



## Create a learning-rich home with these three strategies

Children's formal education begins when they start school. However, a lot of crucial learning happens right at home. In fact, the things your preschooler learns at home now may have the biggest impact on school performance later.

According to research, children who grow up in learning-rich homes have the best chance of thriving in school—and the benefits are long-lasting.

What do learning-rich homes have that others don't?

1. **Literacy activities.**
2. **Learning materials.**
3. **Quality interaction with family.**

Luckily, none of these is expensive, and none requires special expertise.

To create a learning environment:

- **Read together.** Point out new words. Run your finger under each sentence to show how text goes left to right. Ask your child questions about what you read.
- **Offer simple educational toys.** Use puzzles to foster problem-solving skills. Try dominoes to teach numbers. Play with blocks. Grab a pot and a wooden spoon and make music.
- **Have meaningful conversations** with your child every day. Show you care about what your child is thinking and feeling. Engaging in conversations teaches your child to interact, builds vocabulary and stimulates learning.

Source: "Child's Home Learning Environment Predicts 5th Grade Academic Skills," New York University.

## Expose your preschooler to reading variety



Children love to hear their favorite stories over and over again. Don't abandon these

cherished books, but don't stick exclusively to them, either. Your child will be best prepared for reading by becoming familiar with all different types of books.

Introduce your child to:

- **Make-believe.** Reading about characters and situations that exist only in an author's imagination encourages children to be creative. Talk to your child about the difference between *real* and *pretend*.
- **Myths and fables.** You may already know such tales as "The Lion and the Mouse," one of Aesop's Fables. Myths and fables teach preschoolers life lessons and values.
- **Poetry.** Look for poems that rhyme. They show kids that language is fun. Rhymes also encourage children to listen for sounds that are different and alike.
- **Nonfiction.** These books show preschoolers that reading can help them discover and learn new things.

# Chores build responsibility and foster a sense of importance



Children learn to be responsible with they are given responsibilities. Doing chores teaches that maintaining a home

is a family effort and that your child is an important part of the family.

Children who are at least three years old can do things such as:

- **Set and clear the table.** They can start with the forks, spoons and napkins. Gradually expand the job to include plates and cups.
- **Feed dry food** to family pets and give them fresh water.
- **Clean, using simple tools** such as a feather duster, a small hand broom or a lightweight handheld vacuum.

- **Help with laundry.** They can put dirty clothes in a laundry basket or put clean clothes in drawers.
- **Help with simple cooking jobs,** such as stirring ingredients and pouring cool liquids.
- **Bring in mail,** unless this requires going out on the street.
- **Pick up toys** on a daily basis before bedtime.

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

—Denis Waitley

# Good nutrition is vital for your child’s future academic success



What children eat affects how they think and feel. And according to research, children who eat a well-balanced diet are likely

to reap academic benefits.

Good nutrition promotes:

- **Concentration.** When children are well-nourished, they’re more alert and better able to focus. That means they won’t have to struggle to pay attention—or be distracted by a rumbling stomach.
- **Memory.** If kids don’t eat well (if they skip a meal, for example), they may have trouble remembering what they’ve learned. If they can’t retain the day’s lessons, they’ll have a harder time keeping up.
- **Achievement.** Kids with poor diets are more likely than their peers to repeat a grade and often score lower in math and on standardized tests.

- **Better behavior.** Undernourished kids have higher rates of suspension from school than their better-fed peers. They’re also more prone to arguing or fighting with classmates.

To nurture your child’s ability to learn and do well in school, start establishing positive eating habits now.

Researchers have found that young children are more likely to eat healthy foods if families:

- **Offer options.** Let your child pick between two snacks (like apples and oranges, or carrots and celery).
- **Make it fun.** Arrange cut-up fruits into a smiley face or rainbow.
- **Include them.** Invite your child into the kitchen to help you cook. When kids are involved in the process of making healthy meals, They are more excited about eating them!

Source: Kansas State University, “Winning the war: How to persuade children to eat more veggies,” ScienceDaily.

# Do you know the basics of effective discipline?



Disciplining children is one of the toughest parts of raising them. Are you practicing effective discipline techniques

at home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you choose** just a few important rules—and explain them in simple words your preschooler understands?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you enforce** household rules consistently so your child always knows what you expect?

\_\_\_ **3. Do you set** expectations that are appropriate for your child’s age? This prevents rules from being too lenient or too tough.

\_\_\_ **4. Do you react** carefully and calmly when your child misbehaves, and demonstrate what good behavior looks like?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you celebrate** your child’s good behavior much more often than you call attention to mistakes?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* answer means you’re using an effective discipline method. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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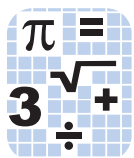
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# Focus on developing skills that improve future math outcomes



Researchers have found that preschoolers' ability to grasp certain math concepts is a strong predictor of how they

will perform in math when they reach fifth grade. Three skills in particular have a significant impact on a child's future success with math—counting, patterning and comparing quantities.

Luckily, there are lots of fun and simple ways to strengthen your preschooler's skills in these areas. Play a game of:

- **Count the shapes.** Sharpen counting and shape-recognition skills at the same time! Pick a room in your house, then see how many examples of a particular shape your child can find there. Can your preschooler find five rectangles in the kitchen? How many circles are there?

- **What comes next?** Draw a simple pattern of colored squares (red, blue, green, red, blue, green). Stop coloring after a certain square, such as blue. Now ask your child what comes next. Is it another blue square? Is it a red one? Or does the pattern call for green? Once your child masters simple patterns, move on to more complex ones.
- **Which has more?** Make two unequal piles of small objects. (Use coins, pieces of cereal, paper clips, etc.) Ask your child to tell you which pile has more in it. Then ask how your child knows. (Is it taller? Is it wider?) Count together to find out!

Source: B. Rittle-Johnson and others, "Early Math Trajectories: Low-Income Children's Mathematics Knowledge From Ages 4 to 11," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc.

# Five ways to enrich family time with your preschooler in 2024



What your preschooler wants most from you is your time. No matter how much time you spend together now,

make a New Year's resolution to make the most of it! To get started:

1. **Focus on quantity** as well as quality. Participate in activities that encourage learning, creativity and family bonding. Thirty minutes of playing on the floor with your child is wonderful. But taking your child on your Saturday errands and talking together the whole time is even better.
2. **Involve your child** in family life. Let your child help you prepare meals and do simple chores. See the article of page two for a list of age-appropriate chores to help you get started.
3. **Eat meals together as a family.** Research shows that more conversation and family bonding happens around the table than anywhere else.
4. **Exercise together.** Move with your child daily. Walk, bike, skate—even climbing stairs counts.
5. **Engage in your child's interests.** If your child loves to color, sit down and color a picture together. If your preschooler loves dinosaurs, read books about them together. Watch your child's favorite show together and then ask what makes it your child's favorite.

**Q:** I've read articles about the importance of thinking skills and that many children grow up lacking these skills. I'd like to help my preschooler develop them but it sounds complicated. I'm not sure I'm qualified.

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Of course you are qualified! Thinking skills are simple to promote because they have to do with imagining, figuring and questioning. Most children do these things every day, naturally. So, all you have to do is offer your child a bit of encouragement.

To promote thinking skills:

- **Don't rush in to fix everything** for your child. For example, your child has put a shirt on inside-out. Stand in front of the mirror and together and say, "Uh-oh. Isn't there supposed to be a picture of a bear on your shirt?" Give your child a chance to realize what went wrong and take care of it.
- **Take a few extra minutes** with story time. After reading, ask your child questions about the story and the characters. Questions that inspire thinking start with phrases like, "How do you know that ..." or "What would happen if ..."
- **Ask questions** about your child's work. Ask, "What is this cat doing in your picture?" or "Why did you decide to draw a dog?"
- **Give your preschooler time** each day to play alone with simple toys such as blocks. This type of play gives your child an opportunity to be creative and practice thinking skills. For example, if the block tower falls down, your child can think about a new way to rebuild it.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Stereotypes can impact your child's self-image



Little girls may start out confident about their intelligence, but things change somewhere along the way. Studies

show that while five-year-olds consider women to be as smart as men, they soon change their opinion. By age six, girls begin to see boys and men as brainier than girls and women.

Surprisingly, girls in first grade and beyond tend to think that girls work harder in school than boys—but they consider boys to be naturally smarter.

Why the shift? It may be because the majority of the explorers, scientists, artists and others studied in the classroom are male. That can send the message that women don't rise to the same heights as men. But that's because in previous generations, women were not afforded the same opportunities.

To help your kindergartner see that women are just as smart as men:

- **Applaud effort.** When your child buckles down to complete a task, offer praise. Say that working hard matters. You don't need to be born with a talent for something in order to master it.
- **Offer examples.** Read children's books about famous women like Amelia Earhart and Sojourner Truth. Point out all the strong, successful women around your child. Make it clear that setting goals and working hard to reach them is something everyone can do.

**Source:** L. Bian and others, "Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests," *Science*, The American Association for the Advancement of Sciences.

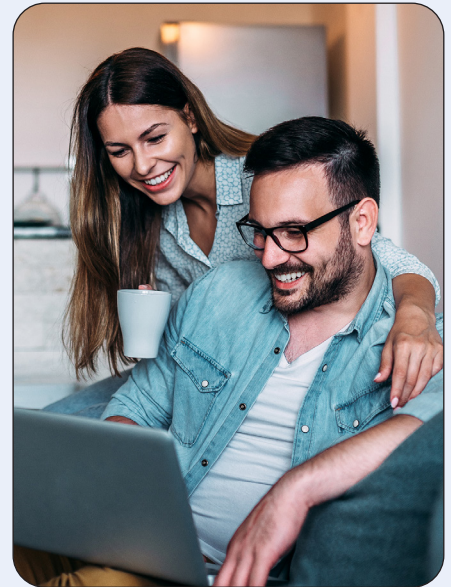
## Strategies can help families feel more connected to school

**B**eing involved in your kindergartner's education has a profound impact on academic success.

However, some families struggle to feel connected to the school.

To create a strong connection:

- **Communicate.** Keep in touch with your child's teachers through email and online portals. Tell teachers about any changes in your child's life. Continue to make parent-teacher conferences a priority.
- **Read.** Stay updated on your child's progress and school events by reading all information the school sends home.
- **Socialize.** Meet other parents of kindergartners. Keep in touch through social media, group texts or video chats. The bonds formed in kindergarten can last many years—for kids and parents!
- **Lead.** As your schedule allows, consider leadership roles, such



joining the parent-teacher group or working on the school improvement plan.

**Source:** H. Kreider, "Getting Parents 'Ready' for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education," Harvard Family Research Project.

## A winter poem is a creative way to practice writing skills



Looking for a simple project that will give your kindergartner's emerging writing skills a boost? Create a winter poem together! It's easy with the following steps:

1. **Write five sentences** that begin with, "In winter, I ... ." Then add a different sense (*see, hear, touch, taste, smell*) to each sentence and leave space for your child to add a word.
2. **Discuss what each sense means.** Your child may need examples.

*Remember when we heard leaves crunching under our feet in the fall? Remember the bird we saw making a nest in spring? Remember when we smelled the grass after it was cut in the summer?*

3. **Spend time observing winter.** What does your child sense inside? Outside? While doing errands? Bring the poem with you, and help your child fill in the blanks.
4. **Choose a title** for the poem together. Encourage your child to add illustrations.