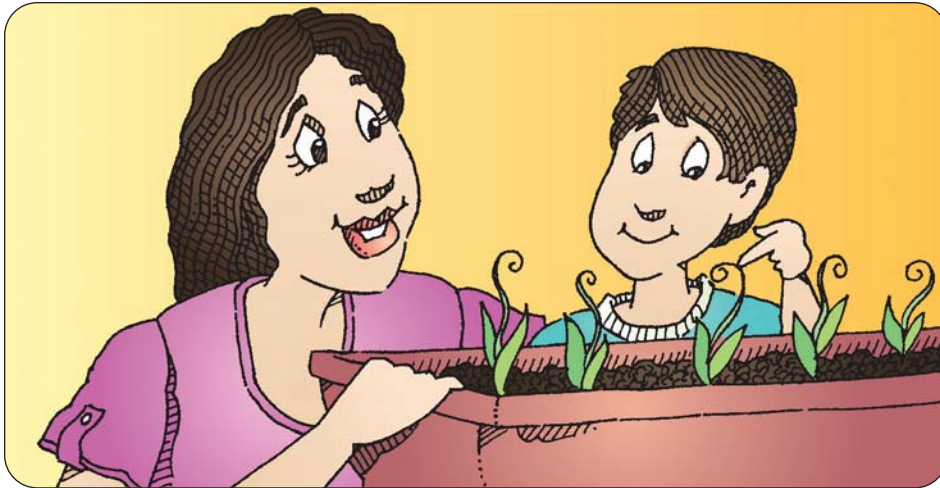


Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

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The Early Learning Coalition
of Northwest Florida



Encourage your preschooler to take responsibility for Earth

Earth Day is April 22. And while protecting the Earth is a job for every day, you can use this special day to begin or reinforce the habit.

Many activities that help the Earth are simple, free and take only a minute or two. And they are very suitable for young children.

Here are some ideas:

- **Turn off the lights** and TV when you leave a room and encourage your child to do the same.
- **Keep a cup** on the bathroom sink. Teach your child to fill it with water *before* he brushes his teeth. After he brushes, he can use the water in the cup to rinse out his mouth. Now there's no need to leave the water running during tooth-brushing.
- **Consider drinking tap water** instead of buying bottled water.

Unless there is an emergency (such as a flood) or other unusual situation, tap water in the United States and Canada is safe.

- **Recycle.** Have your preschooler help you place recyclables into their own bins.
- **Plant something** with your child. You can use seeds. Plant outdoors if you have a yard. If not, plant in a container. If you have the time, space and money to do so, consider planting a tree.
- **Participate in a clean-up day.** Many communities plan these to celebrate Earth Day. If you can't find one near you, rally neighbors to clean up a section of your own neighborhood or block.

Source: The Wilderness Society, "Earth Day, Everyday," Wilderness Society Teacher's Lounge, <http://earthday.wilderness.org/teachers/postings.htm>.

Tell your child that you won't allow whining



Whining irritates nearly every parent. (Teachers aren't crazy about it either!) But sometimes parents accidentally encourage whining. They respond to it, so kids figure they can gain something by trying it again. Keep this in mind as you try to curb the whining.

Here are some tips:

- **Model for your child** the difference between whining and an appropriate tone.
- **Be neutral** when your child whines. Sometimes, your lack of a response may be enough to stop her. If she continues, say, "I'm sorry, I don't understand whining. I'll be happy to listen when you can speak in a nice voice."
- **Be firm** about not granting requests made in a whiny voice.
- **Respond quickly** when your child remembers an appropriate voice. Say, "What a nice tone of voice. I sure heard that loud and clear!"

Source: Jim Fay & Charles Fay, *Love and Logic Magic for Early Childhood: Practical Parenting from Birth to Six Years*, ISBN: 1-930429-00-2 (Love and Logic Press, www.loveandlogic.com).

Teach your preschooler about family heritage & traditions



It is important for your child to know about her own family's background. Embracing background and traditions often enriches our lives. It also makes us appreciate who we are and what we have. Share your family's heritage with your child.

Also take time to point out and show your child that others may have different backgrounds and traditions. These give your child new perspectives.

To expand your child's world:

- **Show your child photos** and keepsakes from your family's past. Children especially love to see photos of their parents and grandparents as children.
- **Try cooking a dish** that represents your family's background. Have your child help. Children are more likely to try new foods if they have helped to prepare them.
- **Read your child a book** about a child of another culture or

country. Talk about the book with your child. Point out similarities: "She likes to play with balls, too." Talk about differences: "She speaks a different language than we do."

- **Encourage your child** to make friends with children from many cultures.
- **Take advantage** of some cultural opportunities in your community. These may include local museums, festivals at cultural centers or houses of worship or performances. Many of these are free.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4808-4 (Teachers College Press and Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, www.tcpress.com).

"What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give."

—P.D. James

Use creative ways to help your preschooler recognize letters



Recognizing letters is an important step toward reading. Thankfully, it's also fun! To teach your child about letters

creatively:

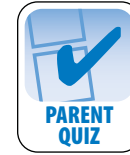
- **Make them out of food.** Give your child kid-friendly, tasty supplies to create letters, such as circle-shaped crackers and small, straight pretzels. Allow him to break up foods to form letters, too.
- **Light up letters.** Use a flashlight to make letters on a ceiling or wall.

Can your child follow the beam and figure out which ones you're writing? Give him a turn making letters, too.

- **Start with parts.** Draw a shape or line for your child, such as a circle or diagonal line. Let him add to it, eventually making a letter, such as "T" or "N." (You can help with hints.) Then switch roles, letting him draw the first shape.

Source: Jackie Silberg, *Reading Games for Young Children*, ISBN13: 978-0-87659-243-4 (Gryphon House, Inc., www.gryphonhouse.com).

Are you taking full advantage of your free local library?



Your local library is an amazing resource—and it's free! However, many families don't take full advantage of it.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you and your child are enjoying all the library has to offer:

- ___ **1. Have you requested** a schedule of activities for young children?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with librarians about books your child is likely to enjoy?
- ___ **3. Do you check out** audio books for use at home and on trips?
- ___ **4. Do you ask** about educational materials, such as programs that teach foreign languages?
- ___ **5. Do you sign up** to use children's computers that teach important skills?
- ___ **6. Do you attend** story times for your child's age group?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're making the most of library time with your child. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Show your preschooler how to be a gracious loser, winner



Teachers and others who work with young children usually make an effort to keep things fair. After all, young children cannot

learn if they don't get the opportunity to try.

Still, every child faces times when someone else comes in first or is chosen earlier. It's a difficult lesson, but it's important to help your preschooler learn to understand and move on.

You can prepare your child if you:

- **Teach him to lose** in a loving setting. A child who never loses or experiences failure soon expects this as his right. So let your child lose sometimes, and then guide him through the expression of his feelings. Tell your child to use his words to say how

he feels. Encourage him to switch to a different activity for a while and to say, "I'll try again another time."

- **Focus on effort.** Tell your preschooler that he can always be proud if he gave his best, no matter the outcome—win or lose.
- **Have fun!** Your child is still very young and games at this age should be fun. If your child had a good time, then he has succeeded, whether he finishes first, second, third or beyond.

Remind your preschooler that it is also important to be a gracious winner. When he wins a game, he should never brag or try to make the other person feel bad.

Source: Nancy Samalin, *Loving Without Spoiling*, ISBN: 0-07-142492-X (The McGraw Hill Companies, www.books.mcgraw-hill.com).

Spend quality time with your preschooler, family outdoors



In today's high-tech world, it's important to connect with your preschooler without distractions. But that's difficult when kids between

eight and 18 spend an average of six and a half hours a day watching TV, playing video games or using a computer, according to research.

A simple solution is to go outside! Plan fun activities, such as bird watching, picnicking or gardening.

To make outdoor activities more appealing to your preschooler, be:

- **Enthusiastic.** This time together should be fun, not a chore! A happy, humorous attitude makes a big difference.

- **Eager to learn.** You don't have to be an expert on birds to enjoy watching them. It's exciting to make discoveries with your child.
- **Reminiscent.** What outdoor activities did you love as a child? Tell your child all about them. Do any appeal to her?
- **Understanding.** Take into consideration your child's likes and dislikes when planning activities. Ask for her ideas.
- **Flexible.** If your family is new to being "outdoorsy," the first few tries may be disappointing. Don't give up! Brainstorm about activities everyone will enjoy.

Source: Judy Molland, *Get Out!* ISBN: 978-1-57542-335-7 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

Q: My son's preschool teacher thinks he is a little behind on his social skills. She said that with some maturity and more social time, he should catch up. What are some of the social skills needed for success in kindergarten?

Questions & Answers

A: Kindergarten teachers don't worry about whether their students can read or write on the first day of school. Their first interest is whether a child has the social and emotional skills needed to support learning.

You're doing a great thing for your child's social development by sending him to preschool. If possible, also consider a low-stress activity such as an after-school playgroup.

Keep these social goals in mind as you help your child:

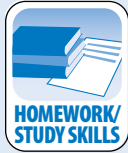
- **Take turns.** Kindergarten children have to share toys and materials with many others. If your child has trouble, try setting a timer. When it goes off, he hands the toy to his friend.
- **Follow rules.** Kindergarten teachers don't expect five-year-olds to be perfect. But your child will have to stick with the classroom routine.
- **Use self-control.** Work with your child to say, "I'm sad," or "I'm angry," instead of crying or hitting.
- **Play alone or with others.** Your child should be able to play alone for a bit—with you in the next room instead of right next to him. He should also work on inviting others to play. For example, "Want to play dinosaurs?"

Best of luck in kindergarten!

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Help your child with homework struggles



Your kindergartner loves going to school and coming home to play, but she isn't so interested in doing

homework. While you understand, you also want what's best for her. That's why it's important to:

- **Keep in mind** the purpose of homework. It reinforces important skills, develops good habits and helps you keep up with your child's progress.
- **Talk with the teacher** about expectations. How long should homework take? How much should you help? Should your child correct mistakes before turning in work?
- **Have a positive attitude.** Many kindergartners like homework and take pride in doing a "big kid" job. Say, "You finished your homework. How grown up!"
- **Consider a break after school.** Some kids need time to relax before they focus on homework. If your child prefers to finish it right away, that's okay, too.
- **Offer choices at study time.** "Would you like to do reading or math first?" Having a say might boost your child's motivation.
- **Establish routines,** such as studying at the same time each day. When kids develop habits, they're more likely to follow through without a battle.
- **Discuss concerns** with the kindergarten teacher. If homework is frustrating or takes too long, you should problem solve together.

Plan a television-free week for your kindergartner & family

April is a popular time to plan a TV-free week—a week when screen time is replaced with family time. This is excellent for kindergartners, since research shows they spend an average of two hours a day watching TV.

Filling these 10 hours per week may seem daunting, but chances are you'll love alternatives such as:

- **Dramatic play.** Act out familiar stories with puppets or people. Role-play everyday situations, such as grocery shopping or eating at a restaurant.
- **Physical play.** Run around outside or create an indoor obstacle course.
- **Game play.** All kinds of games—from board games to jigsaw puzzles—build sportsmanship and muscles. They also improve thinking skills.



- **Artistic play.** Collect art supplies, such as magazines, crayons, paint, brushes, glue, fabric, string, boxes and more. Brainstorm about what you can make together.

Source: "Promoting Physical Activity," Bright Futures, http://brightfutures.aap.org/pdfs/Guidelines_PDF/7-Promoting_Physical_Activity.pdf.

Knowing your kindergartner's school routine leads to talks



Talking about school is not usually easy for kindergarten students. So many things happen in a day that they are not sure which ones to choose.

Kindergarten teachers are happy to share information with parents about the school day. With this information, you can ask your child questions and have a better conversation. You can:

- **Read all newsletters** and communications your child's teacher sends home. These often have

great details about what the children are doing in school.

- **Contact the teacher** to talk about how the school days are going. Ask if your child has a favorite activity or part of the day.
- **Ask specific questions.** "Can you tell me about the picture you drew today?" Or, "I heard the class learned a new song! Would you please sing it to me?"

Source: Edward L. Schor and the American Academy of Pediatrics, *Caring for Your School-Age Child*, ISBN: 0-553-37345-5 (Bantam Dell Publishing Group, www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell).