

Early Childhood Parents[®] Lunenburg County Schools

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make the difference!



Boost your preschooler's brain power just by talking!

Preschoolers whose parents talk to them a lot not only have better language skills, they also develop the brain power needed for school success. Daily exposure to words builds brain pathways. And these pathways boost a child's ability to think and learn.

To build your child's brain power:

- **Sharpen her listening skills.** Ask your child to listen to the sounds around you. Does she hear the clock ticking? The airplane flying? The dog panting?
- **Talk about everything** you do together. Describe your actions as you set the table or pour milk. Name your child's body parts as you dress her. "Socks go on your feet. Shirt goes over your head."
- **Talk about the sounds** she makes. Clapping hands. Splashing in the tub. Stomping feet.
- **Don't use baby talk.** Speak clearly and correctly.
- **Follow her lead.** Talk and play with your child as long as she shows interest. Focus on the words and objects that *she's* focusing on at the moment.
- **Be an active listener.** When your child speaks, stop what you're doing and really listen.
- **Check out any concerns.** If you have questions about your child's language development, talk to her pediatrician.

Source: "Building brain power: Executive function and young children," *Better Kid Care*, PennState Extension, nswc.com/ec_brain.

Teach your preschooler to persevere



Children need perseverance to do well throughout school and beyond. Here are four keys

to teaching it:

1. **Motivation.** What makes your preschooler tick? What doesn't? Does he love books? Does he have a hard time sitting still? Match learning activities to his personality.
2. **Practice.** Give your child practice meeting reasonable expectations. When people have opportunities to push through challenges, they see that it's worth the effort.
3. **Support.** Help your child plan for success. What small steps must he take to reach a big goal? When your child struggles or fails, be his cheerleader. Encourage perseverance and praise his progress.
4. **Modeling.** Set an example for your child to follow. You don't have to make everything look easy. Instead, show him that you are willing to keep trying and finish difficult tasks. Send the message: "I'm going to give this my all, no matter what."

Autumn leaves are wonderful learning tools for your child



Trees shed many leaves in the fall. Why not use the leaves for some great learning activities with your preschooler?

Help your child:

- **Collect different kinds** of leaves. Count the leaves collected from each type of tree.
- **Sort leaves** by size, color and shape.
- **Match leaves.** Set out two or three of each kind of leaf. Let your child find the matches.
- **Make leaf rubbings.** Put a green leaf under a sheet of paper. Rub the paper with crayon and watch a leaf appear.
- **Read picture books** and poems about trees and leaves.

- **Create hand leaves.** Trace your child's hands onto pieces of construction paper in fall colors. Cut them out to make "maple leaves."
- **Have a leaf race.** Use straws to blow leaves across the table. See who can blow his leaf across the table first.
- **Play "Leaf Hide and Seek."** Hide a leaf in the room. Tell your child when he's getting *hot* or *cold* in relation to the leaf.

"Play is our brain's favorite way of learning."

—Diane Ackerman

Tap into your preschooler's interests to build attention span



Children (like nearly everyone else) find it easier to pay attention to activities that interest them. Choose an activity

your child enjoys. Then look for ways to keep her focused on it for increasing periods of time.

Staying focused on an activity will be an important skill for school success. So will the ability to turn an area of interest into a project.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Extend your story time.** Instead of looking at a short picture book, try reading a longer story or a beginning reader's chapter book over a period of several nights. Each night, remind your child of where you are in the story. Then

explain that you are going to read on to find out what happens to the characters.

- **Work together on a jigsaw puzzle.** Try one with about 25 pieces. Move on to more complicated puzzles once your child masters these. Remember, there is no need to finish a puzzle in one sitting! Attention span also involves coming back to a project after you have put it aside.
- **Try a multi-step art project—** such as making a clay animal. Help your preschooler shape an animal out of clay. Allow the clay to dry and harden. On another day, let your child paint the animal. Let the paint dry. Then help your child apply fur or eyes using glue and yarn or bits of paper.

Are you teaching your preschooler to love books?



Long before children read independently, they learn that books are sources of fun. This is a critical step toward reading.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're making books enjoyable:

- ___ **1. Do you spend time reading** with your child every day, such as at bedtime?
- ___ **2. Do you choose books** your child likes, even if it means reading the same book over and over?
- ___ **3. Do you read with enthusiasm,** using different voices for characters and situations?
- ___ **4. Do you talk about what you read,** allowing your child to ask questions, point out pictures and recite familiar parts?
- ___ **5. Do you visit the library** with your child regularly to browse and check out new books?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are building excitement about reading. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Set limits on TV time and choose quality programming



Too much television can harm your preschooler. It can lead to obesity and low school achievement. Time spent watching

TV takes away from developing creativity and social skills.

However, the right television choices can actually help your child. Some preschool children who watch “Sesame Street” excel in identifying numbers and letters in first grade. They’re more eager to learn, too.

To make TV viewing a positive activity:

- **Limit** your child’s recreational screen time to two hours per day. This includes TV, tablets, computers and video games.

- **Watch** television shows with your child. Talk about the values and lessons shown in programs you view—like sharing and kindness.
- **Select** educational programs. Review your TV guide. Tune in to public television for quality programming.
- **Avoid** violent programs. Young children can’t always tell the difference between what’s real and what’s “entertainment.”
- **Monitor** what your child sees and hears on the news. Images of war, disaster and violent crime can disturb him.

Source: “Media and Children,” American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/ec_media.

Responsibility and autonomy lead to academic success



When your preschooler behaves and thinks independently, he is being *autonomous*. And studies show that this

trait, along with responsibility, leads to school success.

Children who have learned responsibility and autonomy are better adjusted. They make friends more easily and do better in school. Autonomous preschoolers even tend to have higher scores on reading tests. To help your child develop these important traits:

- **Assign regular chores.** Your child could take out the trash, feed a pet or set the table. Show him how to do the chore first, and help him the first few times.
- **Keep expectations realistic.** Try to see things from your child’s point of view. A four-year-old

cannot make complex decisions or handle responsibilities that have more than a few steps.

- **Offer choices.** Within limits, let your child decide what book you’ll read to him, what clothes he’ll wear or what chore he would prefer to complete.
- **Give reasons.** Explain *why* you want your child to do something he’s resisting. For example, it’s important to pick up his clothes to keep them clean and neat.
- **Avoid using bribes.** Don’t say, “If you pick up your toys, I’ll take you out for ice cream.” Rather than teaching respect or responsibility, bribes encourage your child to focus on what he can get.

Source: M. Joussemet and others, “A Longitudinal Study of the Relationship of Maternal Autonomy Support to Children’s Adjustment and Achievement in School,” *Journal of Personality*, Blackwell Publishing.

Q: My daughter is in her last year of preschool and will be starting kindergarten next September. Her preschool teacher has suggested we spend this school year working on her self-control. How can we do that?

Questions & Answers

A: Kindergarten teachers are used to dealing with five-year-olds and do not expect “perfect” behavior. But your child will have an easier time at school if she can do things like wait her turn, follow directions and express her feelings in appropriate ways.

To help your daughter develop self-control, encourage her to:

- **Wait for what she wants.** At this age, your child should not expect you to jump to take care of her every want. Don’t end a phone call just because she wants a snack and a drink. Say, “Unless you are hurt or something bad is happening (such as a fire), you need to wait until Mommy is off the phone.”
- **Work before she plays.** Almost always, people must work before they play. This will be the case when your child gets to school. Give her simple responsibilities to fulfill before she gets to play. For example, she should dress, eat breakfast and brush her teeth before she starts playing each morning.
- **Use words to express feelings.** When you see your child begin to get upset, stop her. Ask her to tell you how she feels *before* she gets out of control. Help her express her feelings in an acceptable way, such as by drawing a picture.

The Kindergarten Experience

Teachers share the secrets of school success



Parents often wonder what kindergarten teachers really expect from families and students. Experienced

teachers want parents to:

- **Keep in touch.** Teachers want to know how home life may affect a child's school performance. They want to hear how school is affecting home life, too.
- **Learn about expectations.** Schools have changed over the years. Kindergarten these days is more like first grade was in the past. In addition to discussing letters and numbers, focus on your child's interests, curiosity and problem solving.
- **Get involved.** Attend school events. Read with your child. Do homework together. Play creative games.
- **Encourage writing.** Writing is an important activity for kindergartners. This leads to forming letters, words and even sentences. Start with simple words, such as your child's name.
- **Emphasize self-discipline.** Young children have lots of impulses to resist. Help your child practice this skill at home by taking turns and sharing.
- **Be adventurous.** Instead of spending time in front of electronic devices, exercise, visit new places, talk and play. Make the most of your time together!

Source: "What Kindergarten Teachers Wish Parents Knew," Scholastic, Inc., niswc.com/ec_teachers.

Create daily routines to foster a successful kindergarten year

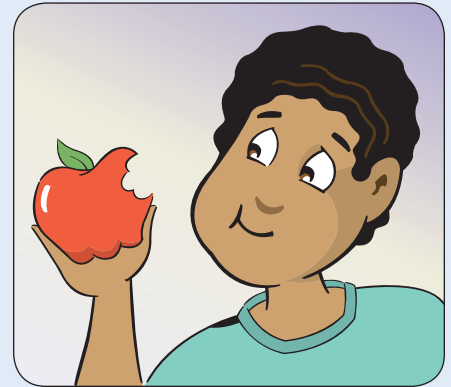
Following routines will help your child be ready to learn throughout his school career. Below are a few routines that you and your child can follow.

Before school, have your child:

1. **Wake up at the same time** each day.
2. **Make his bed** or pull up covers.
3. **Eat breakfast.**
4. **Get dressed** and brush his teeth.
5. **Read or play** until it's time to leave for school.

After school, have your child:

1. **Empty his backpack** and show you important papers.
2. **Unwind** and eat a healthy snack.
3. **Complete homework** or read together for 10 minutes.
4. **Play.** Encourage outdoor play and limit television viewing.



Before bed, help your child:

1. **Put his backpack** near the door.
2. **Make his lunch** if needed. Put it in the refrigerator.
3. **Choose clothes** for tomorrow.
4. **Take a bath,** brush his teeth and put on his pajamas.
5. **Read a story together** before bedtime.

Homework in kindergarten can help develop positive habits



Some kindergarten teachers assign homework to help children establish positive habits.

Completing assignments will be a regular part of your child's experience as a student. Starting a homework routine now will set a precedent for her future school career.

A kindergartner's homework should take just a few minutes each day. It should be fun and should help your child develop a sense of responsibility and accomplishment.

Her homework may be to:

- **Practice saying her name** and address.
- **Find three things** that begin with the letter "M."
- **Find and bring** in two different kinds of leaves.

Some teachers wait until later in the year to start assigning homework. But whether your child's teacher assigns it or not, don't forget the most important homework of all: Read with your child every day!

Source: "Research Spotlight on Homework," National Education Association, niswc.com/ec_homework.