am off the phone. Thank you.”
- **Use words to express feelings.** When you see your child begin to get upset, name the feelings and demonstrate how to talk about them in an acceptable way. This helps your child build self-awareness.
- **Use calming techniques**, such as “five-finger breathing.” Have your child hold out a hand and slowly trace the outline of fingers with a finger from the other hand. Your child should inhale when moving up a finger and exhale when moving down. This practice slows down your preschooler’s breathing and calms the nervous system.

The Kindergarten Experience

Reinforce basic geometry with your child



Kindergarten math involves much more than numbers and counting. Many families are surprised to find out that it also includes learning the basics of *geometry*.

In a nutshell, geometry is the study of shapes, sizes, patterns and positions. And your child probably knew something about it before even starting school!

When your child names a shape, that's using geometry. When your child uses positional words like *above*, *below*, *beside*, *in front of*, *behind* and *next to*, that's also using geometry.

There are many ways families can reinforce kindergarten geometry. Here are just a few:

- **Go on a shape scavenger hunt.** Look around your home with your child and name the shapes you see: round table, rectangular place mat, square napkin. See how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find. Look for shapes when you are outside, too.
- **Learn about lines.** Talk about *horizontal lines* which run from side to side and *vertical lines* which run from top to bottom. Then, give your child a few pictures or illustrations to look at. How many horizontal and vertical lines are there?
- **Practice positional words.** Ask your child questions about the position of everyday objects. Is the dog *in front of* or *behind* the chair? Is the clock hanging *above* or *below* the shelf?

Support school attendance by focusing on your child's health

Winter is the season when many children contract colds, the flu and a host of other ailments. Of course, this can lead to missed days of school and interrupted learning.

While it is impossible to keep your child from *ever* getting sick, you can take steps that offer the best chance of staying healthy—and attending school. Be sure to:

- **Keep your child** up to date on medical visits.
- **Make sure your child** wears proper protective clothing in cold weather. A lot of body heat escapes through the head, so wearing a hat is a great idea on a cold day.
- **Have your child** wash hands regularly, such as before meals, after using the restroom and after



arriving home from school. This can prevent the spread of many diseases.

- **Avoid exposing your child** to people who are already sick. Sick family members should limit contact.

Use role models to introduce positive character traits



While you are the most important role model in your kindergartner's life, you don't have to be the only one. Here's how to use other role models to instill positive character traits:

- **Talk about people you admire.** Discuss relatives, friends or well-known figures who show respect, responsibility or compassion.
- **Point out everyday heroes.** Look for people in your community who are making a difference, such as a firefighter, a teacher or a doctor.
- **Discuss your child's heroes.** Your kindergartner might mention a

character from a book or movie, an athlete or a family member. Have a conversation about why your child admires that person.

- **Read together.** Choose books that feature characters who show kindness, courage and honesty. Talk about what makes a good role model and how those traits can be applied in real life.
- **Create a Hero Wall.** Help your child make a collage with pictures of heroes. When adding a picture, talk about the specific traits that make that person a hero. For example, "Superman is a hero because he shows *courage*."