

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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Katy Independent School District

make the difference!



Do you know how to make your home reading-friendly?

You have probably heard that making your home reader-friendly will do a lot to turn your child into a reader, and keep her reading after that. But exactly how do you do that? To start:

- **Load up on books.** A weekly trip to the library does wonders. Garage sales often have inexpensive children's books. Look for alphabet books, rhyming books and picture books.
- **Be a role model.** Your child wants to do what you do, so make sure you are reading. It's best if your child sees you reading every day—a book, magazine or newspaper. Be enthusiastic about reading. Tell your child you enjoy it. Also let her know you look forward to reading to her each day.

- **Communicate.** Read to your child daily. Sing songs and nursery rhymes. Make it a point to expose your child to new words. Set aside time each day to talk with your child. Ask questions that will spur her to think. "What do you think people did before they had TVs?"
- **Practice.** As your child moves on to kindergarten, support what she is learning in school. Say the alphabet with her and point to the letters, so she will learn to recognize them. Encourage her to write and draw. Look for opportunities to match letters and sounds. "Sun starts with S. That letter makes the sssssssss sound."

Source: "Home Literacy Environment Checklist," Get Ready to Read! National Center for Learning Disabilities, www.getreadytoread.org/images/stories/downloads/home_checklist_rev.pdf.

Teach your preschooler the concept of size



Your preschooler is probably learning about colors, shapes and numbers. But what about sizes?

Encourage him to notice and compare things around him. Use words like *bigger*, *smaller*, *shorter* and *longer*. You might:

- **Read the fable "The Lion and the Mouse."** Discuss the characters' sizes. How big are their ears? Their paws? Their voices? Then compare other animals you see, such as a squirrel and a dog. Which one is smaller?
- **Make pancakes of all sizes.** Put them in order from smallest to largest. Which one does your child want to eat? The smallest pancake or the biggest one of all?
- **Compare lengths**, such as hair lengths and length of time. For example, "My hair is 12 inches, and yours is 10 inches. Yours is two inches shorter than mine!" Or "Let's read two stories and see which one is longer."

Source: F. Wisniewski, "Understanding Size," Universal Preschool, www.universalpreschool.com/how-to/teach/learning_concepts.asp.

Help your preschooler make homemade Valentine cards



Nearly all preschool classes have an optional exchange of Valentines for students this month. If you let your child make the cards himself, he will

strengthen his fine motor skills. It will also save you a bit of money. As your child makes cards, focus on:

- **Cutting.** Cutting paper with scissors is great for building small muscles in the hand. It also helps your child use his eyes and hands together. His hands will follow his eye movements as he cuts.
- **Pasting.** Pasting strengthens your child's hand muscles as he presses down to make the paper stick. It is also a sensory experience as your

child learns to tolerate the feel of different materials.

- **Drawing and writing.** Drawing a picture or writing his first name on Valentines or cards helps your child practice some of the most important skills he will need in school. If your child can't write his name, encourage him to try just the first letter. Then help him write the rest of it.

"We can teach from our experience, but we cannot teach experience."

—Sasha Azevedo

Build your child's writing skills with creative & fun activities



Preschoolers need to build writing skills, but writing the alphabet isn't the only way! Plenty of activities make writing

easy and fun.

You and your child can:

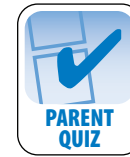
- **Do art projects.** Painting, drawing and shaping clay all build important finger muscles. It's also fun to "write" letters in glue and cover them in yarn.
- **Write with fingers.** Instead of holding a pencil, it may be easier for your child to make letters with her pointer finger in paint or sand.
- **Use sandpaper.** Cut out sandpaper letters and let your child trace them with her finger. This provides a hands-on experience with each letter's shape.
- **Solve puzzles.** Dot-to-dots motivate kids to build writing and

number skills. If your child likes mazes, she can "write" with her finger to prevent frustration.

- **Shape letters.** Use all kinds of materials to create letters, such as pretzel sticks, bread dough, blocks and O-shaped cereal.
- **Exchange letters.** Transform a shoebox into a mailbox for your child. Send her notes every day and encourage her to write back—even if it's just in scribbles or drawings.
- **Make lists.** Your child can help you with grocery lists, wish lists, to-do lists and more. She can add words or pictures, whichever she prefers. At this age, everything counts!

Source: "Fun Preschool Writing Activities—Get your preschooler excited to write!" Preschool-Learning-and-Crafts.com, www.preschool-learning-and-crafts.com/preschool-writing-activities.html.

Does your family have healthy television habits?



Preschoolers learn through interaction and play, so it's especially important to limit their TV time. Answer *yes* or

no to the following questions to see if your family's television habits are healthy:

- ___ **1. Do you restrict TV viewing** to two hours a day or fewer, as recommended by many experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics?
- ___ **2. Do you monitor shows** to make sure they're educational, nonviolent and age appropriate?
- ___ **3. Do you watch TV** with your child so you can answer questions and discuss what she sees?
- ___ **4. Do you use DVDs** or other recordings to limit commercials and control what your child watches?
- ___ **5. Do you choose alternatives** to TV viewing, such as reading, talking, telling stories and being active?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're taking control of TV time. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Find ways to let your young child help around the house



Among the best ways to teach your child responsibility is to give him chores at home. Having chores teaches your child

that maintaining a home is a family effort and he is an important part of the family. This lesson will pay dividends when he is at school, and again later in the working world.

You may be surprised at how many things your child can do to be helpful, and how much he wants to do them.

Here are some chores you can consider if your child is at least three years old:

- **Set and clear the table.** Have him start with the forks, spoons and napkins. Gradually expand the job to include plates and cups.
- **Feed dry food** to family pets. Give pets fresh water.

- **Put clean clothes in drawers.** Put dirty clothes in a laundry basket. Carry a lightweight basket filled with laundry.
- **Match up socks.**
- **Do simple cooking jobs** with you, such as stirring ingredients together and pouring liquids.
- **Bring in mail or newspapers** unless this requires going out on the street.
- **Clean.** Let him use simple tools such as a feather duster or a lightweight handheld vacuum. Give him a soft rag and let him gently wipe tables and low shelves.
- **Pick up toys.** Have him pick them up on a daily basis before bedtime.

Source: A. Rock, "Chores for Kids: 20 Easy Tasks That Encourage Preschoolers to Help Around the House," About.com, <http://preschoolers.about.com/od/familyrelationships/tp/choreslist.htm>.

Foster a sense of independence & confidence in your preschooler



Having healthy self-esteem means you consider yourself a person who can do things. To foster this

sense of independence and confidence in your young child:

- **Let her be involved.** Too many parents say *yes* when a child wants a new toy, but *no* when she tries to help her family. For example, if you are doing laundry, and your child asks, "Can I do that?" you can answer, "Sure, please start handing me everything that is blue." *Lesson: I am competent.*
- **Make her wait.** Your child deserves much attention—but not *all* the attention. Your child

should frequently hear, "I am helping Jimmy right now. Your turn will come later." Or, "I need to get ready now. You will be fine with your blocks while I do this." *Lesson: I am big enough and secure enough to wait.*

- **Let her entertain herself.** Spend time with your child, but don't try to keep her constantly fascinated. Offer things to do—books, crayons, blocks—and encourage her to do them on her own. Notice her efforts. *Lesson: I can make myself happy and busy.*

Source: Jean Illsley Clarke and others, *How Much is Enough? Everything you need to know to steer clear of overindulgence and raise likeable, responsible and respectful children*, ISBN: 1-56924-437-5, Marlowe & Company.

Q: My son, who is four-and-a-half, received some computer games from a family member. Now he wants to play them all the time. They are educational games, which I am happy about. But I worry about too much of a good thing.

Questions & Answers

A: You're right. Every child needs a balance of activities. Educational computer games can teach your child school skills. But playing for hours on end is not healthy.

Here are some ideas for putting on the brakes:

- **Set and enforce limits.** About 30 minutes a day is enough on the computer. That's especially so if your child also watches TV or plays video games. It's all screen time. You can use a timer—when it beeps, he'll know the 30 minutes are up.
- **Encourage active play.** Your child should have some time outdoors every day, except when the weather is very harsh. Supervised playground time is ideal, but if that's not possible, at least take your child for a short walk, down the block and back.
- **Have plenty to do inside.** Your child needs crayons, paper, books, and toys such as blocks, puzzles, cars, animals and action figures for pretending. Rotate toys—put some out for a few days, then put them away and put others out, so he won't get bored. Remember that garage sales and friends with older children, can be great sources for very inexpensive (or free) toys.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Have you found ways to connect with the school?



Your child has been in kindergarten for several months now. Have you found ways to connect with your child's teacher and the school? To stay involved with your kindergartner's school:

- **Visit.** Take advantage of chances to get comfortable. Volunteer in class, for example, and introduce yourself to staff. Attend school events, such as musicals, field trips and workshops.
- **Communicate.** Keep in touch with your child's teacher through email, notes and calls. Tell her about important changes in your child's life. Continue to make parent-teacher conferences a priority.
- **Read.** To stay updated on your child's progress, review papers he brings home every day.
- **Socialize.** Meet other parents of kindergartners. Keep in touch through group emails. The bonds formed in kindergarten can last many years—for kids and parents!
- **Lead.** As you gain confidence, consider leadership roles, such as organizing class events, serving in the parent-teacher organization or working on the school improvement plan. Make it a goal to help other new parents feel welcome.

Source: H. Kreider, "Getting Parents 'Ready' for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education," Harvard Family Research Project, www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/getting-parents-ready-for-kindergarten-the-role-of-early-childhood-education.

Practice critical communication skills with your kindergartner

One of kindergartners' greatest accomplishments is learning to communicate well with teachers and peers. To help your child:

- **Talk and listen.** Ask about your child's day and tell him about yours. Set an example by making eye contact and waiting your turn to speak.
- **Practice manners.** Show him how to raise his hand, ask a question and meet a new friend.
- **Enjoy language.** Play games that involve listening and recite poems or lines from books.
- **Retell stories.** After reading a book, talk about it. What was the story about? Did your child like it?
- **Talk about feelings.** Help your child find words for emotions. If he yells at a friend, you might



say, "You're *angry* that Jack isn't sharing his toy."

- **Follow instructions.** Give your child simple, multiple-step directions. "Please take this to your room, put it on your bed and come back."

Source: "Supporting your child's learning—Talking and Listening in K-6," New South Wales Government, www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/parents/k6talking.html.

Use hands-on learning to foster a sense of curiosity in your child



Is your kindergartner always in motion? Is she always asking "why?" Good for her! She's using some of her

best learning tools.

Kindergartners need to learn with *all* their senses. They need a strong curiosity about everything around them. Foster this sense of curiosity with:

- **Your child's interests.** Does she love a certain animal, such as dolphins? Help her find out more about them—where they eat, where they can be found, how they take care of their young.

- **Word hunts.** Your child is learning to recognize and read some words. Does she know that these words can be found in places other than her books? Challenge her to find as many words as she can—outside of books.
- **Hands-on learning.** Making letters out of play dough helps her remember them. Counting is easier if she has a small pile of dried beans. She can move a bean into a new pile as she counts each one.

Source: "Grade-by-Grade Learning: Kindergarten," Going to School, PBS, www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/what_kinder.html.