



Enriching experiences fuel your child's developing brain

Children's intelligence, once thought to be fixed and determined by genetics, actually continues to develop throughout childhood and into adulthood. You play a crucial role in that change by providing your child with lots of new and interesting experiences.

Here's what to know:

- **The brain develops significantly** during the preschool years. However, this is not the time to overwhelm your child with academics. Rather, it's the time to lay a foundation for learning. You can do that by having conversations and taking your child places with you. Read together, play games and encourage creative play.
- **Learning by doing is essential.** To you, sorting socks may be a boring chore. But when children do it, they

are learning to compare and classify. Setting the table helps with pattern recognition. Measuring ingredients offers practice with key math skills. Feeding a pet boosts fine motor skills and the satisfaction that comes from caring for something.

- **Relationships matter.** A child who feels connected to other people is also likely to feel connected to learning. Demonstrate your love with words and actions. Offer your undivided attention and listen with interest. This will help your child feel secure and develop the self-confidence needed to take on learning challenges.

Source: X. Ma et al, "A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Learning Outcomes and Parental Involvement During Early Childhood Education and Early Elementary Education," *Education Psychology Review*, Springer.

Healthy sleep habits set kids up for success



Research indicates that children who get at least 10 hours of sleep at night on a regular basis have

an easier time making the adjustment to kindergarten. These children experience greater success in emotional development, learning engagement and academic performance throughout their kindergarten year.

Findings also show that taking naps during the day to make up for less sleep at night does not have the same effect.

To help your child get at least 10 hours of sleep each night:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Enforce a regular bedtime and wake time.
- **Encourage physical activity.** Exercise and fresh air help children sleep better.
- **Set a screen time curfew.** Kids should avoid bright screens for one hour before bedtime.
- **Follow a bedtime routine.** Your child could take a bath, enjoy a story and talk about the day.
- **Make your child feel safe.** Put a night light in the room and say you'll peek in periodically.

Source: D.M. Teti and others, "Sleep Duration and Kindergarten Adjustment," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics.

Introduce your preschooler to the joy of scientific discovery



Some adults find the term “science” intimidating. But the truth is, science is all about figuring out how the world works—something

preschoolers are already doing with enthusiasm every day. To reinforce how fun science can be:

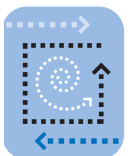
- **Talk about how things change.** Together, observe a nearby tree and take notes about how it looks. Plan to do the same thing in the winter, spring and summer. How does the tree change each season?
- **Test predictions.** Have your child guess how far you can throw a ball. Then, measure and see how close your child’s answer comes to the real distance. Switch and see if you can estimate how far your child can throw the ball.

- **Ask your child questions** that require thought: *Why do you think giraffes are tall? Why is the sky blue? What makes plants grow? How do you think we could solve this problem?*
- **Begin a collection** of shells, rocks or leaves together. Each time you or your child add something new to the collection, talk about how it compares or contrasts with the other items you’ve gathered.

“Every brilliant experiment, like every great work of art, starts with an act of imagination.”

—Jonah Lehrer

Help your child understand the concepts of *beginning* and *end*



An understanding of the concepts of *beginning* and *end* is an early step in learning to manage time—a skill

every student needs. It also helps preschoolers navigate transitions more easily.

There are unlimited ways to help your preschooler learn and master these concepts. Here are just a few:

- **Talk about them** in your daily life. Remind your child what happens at the beginning and end of a meal or a bath. Story time is another great opportunity—all stories have a beginning and an end.
- **Use visual timers** like sand timers or kitchen timers. Show your child when the timer starts (the beginning of an activity) and when it

rings or the sand runs out (the end of the activity).

- **Ask questions.** When you travel in a car, train or bus, ask your child if you are at the beginning or end of your trip. When you arrive at your destination, ask again.
- **Play games.** Many children’s board games have pathways that the game pieces must travel. Point out the beginning and end to these pathways.
- **Create simple mazes** on a piece of paper. Guide your child’s hand and demonstrate how the pencil travels from the beginning of the maze all the way to the end. As your child grows, you can develop these concepts further and build thinking skills by introducing more complicated mazes.

Are you teaching your preschooler to love books?



Long before children are able to read all by themselves, they learn that books are sources of relaxation and fun.

This builds their interest in learning to read. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you’re making books enjoyable:

- ___ **1. Do you read** with your child every day at enjoyable times, such as during bath time and at bedtime?
- ___ **2. Do you choose** books you know your child likes, even if it means reading the same books over and over?
- ___ **3. Do you read** with enthusiasm, using different voices for characters and situations?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** about what you read, encourage your child to ask questions, discuss pictures and recite familiar parts of stories?
- ___ **5. Do you visit** the library with your child regularly to browse and check out new books?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are fostering your child’s sense of enjoyment about reading. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Early Childhood
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make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

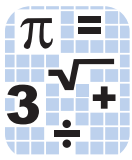
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Pattern recognition boosts young children's math smarts



If someone asked you what math was about, you might say *numbers*. While that's true, math is also about *patterns*.

It is the sequence in which numbers occur and repeat that makes them meaningful.

When preschoolers can line up a red truck, then a blue one, then a red one and then a blue one, they are actually practicing an essential math skill.

To reinforce the concept of patterns, have your child:

- **Look at the calendar.** Point out how every month begins with the number one.
- **Read a rhyming book.** Rhymes are actually patterns of words.
- **Look for patterns** at home. Can your child recognize patterns

on clothing? How about on other fabrics?

- **Look at books** in the library. Explain that the way books are arranged is part of a pattern. This helps people find them.
- **Learn a simple sequence**, such as *clap, clap* (clap twice), *slap, slap* (slap thighs twice). Add other motions as this gets easy, but always repeat them in the same order.
- **Sing songs** with repeating phrases, such as "B-I-N-G-O" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes."
- **Make patterns.** Your child can arrange blocks by color, objects according to size, or string beads.
- **Read a book** about patterns, such as *A-B-A-B-A: A Book of Pattern Play* by B.P. Cleary.

Q: On the weekends, I spend most of my time playing with my four-year-old. We read, do puzzles, play with blocks and go outside. However, I think it would be beneficial for my child to play independently a little bit, too. How can I encourage my preschooler to do that?

Questions & Answers

A: You're absolutely right. By the time children are four, they are ready to learn how to play on their own for short periods of time. Children often come up with some of their most creative ideas when family members are not hovering over them.

To boost independence and encourage solo play:

- **Start small.** Begin with short intervals of five to 10 minutes and gradually increase the time as your preschooler becomes more comfortable.
- **Stay close by initially.** Your presence provides a sense of security. Over time, you can move further away but still be within earshot.
- **Transition smoothly.** After playing together, announce that it's now "quiet playtime." Frame it positively as your child's special time to play.
- **Designate special games,** books, toys and supplies for your preschooler to use during alone time. Bring them out when you want your preschooler to play independently.
- **Allow your child** to become fully absorbed in play. Try not to interrupt with questions or comments unless your child initiates it.
- **Make it a habit.** Try to include independent play into your child's daily routine.

Four daily habits help lengthen your child's attention span



Paying attention is mental work. But your child's body supports the effort. That's why it's helpful to help your

child establish habits that build physical and mental fitness.

Attention-friendly habits include:

1. **Getting enough sleep.** Lack of adequate sleep is attention's biggest enemy. Some children who appear to have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are actually sleep-deprived. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ages three to five get at least 10 hours of sleep every night.
2. **Engaging in physical activity.** Studies have shown that regular, vigorous exercise stimulates

brain cells—which improves memory and attention. Head outside with your child for a walk or to bounce a ball.

3. **Eating a healthy diet.** Nutritious foods help the brain do its best work, including paying attention. Ask your child's pediatrician for food recommendations and try to avoid foods with high levels of sugar and saturated fats.
4. **Limiting passive screen time.** Watching shows and playing games online causes many children to tune out. Instead, engage your preschooler's mind by filling the day with plenty of reading and creative play.

Source: M.H. Popkin, Ph.D. and others, *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds*, Active Parenting Publishers.

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance is vital for your kindergartner



Kindergarten attendance rates are often lower than in later grades. However, regular attendance

in these early years is essential for future academic success. Students who attend school regularly build a strong foundation for learning.

To cultivate regular attendance habits:

- **Let your child know** that attending school is not optional. If you say school attendance is important to you, it will also be important to your child.
- **Remain calm** if your child doesn't want to go to school. This is normal for kindergartners. Just tell your child that staying home is not an option.
- **Keep your child home** in case of illness or fever. Simply being tired, however, is not a valid reason to miss school.
- **Don't make staying home** seem like a treat. A sick child should be resting, not playing on a digital device or watching television.
- **Schedule medical appointments** outside of school hours.
- **Schedule family vacations** during school breaks.
- **Maintain open communication** with teachers and school staff. Inform them promptly of any absences and the reason. This allows them to understand and help you problem-solve, if needed.

In addition, help your kindergartner get to school on time. When students arrive late, they miss instruction and distract the whole class.

Partner with your child's teacher for elementary school success

Studies regularly show that when families play an active role in their children's education, their children do better in school. That's one of the reasons it's so helpful to develop a relationship with your child's kindergarten teacher.

To foster that connection:

- **Attend events for families** at school. Meet the teacher and find out what your child will be learning this year.
- **Schedule conferences.** Make the most of one-on-one time with the teacher. Bring a list of topics you'd like to discuss and take notes.
- **Keep an open mind.** If the teacher mentions areas in which your child needs improvement, try not to be defensive. You and the school both want the best for your child.



- **Stay in touch.** Let the teacher know about any changes that affect your child, such as a divorce, a new sibling or a move. Ask about ways you can support your child's learning at home.

Strong social skills prepare kindergartners for learning



Educators consistently point to social skills as a strong predictor of kindergarten success—even more than literacy

skills and fine motor control.

Teachers also say that many students lack adequate social development upon entering kindergarten.

Students with strong social skills get along well with others, have self-control and are confident—all of which allows them to focus on learning. While young students have opportunities to practice social skills at school, you can also help your child build them at home.

Encourage your child to:

- **Play and cooperate with others** in a group. Invite school friends over or take your kindergartner to a playground.
- **Share with friends and family.** Encourage your child to take turns, let others play with toys and offer to share treats.
- **Think about others' feelings.** Considering how others feel will help your kindergartner become more understanding. When reading together, stop and ask questions, such as "How do you think this character felt after losing the contest?"