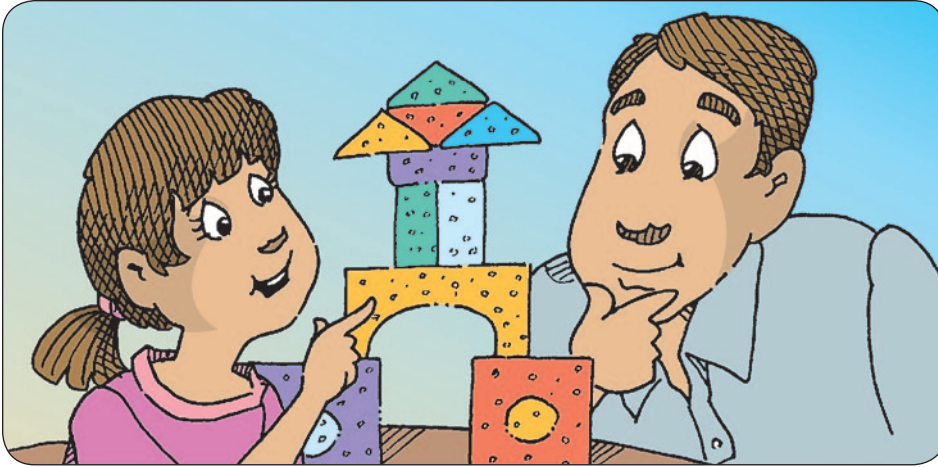


Early Childhood Parents[®]

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Katy Independent School District

make the difference!



Encourage your preschooler to learn using evaluation

Young children often learn best by doing. Evaluation is an important part of this learning process. Teach it by encouraging your child to think about questions such as these: “Why did we do that?” “How did that turn out?” “Would I like to do that again?” You can help your child evaluate if you:

- **Practice.** If you make evaluation routine, thinking this way will become a habit. Evaluate events and especially evaluate your child’s choices. Notice that your child used the bendable blocks instead of regular blocks to make a tower. How did she like it? Would she use them again? Why?
- **Watch your child’s** body language. Young preschoolers may not have all the words they would like to use to evaluate an experience. But

watch them closely and you will see that they evaluate it in a non-verbal way. For example, your child puts her hands in the finger paint and then makes a face. You can say, “Oh, how did that feel?” She may tell you it felt funny or sticky. Follow up with, “Would you like to try again?”

- **Do not judge.** Judgment is part of evaluation, but let your child do it. Your judgment of her words or actions can discourage her. If her evaluation is negative, don’t say, “You don’t really mean that.” Instead, say, “I’m sorry you didn’t like that. Maybe we’ll try again another day.”

Source: A. Epstein, “How Planning and Reflection Develop Children’s Thinking Skills,” National Association of the Education of Young Children, <http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200309/Planning&Reflection.pdf>.

Include art in holiday celebrations



One of kids’ favorite ways to learn is through art, and winter is a natural time to enjoy this. During the holi-

days, encourage your child to celebrate with projects such as making:

- **Decorations.** Cover bare walls with homemade paper snowflakes, snowmen, hats and mittens. To make an old-fashioned snowflake, fold a circle in half three times. Then cut shapes out of the sides to make patterns. Let your child unfold and decorate!
- **Wrapping paper.** Let your child turn plain paper into gift wrap. He can personalize it with crayons, glitter, paint and stamps. To make your own stamps, cut shapes out of sponges and dip them in paint. Your child can help with writing names, too.
- **Cards.** The most meaningful cards are handmade. Have your child draw a picture and fill in blanks. “Dear ____, I hope your holiday is ____! Love, ____.” Do this for thank-you notes, too.

Experts suggest using the Four P's when teaching social skills



Parents play an important role in helping their children develop the social skills they will need to be successful in school and in life. Some pediatricians have special training that allows them to focus only on the development and behavior of children. These doctors suggest you teach your child social skills with the Four P's.

The Four P's are:

- 1. Practice.** If you want your child to learn to share, try using a timer. Set it for 15 minutes. When it rings, she must give the toy to another child. Use this consistently and sharing will become second nature to your preschooler.
- 2. Praise.** Your child needs to know she is doing the right thing when she practices sharing. Tell her specifically what you liked about her actions. Say, "You let Ashley use the markers. That was a nice thing to do. Look at her smile."

3. Point Out. Your child will benefit from seeing what good social skills look like. So say, "Look. Jacob has the blue dinosaur, but now he gave it to Will. Will can play for a while, and then give it back. Now they both get a chance to play with the same toy."

4. Prompt. Your child will not always remember what to do. So remind her. Say, "Katie has been watching you put that puzzle together. You're done now. I bet she would like a turn."

Source: E. Christophersen and S. VanScoyoc, "Strategies for Teaching Important Social Skills to Young Children," American Academy of Pediatrics, section on Development and Behavioral Pediatrics, www.dbpeds.org/articles/detail.cfm?TextID=132.

"You have a lifetime to work, but children are only young once."

—Polish Proverb

Continue to monitor your child's screen time over holiday break

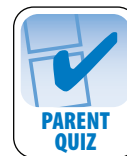


It's December, and your child will soon have a break from school. The break can be a wonderful time to spend with family and friends. But it is not a time to let your child do whatever he wants, or to get into bad habits that will be difficult to break come January. One of these bad habits is too much screen time.

To limit screen time during break:

- **Take advantage of time** you or other adults close to your child may have off from work. Spend this time with your child baking, playing outside (if possible), playing board games, decorating or reading.
- **Keep to the same rules** you have when school is in session. For example, if you only allow screen time on the weekends, stick to that during break.
- **Provide balance.** Your child may want to watch more television than usual due to all of the special shows during the holidays. You can compensate for this added time by declaring the school break a computer-free or video game-free zone.

Are you making reading a priority in your family?



Reading with your child is one of the best ways to prepare her for school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're making reading a priority:

___ **1. Do you read** with your child every day? Choose a time when your child is ready to snuggle and relax.

___ **2. Do you visit** the library often? In addition to checking out and returning books, do you attend special children's activities?

___ **3. Do you include** your child in the reading process? For example, she might choose books, turn pages and fill in words she knows.

___ **4. Do you talk** before, during and after reading time? Ask questions such as, "What do you think might happen in the story?"

___ **5. Do you read** your child's favorite books over and over? Repetition builds children's comfort with books and reading.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're emphasizing reading. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Teach your preschooler to care for herself and her surroundings



Your child will truly have become responsible when you no longer have to prompt her in taking care of every aspect of

her daily life. Obviously, that day is a long way off. But the time to practice is now and every day that she spends with you until she is an adult.

Here are some ways to do this:

- **Understand her development.** A young child thinks only of herself, and about what is happening right now. Don't blame your child if she appears inconsiderate or doesn't understand consequences. Those are things you need to gradually teach her.
- **Give appropriate chores** and put them in context. For example, perhaps she can put the forks on the table for dinner. You can say, "Thank you. That helps the family." This language makes her

realize that she is doing something for someone other than herself, and that this action is considered right and valuable.

- **Drop your perfectionism.** Many children never learn to do tasks because their parents refuse to let the tasks be done less than perfectly. It does not matter that your child smeared the counter. It matters that your child is learning to wipe the counter.
- **Challenge your child**, but not too much. For example, when your child has mastered putting on shirts that pull over her head, move on to shirts with buttons. But start with large buttons and let her master those before moving on to the small ones.

Source: N. Ruffin, "Developing Responsibility and Self Management in Young Children: Goals of Positive Behavior Management," Virginia Cooperative Extension, www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/350/350-052/350-052.html.

Build stability by creating meaningful family traditions



Holidays are opportunities to develop special traditions with your child. Simple activities, such as baking the same cookies each year,

remind your child, "We're a family. We have fun together. We'll always be there for each other." This holiday season, continue old traditions or begin new ones, such as:

- **Read or tell a favorite story.** You might take out a special book that is only used at this time of year.
- **Play a family game.** Some games, such as charades, can be played by almost everyone—no matter how young or old.
- **Serve a traditional meal.** Start with a basic menu and add items you know your child will love.
- **Give a compliment** to each person at the dinner table. Kind words are one of the best gifts to give and receive.
- **Put up special decorations.** Discuss the memories they evoke. "You made that in your first year of preschool. I'll always love it!"
- **Invite a friend** or relative to celebrate with your family. You might choose someone who would otherwise be alone.
- **Sing traditional songs.** Children love belting out seasonal favorites in the car and at home!

Q: My son is a fortunate child who will have a lovely holiday season. He'll spend time with family, attend fun events and open many gifts. I want him to enjoy every moment. But I'd also like him to realize that not everyone is so lucky. Is a five-year-old too young for community service?

Questions & Answers

A: There are many ways a family that includes a five-year-old can get involved in helping others this holiday. You can:

- **Have your child pick out** some canned goods or other unopened foods such as peanut butter or spaghetti from your pantry. Deliver them together to a local food bank.
- **Find out if the food bank** needs sandwiches or bagged lunches. Have your child help you make and deliver some.
- **Make holiday cards** with your child. Take them to a local nursing home. You can also call the home and ask if they allow donations of baked goods. If so, bake some cookies to go with the cards.
- **Talk with your child** about the fact that some children don't get any new toys. Ask your child if he would be willing to give up just one toy. If he can, get him one less toy and instead buy a small new toy together. Take it to a donation site.
- **Look around your home** for outgrown coats with your child. Call your neighbors and see if they have any. Take the coats to a shelter or other collection site. Tell your child you are proud of him for helping someone else have a happy holiday too!

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Keep kindergarten skills fresh over the school break



You and your kindergartner deserve a holiday break from school! But that doesn't mean learning has to stop. You can enjoy building important skills over the break if you:

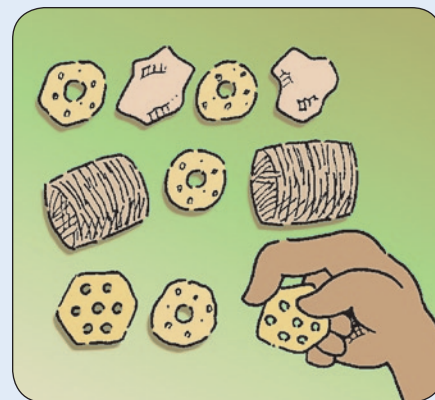
- **Play games.** Sneak learning into activities such as playing store (math), acting out a story (reading) and playing Simon Says (listening and following directions).
- **Explore.** Visit a museum, see a show or take a nature walk. Plan new and exciting adventures.
- **Cook.** Use reading, math and science to follow a recipe.
- **Talk and listen.** This builds vocabulary and communication skills. Discuss daily life and ask creative questions, such as, "What would it be like to live in outer space?"
- **Visit the library.** Note holiday hours so you have time to check out books, magazines and stories on CD. Set aside time each day for reading.
- **Exercise.** Build your child's muscles—and prevent cabin fever—by going outside or building a safe, indoor obstacle course.
- **Limit screen time.** Instead of filling your vacation with movies, TV shows and computer games, set reasonable limits. Make a list of fun, screen-free ideas.

Source: T. Mauro, "Five Ways to Keep Learning Going During School Breaks," About.com, <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/learningissues/tp/learnvacation.htm>.

Teach your kindergartner to recognize, create patterns

Success at math relies in part on recognizing patterns. Odd and even numbers, addition and multiplication, and many other parts of math are pattern-based. Activities like these will help your child recognize patterns and create them:

- **Look at gift wrap.** When your child receives or gives a gift, point out the wrapping paper. Gift wrap almost always contains a pattern. For example, a snowflake, then a star, then a snowflake again. Show your child a part of the pattern and ask him what comes next.
- **Create patterns.** Give your child a scoop of three different kinds



of dry cereal. Put one piece of each kind of cereal on the table. Ask him to repeat your pattern.

Source: Carol Wright, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success – Kindergarten*, ISBN: 1-55254-169-X, Brighter Vision Publications.

Take kindergarten attendance seriously, even during holidays



Have you secretly considered extending your child's holiday vacation? If so, you are not alone. Many parents wonder, "Would it really hurt my kindergartner to skip a few days of school? It would make our vacation so much easier!"

Of course missing school always means missing learning. It also forces teachers—and sometimes whole classes—to pause and help kids catch up. But what does the research say about kindergarten attendance? It suggests that:

- **Missing too much kindergarten** is linked to problems. Kids who are absent a lot in kindergarten

tend to be absent a lot in first grade, too. And the more kindergartners are absent, the more likely they are to struggle in first grade. This is true in reading, math and general knowledge.

- **Being at school**, when possible, should be a priority. Everyone understands that some absences are unavoidable. But kindergarten is the foundation of your child's school experience, and it should be as strong as possible. In short, missed school days are missed opportunities to learn, and that can affect future success.

Source: M. Romero and Y. Lee, "A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org/publications/pub_771.html.