



Establish family habits that boost social-emotional health

Following routines helps young children figure out their place in the world. Routines also provide kids with structure that helps them feel secure.

Studies show that children who follow at least five positive family routines at home have stronger social-emotional health (SEH) than those who don't. And the better your child's SEH, the better able he is to form relationships, grasp emotions, and do well in school.

Here are some common family habits that can benefit your child:

- **Eating together.** Sharing daily meals gives your child an opportunity to connect with family members and practice manners.
- **Reading.** Whether it's a fairy tale at bedtime or a picture book each

morning, a reading routine boosts your child's emotional health and word smarts, too.

- **Playing.** It doesn't matter what you play—just that you play regularly.
- **Meeting as a family.** Pick a day of the week to have family members share what's going on in their lives and talk about how they are feeling. This gives your child practice expressing his emotions in productive ways.
- **Sleeping.** A good night's sleep is crucial to learning and managing emotions. Make sure your preschooler gets the recommended 10 to 13 hours of sleep per 24 hours.

Source: E.I. Muñoz and others, "Family Routines and Social-Emotional School Readiness Among Preschool-Age Children," *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Help your child recover from small setbacks



As your preschooler explores and tries new things, it's only natural that she will experience some

failures. Learning how to bounce back in these situations will serve her well in school and in life.

To help your child recover:

- **Be empathetic.** "I can see how sad you are that you didn't make it across the monkey bars. It's disappointing when you try to do something and it doesn't work out."
- **Offer encouragement.** "Sometimes kids must grow before their arms are strong enough to make it across the monkey bars. You're growing fast and I think you'll be ready soon. Let's try again next week and see how far you can get!"
- **Be a good role model.** Your child notices how you react to your own disappointments, so handle them with grace. For example, if a new recipe doesn't turn out well, say "I tried something new and gave it my best shot—that's what matters most. I'll try again."

Source: J. Lahey, *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, Harper.

Keep your preschooler active during the winter months



Preschoolers need physical activity. They use it to build muscles, bones, confidence and brain power. (Exercise “feeds” the brain glucose, oxygen and water.) The best physical activities are both fun and beneficial.

Make physical activity a daily part of your preschooler’s routine—even when it’s cold outside. Here are a few activities to try:

- **Play follow the leader.** Take turns leading each other in big movements, such as waving arms, stomping feet and hopping.
- **Navigate an obstacle course.** Create a safe layout that requires crawling, jumping and more. Use words like *over*, *under*, *high* and *low*.

- **Be a stoplight.** Stand at a distance from your child. When you say, “Green light,” she should run toward you. When you say, “Red light,” she should stop.
- **Play tag.** Chase each other around a limited space. This ensures that your child will not only run, but also pivot and duck.
- **Hula hop.** Suggest your child hop in and out of a hula hoop. She can do it with two feet—or one, when he’s ready—all the way around the circle.

**“Take care of your body.
It’s the only place you
have to live.”**

—Jim Rohn

Provide play opportunities that build fine motor skills



Physical activity that gets your child’s heart pumping is great, but the small muscles in his hands need exercise, too. These are the muscles that he’ll use to write and manipulate objects.

The preschool years are a crucial time in children’s development. But without parents’ guidance, children may not develop the abilities they need.

Helping your child develop fine motor skills doesn’t have to be complicated. There are countless fun activities to try. Your child could:

- **Peel stickers** and then stick them on paper.
- **Pick up small coins** off a table (with supervision).
- **Finger paint.**
- **Dress and play with dolls and action figures.**
- **Squeeze and form clay** or play dough.
- **Use child-size spoons and forks** when eating.
- **Zip, snap and button clothing.**
- **Draw and color** with pencils crayons and washable markers.
- **Cut with child-safe scissors.**
- **Do puzzles.**
- **Do hands-on activities** at museums.
- **Play with building blocks.**
- **String beads** of various sizes onto a piece of string.
- **Lace tennis shoes.**
- **Snap interlocking blocks** together and pull them apart.
- **Paint with cotton swabs.**
- **Use blunt-nose tweezers** to pick up pieces of cereal.

Are you teaching your child to recognize words?



Preschoolers are the right age to learn about letter and words, as long as the activities are enjoyable. Answer *yes* or *no* to

the questions below to see if you’re building your child’s word smarts:

___ **1. Do you provide** toys with letters on them, such as kid-safe refrigerator magnets or alphabet blocks?

___ **2. Do you put** your child’s name on his belongings and encourage him to write (or scribble) it, too?

___ **3. Do you label** things your child uses often, such as books, crayons, paper, shoes and toys with the words for them?

___ **4. Do you talk** about the words your child sees throughout the day, such as *exit*, *sale* and *bus*?

___ **5. Do you play** word games with your child, such as matching pictures of items with their names or thinking of words that start with the same letter?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you’re teaching your child word recognition. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Explore colors, patterns and textures with art activities



Creating artwork allows your child's imagination to soar. That's why it's a great idea to build time for art into your daily

routine. You can also use this creative time to help your preschooler learn about colors, patterns and textures.

Here are a few fun ideas to try:

- **Veggie patterns.** Have your child dip sliced vegetables, such as carrots, celery, potatoes and broccoli, into paint and then press them onto paper. Discuss what you notice about their patterns.
- **Touchable art.** What happens when you mix textures with paint? Have your child add salt or sand to paint. Think about other items you could add to the paint, such as crushed cereal.
- **New colors.** Check out a library book about the color wheel. (Or find a color wheel online.) Notice how mixing primary colors (red, yellow and blue) creates secondary colors (green, orange and purple). Try it together with paints or food coloring!
- **Lots of dots.** Instead of painting with lines, show your preschooler how to paint with dots. Start by using a pencil to draw a shape. Then, have your child use a cotton swab to cover the shape with dots of paint.

Focus on responsibility and respect during the holidays



The holiday season is meant to be a time of fun, relaxation and family togetherness.

It's also the perfect time

to help your preschooler practice responsibility and respect.

Encourage him to:

- **Help others.** There are dozens of ways your preschooler can help out this season. He can help you put things away. He can go to the mailbox with you and drop in envelopes. He can call family members to the dinner table. Your child can also help you collect gently-used toys and clothing to donate. Be sure to take him with you when you drop items off.
- **Show appreciation.** Remind your child to say *thank you* when he receives a gift. Help him get in the habit of "writing" thank-you notes, too. He can tell you what to write or draw a thank-you picture.
- **Practice good manners.** If your holiday plans include a visit to someone's home, this is a great opportunity for your child to practice saying *hello* and *goodbye*, to ask permission before touching something, and to take turns. Remind him to always use polite words—*please, thank you, you're welcome* and *excuse me*.
- **Listen to different adults.** Your child may spend time with some adults this month that he doesn't usually see. This can be confusing for a preschooler, but it's also a good chance for him to practice respect for adults. Say something like "Mrs. Jones is my friend and this is her house. Please use your nicest voice and follow her directions while we are here."

Q: My child currently goes to preschool and will be turning five next August. I have to let the preschool know whether she will be returning next year or heading off to kindergarten. How do I know if she will be ready for kindergarten or not?

Questions & Answers

A: Many parents in your situation are wondering the same thing. You may be surprised at what actually makes a child ready for kindergarten. It is not whether she can read, add or subtract. It has more to do with enthusiasm, independence and getting along with others.

A child entering kindergarten should:

- **Have a desire to learn** and be excited to begin tackling subjects such as reading and writing.
- **Know how to express herself.** Your child should be able to carry on a conversation and talk about herself and her experiences. (If she has special needs or is an English language learner, you should contact the elementary school to discuss resources.)
- **Listen and follow directions.** Most kindergarten teachers would say this is a top priority.
- **Be somewhat independent.** She should be able to use the bathroom, wash her hands and put on her coat by herself.
- **Get along with others.** Sharing and taking turns are necessary skills for any well-functioning kindergarten classroom.

If your preschooler can do these things now, or you feel confident she will in the next six months or so, then she will be ready for kindergarten!

The Kindergarten Experience

Support your kindergartner's reading skills



Parents of kindergartners often ask: "When will my child learn to read?" There's no one-size-fits-all answer. Many

kindergartners read simple books by the end of the school year. Others need a bit more time.

To support your child's emerging reading skills:

- **Expose him to a variety** of printed materials. Together, read poems, biographies, instructions and more. That way, he'll be more comfortable when he encounters them in school.
- **Use new words** in ways that show what they mean. "I think that is the biggest dinosaur I've ever seen! He's *gigantic*!" This builds your child's vocabulary. The more he hears new words, the more likely he is to recognize them in print.
- **Talk about the illustrations.** Ask your child to describe what is happening in each picture. How does he think it relates to the story?
- **Promote participation.** Many young children memorize their favorite books. When you're reading aloud, let your child chime in and "read," too. If he can't figure out a word, let him give it a few tries before helping him sound it out.
- **Encourage him to play** with letters. If you don't have child-safe refrigerator magnet letters, just cut letters out of paper. Then, help your child arrange them to form different words.

Reduce kindergarten absences with these simple strategies

Missing school too often can hurt students' success, even in kindergarten. When a child is late or absent, it affects other students, too. Frequent tardiness disrupts the class. And when a child is absent a lot, the teacher must use class time to help her catch up. Remember to:

- **Schedule family trips** when school is not in session. It may be tempting to add a few extra days to a holiday vacation. But when your child is absent from class, she misses opportunities to learn.
- **Protect against illness.** Follow school health protocols, and reinforce hand washing. Teach your child to lather up and scrub for 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice). End with a thorough rinse and clean dry-off.
- **Check the school calendar** when making medical appointments.



With enough notice, routine visits can often be scheduled on days off or after school ends for the day.

- **Commit to being prompt.** Continue helpful habits, such as organizing school supplies at night and enforcing a consistent, reasonable sleep schedule.

Follow these steps if your child gets into trouble in school



Receiving a phone call from a teacher to say your child is misbehaving is never pleasant. But if you take quick action, you can almost always nip the problem in the bud. Take these steps:

1. **Listen to the teacher.** Teachers don't like calling parents to report a problem with a student. The teacher wants your child to do well. So if she is calling you, something is going on that is stopping your child from learning. Hear her out.
2. **Work with the teacher.** It's likely she has seen a similar problem before. What does she recommend? What can you do at home to help? Form a plan as partners.
3. **Talk with your child.** Assure your child that you love him and that his teacher cares about him. That is why you are both trying to help him. Review school rules together. Explain that following rules is not always easy, but it is something that everyone must do so school can be a happy place.