

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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Lunenburg County Schools

make the difference!



Take advantage of seasonal learning activities this month

December ushers in the first official day of winter. Here are a few activities you can do with your preschooler to help her learn about colors, numbers, science, nature and more. Together:

- **Enjoy a winter picnic.** Bundle up and head outdoors with hot chocolate and graham crackers. Talk with your child about what she sees in nature in the winter. Or, spread a blanket inside and serve her favorite lunch on it. You can even turn your picnic into a reading party!
- **Have fun with cookie cutters.** With a pencil, have your child trace around each cookie cutter. Look at the shapes they make. Then place the cutters in a paper

bag and see if your child, using her sense of touch, can bring out the cookie cutter that matches each shape.

- **Listen to the sounds of winter.** Take a walk and talk about what you hear. Perhaps you hear boots crunching on snow, rain splashing or wind whistling.
- **Be winter detectives.** Help your child identify the signs of winter in a cold climate, such as freezing weather, less daylight, bare trees, people wearing warm clothing or smoke rising from chimneys.
- **Count pairs.** Gather several pairs of mittens or gloves. Or, cut pairs of mittens out of different colors of paper. Mix them up. Have your child sort them back into pairs.

Questions can help your child solve problems



When it comes to helping your preschooler learn to think for himself, the key may lie not

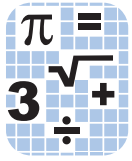
in what you *tell* him, but in what you *ask* him. Asking the right questions can spur him to come up with his own solutions.

Here's how to use questions to help your preschooler solve a problem:

1. **Encourage him** to state the problem. Ask questions such as, "What's going on?"
2. **Try to get him** to come up with solutions. Ask, "What do you want to do about that?"
3. **Help him think about** the consequences. "That could work. What do you think might happen if you did that?"
4. **Ask about alternatives.** "Do you have any other ideas?" It's OK if your child doesn't solve the problem or come up with the "right" answer. The idea is to get him to think, rather than having you supply the answers for him.

Source: M.B. Shure, Ph.D., *Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along with Others*, Gallery Books.

Try a few counting games to boost your child's math skills



Your preschooler has opportunities to build math skills each time she plays. To her, math is not something difficult to be “worked on.” It’s simply part of her fun.

Foster that fun with these three counting activities:

- 1. Count with clips.** Label index cards with numbers. Give your child paper clips and ask her to put three clips on the card with number 3, and so on. Be sure to supervise your child when she plays with small objects.
- 2. Make number trees.** Cut out trees from brown and green construction paper. Then, cut out some “apples” from red construction paper. Label the

trunks of the trees with numbers and ask your child to put the correct number of apples in each tree.

- 3. Count with cars.** Label toy cars with numbers. Make garages out of small boxes and label those with matching numbers. Then, ask your child to put the right car in each garage. The number 1 car goes in the number 1 garage, and so on.

“Too often we give our children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.”

—Roger Lewin

Practice attention-friendly habits at home to build attention span



Paying attention to the teacher and to instruction is vital for your child's success in school and in life.

That's why it's helpful to promote a lifestyle at home that will give your child the best chance for building a solid attention span.

“Attention-friendly” habits include:

- **Exercise.** Studies have shown that regular, vigorous exercise stimulates brain cells—which improves memory and attention.
- **Nutrition.** Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein help the brain do its best work, including paying attention. Healthy foods should make up most of your child's diet.
- **More reading** and creative play than screen time. Reading and creative play engage your child's mind, while TV and computer games may cause him to tune out. Experts recommend parents monitor and limit their children's recreational screen time.

Source: M.H. Popkin, Ph.D. and others, *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds*, Active Parenting Publishers.

Are you teaching your child how to follow rules?



Kids who are expected to follow rules at home have an easier time following rules when they get to school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are teaching your preschooler how to follow rules:

- 1. Do you make a few basic rules** that help life run smoothly? The list should be short so your child doesn't get confused or overwhelmed.
- 2. Do you follow routines** that help your child cooperate? If things are done the same way daily, they're easier to remember.
- 3. Do you explain rules simply?** Be clear and specific. “Say *please* and *thank you*” is better than “Be polite.”
- 4. Do you always enforce rules?** Bending the rules confuses children.
- 5. Do you adjust rules** when your child is ready? As he matures, show pride and confidence in his new abilities.

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are doing a great job teaching your preschooler about rules. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Music can be a valuable tool for teaching preschoolers



There is almost no limit to what your child can learn from music. And with the holiday season approaching, music is just about everywhere!

Music can help your child identify emotions—some songs sound happy, others sad, still others calm and relaxed. Learning lyrics can improve your child's language and vocabulary. And it can help him identify patterns—a key math skill—as he learns to recognize when the chorus will appear in the song.

To help your child get the most benefit from music:

- **Have at least one time** of the day when your child can expect to

hear music. It could be on the car ride to preschool, during playtime or just before bed.

- **Give your child opportunities** to move to music. This is even more fun for preschoolers if they have something to wave as they move. Long strips of fabric or scarves work perfectly.
- **Blend music** with other creative activities. For example, let your child listen to music while he paints or draws.
- **Expose your child** to rhythm. Show him how to clap his hands in time to the beat of some of his favorite songs.

Source: J.R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher: Insights for Parent Involvement*, Instructional Fair, TS Denison.

Teach your child the difference between *telling* and *tattling*



Preschoolers love to tattle on each other. Most parents, however, do not love to hear it. And teachers, who may have 20 or more little tattlers in their classes, love it even less.

Here are some strategies you can use to break the tattling habit in your child:

- **Tell your child** you will listen only to *telling*, not to *tattling*. *Telling* is when your child comes to you with information that can keep another child from harm. For example, your child informs you that her two-year-old sister is playing with matches.

Tattling is when your child comes to you with information that can get another child into trouble. For example, she informs

you that her sister went into the pantry and ate three cookies.

- **Reinforce the difference** between *telling* and *tattling* by always asking the same two questions when your preschooler tattles:
 1. *Is somebody hurt?*
 2. *Is somebody going to get hurt?*
 If the answers are *no*, simply say, “No tattling,” and turn your attention to something else.
- **Offer empathy.** You can acknowledge your child's feelings about what her brother did without punishing her brother for what you didn't see. For example, “I can tell how angry you are that your brother teased you. I'd like to hear you use your words to tell *him* instead of me.”

Source: N. Samalin and C. Whitney, *Loving Without Spoiling: And 100 Other Timeless Tips for Raising Terrific Kids*, McGraw-Hill.

Q: My family finally has a good routine going. Now here come the holidays and winter break! We'll be more relaxed and flexible, but I don't want to have to start all over again in January! What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Going back to preschool in January is not usually as difficult as starting the new school year after a summer break. But a winter break can wreck routines, and many preschoolers struggle to readjust when it's over.

Here are ways to keep things more or less on track so everyone in your family will have an easier time next month:

- **Do not completely let go** of routines. There will be days when your child eats or sleeps at unusual times, but these are usually part of an event that you can plan for. The rest of the time, feed your child at the same times she usually eats. Keep her regular bedtime.
- **Stick to your rules!** Does your child stay up until all hours of the night all year long? Then she shouldn't do it during the holiday season either. The holidays are not a time to forget discipline and respect. In fact, the many changes that take place this season are even more of a reason to keep discipline unchanged.
- **Remind your child** about preschool. Some kids think the school year has also come to an end when they hear adults talking about the calendar year ending. So say things like, “Won't it be fun to tell your teacher about your trip to Grandma's when you go back to preschool?”

The Kindergarten Experience

Fun activities can build important listening skills



You want your kindergartner to be an excellent listener. But simply telling her to “listen” isn’t enough.

To motivate your child to pay attention, give her opportunities to practice in new and exciting ways.

Encourage your kindergartner to:

- **Help out around the house.** Choose tasks that interest your child. Maybe she likes setting the table or watering plants. Then give her specific directions to follow. “Fill the watering can. Touch the plant’s soil. If it feels dry, water the plant.”
- **Tell stories.** Read or tell your child a detailed story several times. Make it one she enjoys. Then, pretend you can’t remember a part of it. Can your child complete the story for you? You may be surprised at how well she listened and how much she remembers!
- **Play Simon Says.** Strengthening listening skills is always fun with this classic game! Children love listening to “Simon’s” instructions (“Simon says raise your right hand”) and doing what he says. When Simon doesn’t give the order (“Raise your left hand”)—kids can ignore the instruction.
- **Learn new board games.** Board games have rules that often need repeating. But that’s OK—this gives your child opportunities to listen. Just make sure she’s enjoying the game, too.

The holidays are a wonderful time to focus on kindness

Kindness is a valuable character trait to instill in your kindergartner. Students who are caring and think of others are more likely to get along with their teachers and classmates—which contributes to a positive learning environment.

To promote kindness this holiday season:

- **Encourage your child** to make presents for family members. He can give a piece of art he made in school, coupons for hugs, promises to make a sister’s bed or take out the trash for Dad.
- **Have your child** go through his closet and select items to donate to a needy child. Together, take bags of clothes or toys to a charitable organization.



- **Bake cookies together** and take them to a nursing home, your local police department or a homeless shelter.
- **Help your child express his thanks.** Remind him to say *thank you* and have him write thank-you notes for gifts.

Help your child avoid school absences by staying healthy



Winter is the season when many children contract colds, flu, strep throat and a host of other ailments. Of course, this results in missed days of school and learning.

While it is impossible to keep your child from *ever* getting sick, you can take steps to give her the best chance of staying healthy—and attending school. Here’s how:

- **Keep your child** up to date on medical visits.
- **Make sure your child** wears proper protective clothing in cold weather. A lot of body heat

escapes through the head, so wearing a hat is a great idea on a cold day.

- **Have your child** wash her hands as soon as she walks in the door from school. This prevents the spread of many diseases.
- **Make sure your child** gets enough sleep. Kindergartners need between 10 and 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours.
- **Avoid exposing your child** to people—outside your own family—who are already sick.

Source: M. Popkin and others, *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds*, Active Parenting Publishers.