

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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make the difference!



Be creative when building your child's attention span

You may have noticed that your child's attention span varies according to the situation. He may spend 10 minutes listening to a story, but only 10 seconds listening to your instructions! While this can be frustrating, remember that attention depends on circumstances.

To increase your preschooler's attention span, try to:

- **Adjust timing.** Is he tired, hungry or thirsty? If so, it's probably not the best time to introduce a challenging activity, such as learning a new game.
- **Expand on interests.** If your child has a favorite television show, read stories about the characters. If he's excited about starting school, have fun playing school with him.
- **Consider personality.** All kids want and need their parents' help, but some prefer more freedom than others. Step aside, but offer encouragement if you know your child can handle tasks himself.
- **Include your child.** Certain activities aren't likely to hold a preschooler's attention—such as watching a sibling's sports game. So involve him in a related activity that requires focus, such as counting snacks for players.
- **Consult experts.** If you're worried about your child's attention span, ask his teacher how he does at preschool. If you continue to be concerned, make an appointment to talk with his doctor.

Source: "Understanding Attention Span in the Early Years," Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, nswc.com/attention.

Help your child get excited about writing



As your child grows, her interest in writing will grow, too. To boost motivation, keep appealing supplies handy, such as crayons and markers. Then seize opportunities to encourage writing skills!

You can:

- **Practice writing** familiar words. Help your child spell words she likes, such as *Dad*, *cat* and *me*.
- **Let your child contribute.** If you're making a grocery list or sending a card, let your child write a few words.
- **Exchange letters.** Put a box by your preschooler's bedroom door and "mail" each other letters. If your child can't write yet, she can scribble and tell you what it says.
- **Weave writing** into other activities. Have your child write captions for photos and drawings.
- **Display** what your child writes. If she writes her name, for example, hang it on the refrigerator with pride.

Art projects boost creativity and teach children useful skills



Your child should have the chance to create art at least a few times a week. It doesn't matter what he makes or even if he finishes his project. What matters is that it taps into his creativity—and that he enjoys making it.

While your child is creating art, he is learning many things. They include:

- **Problem-solving.** “I want to color the sun, but I don't have a yellow crayon. I think I'll use orange instead.”
- **Making a plan.** “I know what I will make today. First, I will”
- **Taking risks.** “I'm going to try to make a new picture today!”
- **Cause and effect.** “Look at what happened when I mixed white and red! I made pink!”

- **Dimension.** “I want to make the paper I cut out fit on this page, but it's too big. I'll have to make it smaller.”
- **Independence.** “I can make my picture all by myself. I don't need help.”
- **Self-satisfaction.** “Look at what I made! I'm proud of myself.”

Source: “Better Kid Care: Children's Art,” Penn State Extension, Penn State University College of Agricultural Sciences, niswc.com/art.

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”

—Pablo Picasso

Help your preschooler develop a strong sense of responsibility



Before children ever get to school, they begin to learn responsibility from their parents. To help your child develop this important trait:

- **Let her do as much as she can on her own.** Many preschoolers can dress themselves, do most of their grooming and perform simple chores.
- **Try not to introduce a new responsibility on a deadline.** Young children need time to complete tasks, especially new tasks.
- **Let her make mistakes.** Your child won't complete tasks perfectly. When she makes a mistake, remind her that she will have to practice before she gets it right.
- **Resist “rescuing” her.** Rather than stepping in and taking over, give your child gentle suggestions, such as “Sometimes it helps if you start from the bottom when you button a shirt.”
- **Let her face consequences** when she forgets to complete responsibilities. If your child leaves a toy outside and it rains, it will get wet and may be ruined. This is a consequence. She will be disappointed. But the experience will teach her more than if you go outside at the first hint of bad weather and bring the toy in yourself.

Source: “Help Children Develop Responsibility,” LSUAgCenter.com, Louisiana State University College of Agriculture, niswc.com/teach_responsibility.

Are you helping your child learn from mistakes?



Mistakes are essential to learning, and learning to handle them will help your child overcome challenges in school.

Are you raising your child to have a positive attitude about mistakes? Answer *yes* or *no* to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you have realistic expectations for your child?** That way, he won't make so many mistakes that he'll get discouraged.
- ___ **2. Do you talk to your child about your expectations?**
- ___ **3. Do you ask your child if he needs help when you see he's made a mistake or is having trouble?**
- ___ **4. Do you let your child know that everyone makes mistakes?**
- ___ **5. Do you tell your child that mistakes give him a chance to correct himself and get it right the next time?** If he spills his milk, say, “You'll do better next time.”

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are teaching your preschooler to think positively about mistakes. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Incorporate physical activities into your preschooler's day



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.

Try to make physical activity a daily part of your preschooler's routine. Here are some ideas:

- **Play follow the leader.** Take turns leading big movements, such as waving arms, stomping feet and hopping.
- **Blow bubbles.** Send bubbles soaring and challenge your child to catch them. He'll enjoy running, reaching and jumping.

- **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,” he should run toward you. When you say, “Red light,” he 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. He can do it with two feet—or one, when he's ready—all the way around the circle.

Build thinking skills by teaching similarities and differences



Your preschooler builds thinking skills when she thinks about the relationship between things. Here are some ideas to discuss with your child:

- **Apples and oranges.** Ask your child, “How are these different?” *They are different colors. They are different shapes.* Then ask, “How are they the same?” *They are fruits. They taste good.*
- **Toys.** You can use toys to teach your child how to classify. This means placing things that are alike together. Ask your child to group toys by putting all the vehicles together and putting all the animals together. Or she can group them by size or by color.
- **Patterns.** Teaching your child to make simple patterns is a way of

building the foundation for future math skills. Start by making a circle, then a square, then a circle. Ask your child what comes next.

- **What happens next?** Introduce your child to cause and effect (one thing happens as the result of another) and making predictions. Ask your child questions. For example, say “I see a lot of dark clouds in the sky. What do you think is going to happen?”
- **Fact and opinion.** You don't need to use these words, but you can teach your child the concept. Show your child a strawberry. Say, “Ripe strawberries are red. That is something everybody knows.” Then say, “I think strawberries are the best fruit to eat. What do you think? We can all have our own thoughts about what the best fruit is.”

Q: I have heard a lot about the importance of fostering healthy self-esteem in children. What exactly does this mean?

Questions & Answers

A: There are many misconceptions about self-esteem. Some people believe that self-esteem is a form of conceit. Or that people with high self-esteem think they are better or above everyone else.

None of that is true. Self-esteem has two main parts. And both are important for success in school and in life:

1. **Competence.** This part simply means that you believe you can accomplish things. It's a positive attitude.
2. **Self-worth.** This means you feel that you are a valuable person.

To build your child's self-esteem:

- **Tell her** often that you love her, just for who she is.
- **Listen to her.** Give your child your undivided attention, at least for a few minutes.
- **Make your home** a safe, happy and cooperative place. Have fun with your child, but also share work with your child. Chores are a great way to increase a child's sense of competence!
- **Praise her** carefully. If you only praise good results, your child will get the idea that she has worth *only* when she gets something right. We all make mistakes, and are no less valuable when we do. So praise your child when you see that she is putting forth strong *effort*.
- **Practice firm,** fair and consistent discipline. Proper discipline builds a sense of safety, love and self-esteem.

The Kindergarten Experience

Maintain healthy balance in your child's schedule



It's natural to want to structure your child's life so she'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 get overwhelmed and become exhausted, anxious, discouraged and ultimately unmotivated. These children eventually find it difficult to keep up in school.

Kindergarten 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 her interests and abilities.
- **Schedule one to two hours** of free time a day for your child. And don't allow her to spend all of that time in front of a screen! Make sure she 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."** Have days that are completely open to just putter 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.

Teach your kindergartner how to socialize successfully

For most children, one of the most exciting things about kindergarten is spending time with classmates and teachers.

To make these experiences successful, work with your child on basic social skills, including:

- **Introductions.** Role-play with your child. Make eye contact, smile and say, "Hi! My name is Kate!"
- **Starting conversations.** Imagine your child wants to join a game. What could she say? "That looks like fun! Can I play, too?"
- **Understanding.** Discuss how other people feel. "You have crayons, and Lamar also wants to color." Practice sharing.
- **Manners.** Encourage your child to say *please* and *thank you*.



- **Solving problems.** "What if Bryan took the toy you were using?" Talk about how and when to ask for the teacher's help.
- **Apologizing.** Saying *I'm sorry* can make a huge difference in relationships.

Source: C. Lawson, Ph.D., "Social Skills and School," Center for Development and Learning, niswc.com/social.

Parent involvement is vital for success in kindergarten



Your child's education is a partnership between your child, the school and you.

Here are some ways for you to build and strengthen that partnership:

- **Tell your child** how important his education is to the whole family.
- **Meet your child's teacher.** Exchange information so you can stay in touch.
- **Let the teacher know** that your child's progress is important to you.

- **Ask what you can do at home** to help your child at school.
- **Read materials** that come from school. Look at the school website to find out what is going on at school.
- **Volunteer at school** if your schedule allows it. As your child gets older, chances grow fewer for volunteering in the classroom. If you can, take advantage of this opportunity in these early years. Most kindergartners love having a parent at school.

Source: "Parental Involvement in School," University of Illinois Extension, niswc.com/partner.