Early Childhood
Parents
make the difference!
December 2026
Vol. 31, No. 4
Cornbelt Educational Cooperative



Five reasons to read aloud to your preschooler every day

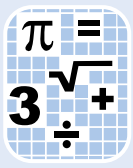
Reading aloud to young children is one of the most impactful things families can do to prepare them for school success. Yet, according to the Reach Out and Read National Center, Fewer than half of U.S. children under five are read to daily.

Reading aloud to your child:

1. **Builds listening comprehension.** Hearing a wide variety of books read aloud often exposes your child to complex ideas, rich story lines and advanced sentence structures.
2. **Boosts vocabulary.** Books use a larger variety of words than everyday spoken language. Discussing these words helps your child build a strong vocabulary bank.
3. **Strengthens phonological** awareness. Engaging with stories, rhymes and language helps your child tune into the fundamental sounds of speech, an essential step for sounding out words.
4. **Models reading fluency.** Reading aloud at a conversational speed—with expression, appropriate pauses and varied tone—shows your child what smooth reading sounds like.
5. **Ignites deeper thinking.** Discussing plots and illustrations prompts your child to ask meaningful questions, make smart predictions and think about the world.

Remember: If English is not your family's first language, reading aloud in your native language is also a powerful way to build your preschooler's foundational literacy skills.

Enhance math smarts with block play



Playing with blocks is a fun way to help your child learn early math skills. It also builds problem-solving and thinking skills, which are very important for math. Best of all, these simple games can turn everyday playtime into a powerful learning experience.

Teach these concepts while playing with blocks:

- **Pattern recognition.** Many math ideas are based on patterns. Make a pattern (a red block, a yellow block and another red block) and ask your child to place the next block.
- **Addition and subtraction.** As you build a tower together, add a few blocks or take a few away. Ask your child, "How many blocks are in the tower now?" Count them together. Then, have your child add two blocks, or take two blocks off. Ask, "Does the tower have *more* or *fewer* blocks now?"
- **Shape identification.** Ask your child, "Is this block a square or a rectangle?" Knowing shapes is the starting point for geometry and other higher math.

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Build your preschooler's motor skills with fun physical activities



Sometimes it is easy to overlook the importance of motor skills for school success. But making sure your preschooler is as healthy as possible is a vital step in supporting learning. Developed muscles, bones and joints are the "drivers" of your child's motor skills.

Exercise is one important way to build motor skills. Exercise can also help your child:

- **Reduce stress.** Your child will be happier, calmer and better able to cope with challenges.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Kids in a healthy weight range are more likely to keep a healthy weight as adults.
- **Sleep better.** A rested child is one who is ready to learn.

To promote exercise this winter:

- **Bundle up and take a family walk.**
- **Build an indoor obstacle course** using cushions, chairs and other items. Encourage your child to crawl, jump and wiggle.
- **Hold a scavenger hunt.** Have family members move throughout the house on a race to find items on customized search lists.
- **Have small dance parties** throughout the day. Put on a favorite song and dance around together.

> **"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."**
>
> —*Lao Tzu*

Promoting respect in early years has lasting benefits for children



Over time, children learn to be respectful not just because they are told to, but because they understand how being respected feels. They realize that it feels good to be asked politely, thanked and treated fairly. Experiencing this at home is a key way children learn.

A study of mothers and children published by the Economic and Social Research Council shows that:

- **Talking to preschoolers** about people's thoughts and feelings encourages empathy. For example, "That little boy is crying. Why do you think he's upset?" Or, "Grandma is frowning. How do you think she's feeling?" These conversations give your preschooler opportunities to be understanding.
- **Discussions about feelings** have long-term benefits. Talking with your preschooler now builds the positive social skills that will make it easier to get along with classmates and teachers in elementary school.
- **Being a positive role model** is important. Let your child see you treat others with consideration. When talking about other people's emotions, use a warm tone. Research suggests this increases kids' cooperation. In addition to discussing real-life emotions, also talk with your child about how characters in books, movies and TV shows might be feeling.

Source: N. Yuill and others, "The Relation Between Parenting, Children's Social Understanding and Language," Economic and Social Research Council.

Are you improving your preschooler's ability to learn?



Young children naturally want to learn. But how much they learn depends a lot on their families. Are you doing things that stimulate your child's learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you foster thinking skills** by asking your child to help solve problems? Ask questions, such as, "What's the best way to ... ?"
2. **Do you encourage** your child to use all five senses to look, listen, feel, taste and smell? (See page three for some fun sensory activities!)
3. **Do you help** your child have new experiences, such as visiting a gallery or museum together?
4. **Do you suggest** your child sit at a table or desk when working on something? This can help children remained focused on the task.
5. **Do you encourage** your child to ask questions? You can look up the answers together.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're stimulating your preschooler's learning. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

Early Childhood Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an independent, private agency.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

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Research shows that taking naps can improve learning ability



You're not the only one who could use a nap. Your child could, too! According to research, young kids who take regular naps have an easier time learning new things. Not only that, their memories are sharper and they retain what they've learned better. That's because, during sleep, the brain "replays" what it took in that day, reinforcing recollections.

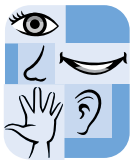
Unfortunately, many children stop taking naps once they reach preschool age. That's a shame, because kids this age need 11-13 hours of sleep in a 24-hour day, and they may not get it all at night. Naps are a great way to make up for missing shut-eye.

To encourage your preschooler to take naps:

- **Create a routine.** Whether there is preschool every day or not, have your child wake up around the same time each morning and go to bed at the same time at night. Also assign a regular time for naps. Make it clear that even if your child doesn't sleep, nap time is for lying quietly on the bed and resting.
- **Offer calm surroundings.** Your preschooler may have trouble drifting off if the TV is distracting or all the lights are on. Turn them off and consider playing some quiet music in the background. A soothing atmosphere is ideal for napping.
- **Limit caffeine.** While preschoolers don't drink coffee, they may sip soda or iced tea, or eat chocolate and other candy that contains caffeine. Don't let these sleep-stealers interfere with your child's ZZZs!

Source: M. Sandoval and others, "Words to Sleep On: Naps Facilitate Verb Generalization in Habitually and Nonhabitually Napping Preschoolers," *Child Development,* Society for Research in Child Development.

Introduce your preschooler to the power of the five senses



Your child experiences the world by seeing, touching, tasting, hearing and smelling. To help your preschooler appreciate what humans can learn from their senses:

- **Play 1-2-3 Look and See.** Put five items on a tray. Ask your child to look at them for a few seconds. Then, take the tray away and remove one item. When you show the tray again, can your child guess what's missing?
- **Make a "feely" bag.** Place a variety of small items in a paper bag. Say, "Close your eyes, reach your hand in and pick up an item." Can your child guess what it is without looking?
- **Have a taste test.** Have your child place salt on the tip, side and back of the tongue. Then, repeat with sugar and lemon juice. Discuss which part of your child's tongue is more sensitive to which taste.
- **Take a smell walk.** Lead your blindfolded child around your house or outside. Ask what smells your child can sniff and name.
- **Have a listening minute.** Stand outside in the dark with your child. Ask, "Can you guess what is making the sounds you hear?"

Questions & Answers

Q: I am concerned about my child's ability to pay attention in kindergarten next year. I know kindergarten involves more seat work than preschool does. Can you explain the attention span needed for kindergarten and offer tips for preparing my child?

A: Kindergarten does involve more seat work, but this work takes place in small chunks. Kindergarten teachers understand that their students are ages five or six and have a strong need to be active.

In ordinary circumstances, your child will be expected to pay attention to the teacher or to one activity for about 15 minutes at a time. As the year goes on, that amount of time may increase to 25 minutes (for an engaging activity).

To extend your preschooler's attention span:

- **Limit digital media activities.** Zoning out in front of a screen is a passive activity. It also feeds a child's desire to be entertained with constantly moving, flashing, changing imagery.
- **Encourage time with toys** such as puzzles and blocks. Playing with these builds concentration.
- **Practice following directions.** Start with one-step directions, such as, "Hang your jacket on the hook." Move on to two-step directions, such as, "Bring me the bag and then hang your jacket on the hook." When your child masters this, try three steps.
- **Read together.** This is the best activity of all. Children learn to follow the story and use their imagination. Also encourage your child to look at books independently.

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The Kindergarten Experience

Keep learning alive over the winter break



You and your child deserve a break from the busy school year! But that doesn't mean learning should stop. You and your kindergartner can have fun building important skills with these winter break activities:

- **Play games.** Sneak learning into fun games. Play store to practice math, act out a story to help with reading, or play Simon Says to practice listening and following directions.
- **Explore.** Take a field trip to the town hall, go on a nature walk or observe a construction site from a safe distance.
- **Cook.** Use reading, math and science skills together while you follow a recipe.
- **Have conversations.** Talk about your day and ask thought-provoking questions, "What would it be like to live in outer space?"
- **Read.** Mix up your normal reading routine. Try reading in new spots, like inside a cozy fort made out of a bed sheet and chairs.
- **Exercise.** Keep your child active and beat cabin fever by playing outside or playing "mountaineer" on the stairs.
- **Create art.** Dip winter-themed cookie cutters into washable paint to stamp fun shapes on paper. You can also make a smiling snowman out of paper plates!
- **Practice manners.** A special family dinner or a visit to a friend's house is a great chance for your child to practice being polite and kind.

Help your kindergartner stay healthy over winter months

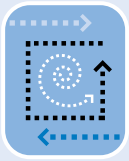
Winter is known as the cold and flu season, and many families are concerned about their children getting sick. While you can't stop your child from ever catching a bug, you can take steps to provide the best chance of staying healthy and ready to learn. Here's how:

- **Get plenty of sleep.** Aim for 11 to 13 hours each night to keep your child's immune system strong.
- **Eat healthy foods.** Fuel your child's body with nutritious fruits and vegetables.
- **Dress for the weather.** Bundle your child up in warm clothes and a hat to trap body heat.
- **Wash hands often.** Teach your child to scrub often with soap and water to stop 80% of infections.
- **Drink water.** Keep your child hydrated throughout the day, especially in dry winter weather.



- **Get fresh air.** Chilly outdoor play helps clear out germs and keeps your child active.
- **Stay up-to-date on checkups.** Keep regular doctor visits on schedule.
- **Follow school rules.** Stick to health guidelines to stop germs from spreading in class.

Reinforce the concepts of size with three simple activities



There are many ways to help kindergartners explore the concept of relative size. Encourage your child to look at everyday objects and compare them. Use words like *bigger, smaller, shorter* and *longer* to talk about them.

Learning about size is both fun and easy to do at home. Try these activities:

1. **Make pancakes** in all different sizes. Put them in order from *smallest* to *largest*. Which one does your child want to eat? The *smallest* pancake or the *biggest* one of all?
2. **Read the fable** "The Lion and the Mouse." Talk about the sizes of the characters. How big are their ears, paws and voices? Next, compare other animals you see, like a cat and a dog. Which animal is *smaller*?
3. **Have your child measure** and compare the lengths of different items. For example, "This crayon is four inches long and that banana is eight inches. The crayon is four inches *shorter* than the banana."