



Build your child's thinking skills with five concepts

Your preschooler builds thinking skills when she considers the relationships between things. To help her make connections, introduce her to these concepts:

1. Similarities and differences.

Give your child two items, such as an apple and an orange. Ask her to tell you how the items are different. Then, ask her to tell you how they are the same.

2. Patterns.

Show her how to make a simple pattern. Draw a circle, then a square, then a circle. Ask your child what comes next.

3. Classification.

Use toys to teach your child how to group things that are alike. Ask her to put her books in one pile and her stuffed animals

in another pile. Or, she can group items by size or by color.

- ### 4. Fact and opinion.
- Make a factual statement, such as, "Broccoli is a green vegetable." Tell your child that this is a *fact*. Then say, "I think broccoli is the best-tasting vegetable." Explain that this is an *opinion*. Then ask her what she thinks. Let your child know that everyone can have their own opinions about what they like best.
- ### 5. Cause and effect.
- Discuss how one thing happens as the result of another—and encourage your child to make predictions. For example, say "I see a lot of dark clouds in the sky. What do you think is going to happen?"

Music can boost your child's language skills



Most young children love to sing. That's good news because singing is an effective way to strengthen communication skills.

Here are some fun music activities to enjoy with your child:

- **Learn** as many nursery rhymes as you can. Have your child help you find some at the library or online. Sing them together at least once a day. Combining nursery rhymes with an activity, such as *Ring Around the Rosie*, encourages active play and builds muscles, too.
- **Experiment** with different types of singing, such as singing in a round. (This is when each person sings the same melody, but starts at a different time.) Songs that work well for this include *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* and *Are You Sleeping?*
- **Introduce** your child to your favorite music. (Make sure the lyrics are age-appropriate.) Your child will enjoy sharing music with you as he learns to sing along.

Source: N. Politimou and others, "Born to Speak and Sing: Musical Predictors of Language Development in Preschoolers," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media.

Head outside to observe nature's treasures with your preschooler



Preschoolers have a way of helping adults appreciate little things in nature, such as the beauty of a spider web, a rock or a fallen leaf.

Maximize your child's interest and develop his observation skills by exploring the world together. You can even turn it into a game. When you go outside with your child:

1. **Bring your smartphone** or drawing supplies to capture images of what you discover. Encourage your child to look for interesting items. Say, "Let's find 10 things outside that we've never noticed before!"
2. **Take or draw a picture** when your child sees something new. "There's a bird's nest in that tree!" or "Oooh,

that's a huge ant hill!" Let your child help record the memory.

3. **Look at the pictures** when you get home. Review and talk about what they are. Then take turns covering most of each picture. Can your child guess what he's looking at? Challenge other family members to figure it out, too.
4. **Do more research.** Go online together and see if you can learn more about what you found outside.

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

—Albert Einstein

Preschool teachers share discipline strategies that work



It's easy to fall into a discipline trap with preschoolers—always using the same approach, even when it no longer

seems to be working. It may be saying *no* over and over. It may be raising your voice more than you would like.

If this sounds familiar, here are some strategies that many preschool teachers use with great success:

- **Try a change of scenery.** Teachers sometimes move a student who is misbehaving to another room to help her calm down. Try this same technique at home. A 10-minute walk outside with you might do more to improve your child's behavior than a scolding would.
- **Offer reminders.** Teachers help students make better decisions by reminding them of appropriate behavior. For example, you've told your child many times not to put her hand in the fish bowl, but she still does it. The fish bowl may be tempting enough to make her forget your warnings. She needs you to step in *before* she gets to the fish bowl, not *after*. Say, "Remember Avery, we can use our eyes to see the fish, but not our hands to touch."

Are you showing your preschooler how to be a giver?



It's the time of year to think about giving. Through giving, children learn valuable social and emotional skills, such as caring about others and connecting with them.

Giving is a habit you can easily promote at home. Are you developing this habit in your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you talk to your child** about the importance of giving to others?
- ___ 2. **Do you take your child** with you when you volunteer your time and tell her why you donate items to certain charities?
- ___ 3. **Do you encourage your child** to celebrate holidays and birthdays by giving to others?
- ___ 4. **Do you make giving** a year-round commitment, not just something you do during the holidays?
- ___ 5. **Do you praise your child** when she gives or shares?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child is on the way to becoming a giving person. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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Books have the edge when it comes to building vocabulary



According to research, reading aloud to your preschooler may be the best way to build her vocabulary. What

makes the process such a powerful tool or boosting young children's word smarts? Among other things, hearing stories read aloud offers your child:

- **Exposure to unfamiliar words.** Your child hears new words when you talk to her, but she'll encounter even more of them in stories. In fact, she's up to three times more likely to hear an uncommon term from a book than she is while talking with you.
- **Examples of new ways to use familiar words.** Chances are, you use the same words and phrases over and over when talking to your preschooler—it's only natural! However, listening to stories gives her the opportunity to hear even

common words used in different or unexpected ways.

- **Clues to how grammar works.** Reading exposes your child to the "rhythm" of sentences. It also lets her see what words and letters look like on a page. That information will come in handy when she starts learning to read.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't have conversations with your child. There is no substitute for the warmth and comfort of heart-to-heart exchanges. Plus, by showing her how to speak with someone, you're helping her develop a valuable social skill.

However, when you want to focus on sharpening your preschooler's word knowledge, break out the books and read together!

Source: D.W. Massaro, "Two Different Communication Genres and Implications for Vocabulary Development and Learning to Read," *Journal of Literacy Research*, SAGE Publications.

Follow these digital media guidelines for preschoolers



It's important for parents to help young children develop healthy digital media habits.

In addition to setting

limits on the amount of time children should spend in front of screens, the American Academy of Pediatrics encourages families to:

- **Choose wisely.** Research links educational games and shows like *Sesame Street* to verbal, math and school readiness skills. When possible, boost learning by watching and playing together. Discuss what you see.
- **Watch and play during the day.** Nighttime use of TV, computer

and video games can disrupt sleep. Bright lights and excitement aren't part of a calm evening routine. Instead, read favorite books, play soothing music, tell stories or have a quiet conversation before bed.

- **Limit exposure to commercials.** There are many ways to avoid ads that influence children's eating, viewing and other habits. Record programs (and skip the ads), consider free "on demand" programming, and watch commercial-free networks.

Source: "Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers," American Academy of Pediatrics.

Q: My son is nearing his fourth birthday and is trying to give up his afternoon nap. He says he is "not sleepy," but I'm not sure. I can't take him anywhere in the afternoon because he falls asleep in the car instantly. He is also cranky from dinner time until it's time for bed. How much sleep does he need, and how can I help him get it?

Questions & Answers

A: Despite your son's protests, you are right. All the signs you describe indicate a child who needs more sleep than he is getting.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that kids three to five years of age get 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Few things are more important to a child's growth and success than adequate sleep.

To help your child get more rest:

- **Try an earlier bedtime.** Some parents are tempted to keep children up later because they work during the day and want to spend time with their kids in the evening. This is understandable, but may not be the best option if your child is cranky the whole time.
- **Follow a routine.** First, try giving your child lunch at the same time every day. After a week of this, try having him lie down right after lunch. It's natural for children to get a bit sleepy right after lunch, and you may find that he will go back to napping.
- **Insist on quiet time.** You can't force a child to sleep. So if he absolutely won't fall asleep, at least enforce rest. For one hour after lunch, have him spend quiet time in his room with books and stuffed animals.

The Kindergarten Experience

Maintain healthy balance in your child's schedule



It's natural to want to structure your child's life so he's on a path to success.

But if almost every minute of your child's waking hours is scheduled with schoolwork, chores and extracurricular activities, your child is overcommitted.

Overscheduled children can become overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, discouraged and ultimately unmotivated. These children eventually find it difficult to keep up in school.

The kindergarten year is the perfect time to review your child's schedule and make sure it's balanced. Here's how:

- **Help your child select** one or two structured activities that match his interests and abilities.
- **Schedule one to two hours** of free time a day for your child. And don't allow him to spend all of that time in front of a screen! Make sure he has access to art supplies, games, books, etc.
- **Expect some boredom.** Boredom is actually a good thing! It can motivate kids to listen to their inner voice. They tinker, write, draw and create.
- **Plan for "unrushed" family time.** Schedule times that are completely open to just puttering around the house and yard together. Listen to music. Take a walk. Do anything you and your child enjoy that has no particular goal.

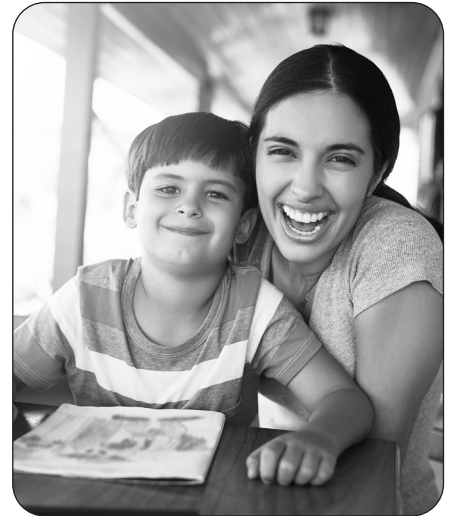
Source: B. Saavedra, *Creating Balance in Your Child's Life*, Contemporary Books/McGraw-Hill.

Kindergarten homework gives parents a window into learning

Many parents are surprised when kindergartners have homework. "Is it really important at this age?" they wonder.

Homework assignments are more than a review of academic skills. They're also a chance for you to:

- **Stay involved** with your child's learning. Discuss what kind of work your child is doing. Look for ways to apply new skills to real life. For example, "If I give you one of my cookies, how many will you have?"
- **Monitor progress.** Parents are often the first to raise concerns about their child's learning. This is extremely helpful to the teacher. "Max is having trouble identifying shapes. How can I help him work on this skill?"
- **Help your child develop** essential habits. Strong study skills and



self-discipline will help your child do better in school in the years to come. Establish important routines now, such as doing work at the same time and in the same place every day, to set the stage for future success.

Self-confidence boosts your child's success in kindergarten



A child who feels capable has a head start on success. She believes she can learn, believes she can make friends and believes she can be a success. And she sets out to do so.

Look for and encourage positive signs of self-confidence in your child:

- **She likes herself.** She seems comfortable with herself and is happy, most of the time, at home and in class. She rarely puts herself down.
- **She is optimistic.** She has a positive attitude and usually says things like, "I can do this!" and "This will be fun!"
- **She has friends.** She believes that her friends like her and that they will have fun playing together.
- **She feels secure** around the adults in her life. She knows you love her unconditionally. She knows her teacher wants to help her learn.
- **She takes healthy risks.** She likes to try and experience new things.