

Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

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Finger learning activities strengthen early math skills

When preschoolers count on their fingers, they aren't cheating. They're being smart! According to research, when young children use their fingers to sort out numbers, they have an easier time of it. The reason may be that using fingers acts as a "bridge" for kids to move from thinking about numbers to seeing them.

In fact, children who are encouraged to use their fingers—for example, by holding up two fingers to represent the number 2—may grasp simple math concepts more quickly than those who don't use their fingers.

Try these "finger learning" activities:

- **Tracing.** Have your child trace single digit numbers in sand or on paper. Next, demonstrate how to trace the numeral 5 with a finger. Then, ask your child to show you five fingers.

This will reinforce the connection between the symbol (the numeral) and the quantity it represents.

- **Make a puzzle.** Flip over one of your child's old jigsaw puzzles and write a number on the back of each piece. When picking up each piece, ask your child to show you its value with fingers before adding it to the puzzle.
- **Dominos.** This classic game is ideal for teaching numbers! After matching, say, a two-dot tile to another two-dot tile, see if your child can do the same using fingers. Hold up two fingers on one hand and then touch them to two fingers on the other hand. Voilà! The quantity comes to life!

Source: T. Jay and J. Betenson, "Mathematics at Your Fingertips: Testing a Finger Training Intervention to Improve Quantitative Skills," *Frontiers in Education*.

Introduce your child to the world of music



Research shows that listening to music primes the brain for learning. It can boost children's listening

skills, improve concentration, promote creativity, build social skills and strengthen math and literacy skills.

To incorporate music into your preschooler's daily life:

- **Play music during chore time.** Whether you're cleaning up after dinner, folding laundry or picking up a room, music can make the task more enjoyable.
- **Listen to music on the go.** If you're in a car, play some tunes and sing along. Traveling by bus? Share a pair of earbuds and listen together.
- **Sing to your child** throughout the day. Make up silly songs together. Sing a few lullabies at bedtime.
- **Give your child musical experiences.** Participating in preschool is one way. Music is a big part of a preschool curriculum. Look for free virtual music performances in your community, too.

Source: N. Kraus, *Of Sound Mind: How Our Brain Constructs a Meaningful Sonic World*, The MIT Press.

Making predictions builds your preschooler's thinking skills



Making predictions requires kids to consider evidence and recognize patterns. Even young children can make educated

guesses based on what they know.

To help your child predict, use:

- **Books.** Predicting what will happen next in the story helps your child understand what you're reading. Before turning the page, ask, "After they get in the boat, where do you think they will go?"
- **Experiences.** "What will we see on our way to Grandma's house?" "Will it be hot or cold when we go outside?"
- **Familiar routines.** "I am wearing my uniform and I'm getting ready

to leave. Where do you think I am going?" "What will we do when we finish eating dinner?" "What do you think you'll need for your bath?"

Be sure to discuss your child's prediction results, too. "You said we would see a horse farm on the way to Grandma's house. There it is. Look, I see one black horse and three brown horses!"

"Did you ever stop to think, and forget to start again?"

—Winnie the Pooh

When it comes to illustrations in books, more isn't always better!



Your child loves picture books, but if each page is filled with too many illustrations, it could slow language learning.

Why? Because when preschoolers see multiple pictures on a page, they can struggle to follow the story (possibly because they aren't sure where to look).

One study showed that young children who were read stories with one illustration per page learned twice as many new words as children shown pages with multiple pictures. This doesn't mean you shouldn't share picture books with your child—all reading is valuable—but you may want to consider the illustrations when choosing them.

To maximize your child's language learning when reading together:

- **Seek out** books with a single picture per page. One splashy, engaging illustration may hold your child's

attention and make following the story a bit easier.

- **Avoid too many** lift-the-flap books. These stories are fun, but they may hinder your child's word acquisition. That's because the act of lifting the flaps and looking underneath distracts from listening to the words on the page. (Don't toss your child's favorite flaps, of course! Just include plenty of regular books during story time, too.)
- **Clarify** multi-illustration stories. When reading your child books with more than one picture per page, point to the drawing that goes with whatever text you're reading at the moment. This will help your child connect the words to the correct illustration. And that, in turn, can bolster book smarts!

Source: Z.M. Flack and J.S. Horst, "Two sides to every story: Children learn words better from one storybook page at a time," *Infant and Child Development*.

Are you teaching your child to be kind to others?



Preschoolers who learn to care about people and things are more likely to care about doing well in school, too. They are also

better friends and classmates.

Are you helping your child become kind and caring? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you nurture** a sense of appreciation by reminding your child to say thank you to others for things they do, and by having your child draw thank-you pictures?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to do acts of kindness, such as offering to share a new book or toy?
- ___ **3. Do you teach** your child how to take care of living things, such as plants or pets?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to think about others' feelings?
- ___ **5. Do you model** caring by thanking, helping and showing respect for your child and others?

How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you are promoting caring and kindness in your child. Mostly *no* answers? Try those ideas in the quiz.

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Share family meals to boost your child's vocabulary & learning



Sharing family meals with your preschooler is a great way to enhance learning. Experts say children who regularly eat at least one meal a day with their families are healthier and have better grades. It turns out that family mealtime is even more important than playtime, story time and other family events to increase vocabulary.

Try these mealtime tips:

- **Plan for meals.** Have your child help you make menus for the week and create a grocery list.
- **Let your child help** with meal preparation by measuring ingredients and stirring. Show your preschooler how to set and clear the table.
- **Make mealtime fun.** Put dinner in a box or bag, and spread out a blanket on the floor for a picnic. Or, create a story during mealtime. Begin with the words “Once upon

a time ...” and go around the table so everyone can add a new sentence until the story is over.

- **Teach manners**—napkins in laps, chew with mouth closed, say *please* and *thank you*, etc.
- **Keep talk positive.** Have each family member tell one good thing about their day.
- **Start traditions.** You might make pancakes on Saturday mornings, tacos on Tuesday nights or eat soup and sandwiches on Sunday nights.
- **Be creative.** If your family can't eat dinner together, gather for another meal, such as breakfast. You could even schedule a virtual meal with extended family using a video chat program.

For more tips and information on the importance of family meals, visit The Family Dinner Project at www.thefamilydinnerproject.org.

Bolster your preschooler's ability to recall information



The ability to remember as much as possible of what they hear and see contributes greatly to children's success in school. In addition to talking to your preschooler about experiences every day, try these simple activities to help strengthen memory:

- **Read nursery rhymes** and familiar stories. Nursery rhymes are especially effective because they contain patterns. Your child will learn to recognize these patterns, which will then trigger memory.
- **Hide a few items** as your child watches. Then ask your preschooler to retrieve the items. As your child gets better at this, hide more items.

Or hide the items and then do another activity. After time has passed, challenge your child to find the items.

- **Play “I'm going on a trip.”** Say, “I'm going on a trip and I'm packing pajamas.” Your child must repeat what you said, and then add something. Example: “I'm going on a trip and I'm packing pajamas and a toothbrush.” At first your child may be able to remember only one or two items. Expand the game as recall improves.
- **Ask your child to teach you.** After teaching a new skill, such as sorting toys, ask your child to teach *you* how to do it. This will reinforce the steps to follow.

Q: My four-year-old has a hard time telling the truth. How should I react when I hear something that I know isn't true?

Questions & Answers

A: Young children are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. When preschoolers tell adults things that they wish were true, they are practicing make-believe, an important part of preschoolers' development. Telling the truth is a habit that young children acquire over several years.

To encourage honesty in your preschooler:

- **Tell the truth for your child.** You walk into the kitchen and see cookie crumbs on the table. If you ask if your child was in the cookie jar without permission, you will likely hear an immediate *no*. Instead, supply the truth for your child. “I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are cookie crumbs everywhere, including on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me.”
- **Appreciate honesty.** Pushing your child to tell the truth will backfire if it's followed by a negative consequence. At this stage, you should praise your child for telling the truth. Then, calmly explain your expectations for the future.

Staying calm when your child is honest will also pay off during the teen years—when dishonesty can lead to dangerous situations. Feeling secure enough to tell parents the truth helps teenagers stay safe.
- **Model honesty.** Your child may not always listen to you, but your child *will* mimic you. Be truthful with your child.

The Kindergarten Experience

Do all kids learn how to read in kindergarten?



One of the most common questions parents ask about kindergarten is, “When will my child learn to read?” There isn’t a one-size-fits-all answer. Some children read books by the end of the year, and others don’t—and that’s OK! Every child learns at an individual pace.

To help your kindergartner develop reading skills:

- **Establish a daily reading time.** Sit down for at least 15 minutes to read together. As you read, let your child “help.” When you come to a familiar or obvious word, suggest that your child fill it in. For example, “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you ___?” This builds reading confidence.
- **Go beyond books.** Look for words everywhere—in board games, on signs and more. Run a finger from left to right under the words as you read aloud. Ask questions such as, “Which word starts with the letter B?” “Can you find the word *it*?”
- **Keep reading fun.** Whether or not your kindergartner struggles with reading, learning the skill can be hard work! If you sense your kindergartner is frustrated, take a break and try again later in the day.
- **Build independence.** When kindergartners practice reading, it’s tempting to jump in and help. Instead, let your child take the lead and try to sound out words. When your child is really stuck on a word, just supply it and let your child continue reading.

Fun ways to support your kindergartner’s writing skills

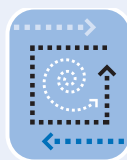
Your kindergartner is learning how to write letters, words and sentences. To reinforce these emerging writing skills at home, try some of these fun ideas:

- **Create a special writing box** and fill it with writing tools and different types of paper. Include crayons, pencils, washable markers, lined paper and plain paper. When your child is in the mood to write, pull out the box!
- **Use food to form letters.** Give your child some cooked pieces of spaghetti. Once they’ve cooled, demonstrate how to use them to form the letters in your child’s name. What other types of food can be used for writing? What about pretzel sticks?
- **Make word art.** Help your child use glue to write words on bright pieces paper. Shake glitter or sprinkles on top.



- **Decorate the sidewalk.** Head outside with some sidewalk chalk. Your child can write some words and draw pictures around them.
- **Make a letter scrapbook.** Write a letter on each page of a scrapbook. Then have your child add pictures of things that start with each letter.

Reinforce the concepts of size with three simple activities



There are lots of ways to help kindergartners explore the concept of relative size. Encourage your child to notice and compare everyday things. Use words like *bigger*, *smaller*, *shorter* and *longer* to describe them.

Then, try a few of these activities:

1. **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?
2. **Read the fable “The Lion and the Mouse.”** Discuss the sizes of the characters. How big are their ears? Their paws? Their voices? Then, compare other animals you see, such as a cat and a dog. Which animal is smaller?
3. **Compare lengths.** Ask your child to measure and then compare the lengths of different items. For example, “This crayon is four inches long and that banana is eight inches. The crayon is four inches shorter than the banana.”