

# Early Childhood Parents®

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Shelton Youth & Family Services

*make the difference!*



## Establish family habits that boost your child's well-being

**F**ollowing routines helps young children figure out their place in the world. Routines also provide structure that helps them feel secure.

Studies show that children who follow at least five positive family routines at home have stronger social skills and emotional health than those who don't. And the better their overall well-being, the better able they are to form relationships, recognize emotions, and do well in school.

Some beneficial positive family habits include:

- **Eating together.** Sharing daily meals gives your preschooler an opportunity to connect with family members and practice manners.
- **Playing together.** It doesn't matter what you play—just that you play regularly.

- **Reading.** Whether you read a fairy tale at bedtime or a picture book each morning, having a reading routine boosts your child's emotional health and word smarts, too.
- **Meeting as a family.** Pick a day of the week to have family members share what's going on in their lives and talk about how they are feeling. This gives your preschooler practice expressing emotions in productive ways.
- **Sleeping.** A good night's sleep is crucial for learning and managing emotions. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, preschoolers need 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours.

Source: E.I. Muñoz and others, "Family Routines and Social-Emotional School Readiness Among Preschool-Age Children," *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

## Help your child develop perseverance



As preschoolers explore and try new things, it's only natural that they will experience some

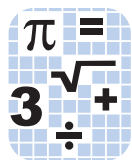
failures. Learning how to bounce back in these situations will help your child thrive both personally and academically.

To instill perseverance:

- **Be empathetic.** "I can see how sad you are that you didn't make it across the monkey bars. It's disappointing when you try to do something and it doesn't work out."
- **Offer encouragement.** "Sometimes kids must grow before their arms are strong enough to make it across the monkey bars. You're growing fast and I think you'll be ready soon. Let's try again next week and see how far you can get!"
- **Demonstrate how to handle disappointments with grace.** For example, if a new recipe doesn't turn out well, say "I tried something new and gave it my best shot—that's what matters most. I'll try again another day."

Source: J. Lahey, *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, Harper.

## Try activities that make math meaningful to your preschooler



There are countless ways to make math fun and relevant for preschoolers. And by incorporating math activities into your daily routine, you can help your child develop a strong foundation in it.

Here are some ideas to try:

- **Use numbers in conversation.** “We need *three* potatoes. *One, two, three.*” “We live *two* houses away from Maria.”
- **Cook or bake something together.** Demonstrate how to measure an ingredient. Point out the number on the measuring cup. Or, count as you cook—the number of teaspoons of an ingredient, the number of pots and pans.
- **Do the laundry.** Ask your child to sort the clothing by size, or classify items by category (socks and towels).

- **Use the calendar.** Show your child today’s date. Each day, count down together to a day your preschooler is looking forward to, such as an upcoming holiday or a visit from a friend or relative.
- **Play a card game.** Take the face cards and jokers out of a deck and divide the remaining cards, face down, between you and your child. Take the first card from your pile and turn it face up, and have your child do the same. Ask your child to tell you which number is bigger.

**“You have to spend some energy and effort to see the beauty of math.”**

—Maryam Mirzakhani

## Promote academic achievement by handling digital media wisely



A language-rich home environment is a helpful factor in academic success. However, a new study suggests that an increase in screen use by young children leads to a decrease in parent-child talk.

That’s why it’s crucial for families to make healthy digital media choices. In addition to setting limits on the amount of time preschoolers should spend in front of screens, families should:

- **Choose wisely.** Research links educational games and shows to verbal, math and school readiness skills. Boost learning and promote conversation by discussing what your child is seeing and doing.

- **Watch and play during the day.** Nighttime use of digital media can disrupt sleep. Bright lights and excitement aren’t part of a calm evening routine. Instead, you and your child can read favorite books, play soothing music, tell stories or have a quiet conversation before bed.
- **Limit exposure to commercials.** There are many ways to avoid ads that influence kid’s eating, viewing and other habits. Record programs (and skip the ads), consider free “on demand” programming, and watch commercial-free networks.

Source: M.E. Brushe, Ph.D. and others, “Screen Time and Parent-Child Talk When Children Are Aged 12 to 36 Months,” *JAMA Pediatrics*; “Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers,” American Academy of Pediatrics.

## Are you helping your preschooler explore the world?



Preschoolers are just beginning to learn about the world around them. Now is the perfect time to take advantage of their curiosity. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you’re helping your child experience and learn from new things:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you take** your child to new places? Think of destinations that are fascinating, such as an airport or construction site.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you read** new books along with old favorites? Visit the library to find fresh, exciting stories.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you give** your child opportunities to meet new children and socialize? Visit a local playground on a nice fall day.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you take** your child to hear live music or see people playing sports or performing?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to try new foods?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you’re helping your child learn by doing. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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# Use proven teacher strategies to reinforce positive behavior



It's easy to fall into a trap when correcting preschoolers' behavior—always using the same approach, even when it no longer seems to be working. It may be saying *no* over and over. It may be raising your voice more than you would like.

If this sounds familiar, here are some strategies that many preschool teachers use with great success:

- **Focus more of your attention** on appropriate behavior. Teachers know that students sometimes misbehave just to be noticed. So, rather than focusing on what your child does wrong, focus on what your child does right and follow up with a big hug. Your preschooler will soon figure out that behaving well attracts more attention than behaving poorly.

- **Try a change of scenery.** Teachers sometimes move students who are misbehaving to another room to help them calm down. Try this same technique at home. A 10-minute walk outside with you might do more to improve your child's willingness to cooperate than a scolding would.
- **Offer reminders.** Teachers help students make better decisions by reminding them of appropriate behavior. For example, you've told your child many times not to reach into the fish bowl, but your child does it anyway. The fish bowl may be tempting enough to make your preschooler forget your warnings. So, step in *before* your child gets to the fish bowl, not *after*. Say, "Remember, we use our eyes to see the fish, but not our hands to touch."

# Build reading readiness by connecting letters and sounds



The link between letters and sounds, which educators call *phonemic awareness*, is a key step toward reading. To help your child make this connection:

- **Have your child say a few words**, such as *cat*, *ball* and *snake*, while looking in the mirror. Say, "Look how you move your mouth, tongue and lips in different ways to make the different sounds."
- **Teach your child the sounds** some letters make. "The word *sky* starts with the letter *s*. It sounds like *sssss*."
- **Read a book of tongue-twisters** together. It's OK if your child can't say them independently. It is more important for your child to hear the

- repeated sounds and learn that many of these words begin with the same letters.
- **Read nursery rhymes together.** Point out words that sound similar, such as *dog* and *log*.
  - **Be silly with music.** Sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." After singing it correctly, change the first letter in the word *boat*. Now it's "Row your *coat*." What other silly songs can you and your child come up with?
- As your child gets more familiar with sounds and letters, make the activities more challenging. Say three words, such as *man*, *mat* and *boy*, and see if your child can tell you which two words begin with the same sound and which word is the "oddball."

**Q:** I have heard a lot about the importance of fostering healthy self-confidence in young children. What exactly does this mean and how can I do it?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Self-confidence is important for success in school. When young children feel confident in their abilities, it is easier for them to learn new things, solve problems, get along with others and develop independence.

There are two main parts of self-confidence:

1. **Competence.** This simply means believing you can accomplish things. It's having a "can-do" attitude.
2. **Self-worth.** This means feeling that you are a valuable person.

To strengthen your preschooler's self-confidence:

- **Express your love.** Say to your child, "I love you for exactly who you are!"
- **Listen to your child.** When you are having a conversation, offer your undivided attention.
- **Ask for your child's opinion.** "What do you think we should have for dinner tonight? Chicken or pasta?"
- **Make your home** a safe, happy and cooperative place. Have fun with your child, but also do work together. Chores are an effective way to increase your child's sense of competence.
- **Praise your child carefully.** If you only praise positive final results, your child will get the idea that worth is tied to being successful. Instead, praise your child's progress and effort.
- **Practice firm,** fair and consistent discipline. Having boundaries and structure builds children's sense of safety, love and self-confidence.



# The Kindergarten Experience

## Why attendance in kindergarten is so important



Kindergartners miss more school than students in any other elementary grade. Yet consistent attendance

may be more crucial in kindergarten than in any other year.

Researchers have found a link between absenteeism in kindergarten and lower performance on third grade reading and math assessments. Your help is essential to make sure your child doesn't miss a day of school—unless there is an illness or family emergency.

Here are some additional reasons attendance matters for your child:

- **Early reading instruction** begins in kindergarten. This has an impact on how quickly and easily children learn to read.
- **Teachers have an easier time** identifying students' strengths and weaknesses when they interact with them every day. Then, they can support those strengths and provide specific help for students as needed.
- **Attending kindergarten classes** helps English language learners become fluent. They benefit from hearing instructions in English. They gain fluency by speaking with classmates and teachers.

Let your kindergartner know that attending school on time, every day is a priority. If you say it's important to you, it will be important to your child, too.

**Sources:** The Absences Add Up Campaign, *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*; D.R. Superville, "Why Kindergarten Attendance Matters for the Whole School," *Education Week*.

## Improve academic success by providing support at home

Your child's academic success gets a boost when you support learning at home. Here's how to do it:

- **Tell your child** that education is valuable. Talk about how school was important in your life.
- **Establish routines** to make school mornings stress free. Have your child set out clothes and school materials the night before.
- **Make sure your child** wakes up in time to have a healthy breakfast every morning—at home or at school.
- **Support your child's teacher.** Say that you and the teacher are on the same team, and both of you want what's best for your child.
- **Encourage reading.** Read together at least 20 minutes a day and let your child see you enjoying a book or article.



- **Ask your child** to teach you something the class is learning in school.
- **Show pride** in your child's schoolwork and display it on the refrigerator or wall.

## Social skills are the foundation of a positive school experience



Children's ability to get along with teachers and classmates influences their learning and overall school experiences.

According to kindergarten teachers, children need support from home to strengthen important social skills, such as:

- **Recognizing authority.** Talk about the rules your child follows at home. Discuss why it's also necessary to follow rules at school. Then, review the school rules together.
- **Using names.** Role-play some situations, such as meeting a

new classmate. "Hi, I'm Josh. What's your name?"

- **Expressing emotions** appropriately. Frustration and anger are difficult feelings for children to manage. Help your child practice using words rather than actions to express feelings.
- **Communicating.** Spend plenty of time having back-and-forth conversations with your child. Ask about school and listen attentively.
- **Helping.** Expect your child to pitch in with age-appropriate tasks at home, such as setting the table, dusting and picking up toys.