



Fun activities bring out the natural scientist in your child

Young children love to figure out how the world works. As they practice observing, testing and predicting, they build important scientific skills.

Here are some activities to try:

- **Have your preschooler** use a magnifying glass to inspect things up close. She can look at things like pinecones, acorns or the seeds in an apple. Then she can draw pictures to keep in a “science journal.”
- **Observe animals.** Challenge your child to tell you everything she knows about a bird or a squirrel.
- **Talk about the weather.** What is snow? Why do we feel colder when the wind blows?
- **Put some snow in a pan.** Bring it inside to show how the warm air melts it into water. Put the pan in the freezer and show how the cold air makes the water solid again.
- **Experiment with toys.** Roll a ball across a flat surface, then down a hill. When does it travel faster? Why?
- **Help your child** figure out which toys sink and which float during bath time.
- **Drop different colors** of food coloring into cups of water. What happens when you mix the colors?
- **Get two sheets of paper.** Crumple one into a ball. Drop it. Then drop the flat piece of paper. Which drops faster? Why?

Model listening skills for your preschooler



Sometimes young children talk ... and talk ... and talk! And what they say doesn't always seem to make

sense. Even so, it's important to pay attention.

When you listen to your child, you are helping him build his language skills and teaching him how to be a good listener, too. These skills will help him succeed when he begins school.

To show that you're listening:

- **Remove distractions.** Offer your attention, even if it means putting down a book, turning off the computer or ignoring your phone.
- **Do not interrupt.** When your child is talking, give him all the time he needs. It can take a while for preschoolers to put their thoughts into words.
- **Ask questions** after your child has finished his thought to make sure you understood. Restate what he said.
- **Pay attention** to your child's body language. Take note of his tone of voice, facial expressions and behavior. Often, it's not *what* children say, it's *how* they say it.

Encourage your preschooler to make New Year's resolutions



Should your preschooler make some New Year's resolutions of her own? The American Academy of Pediatrics says *yes*.

This group of doctors for babies, children and teens has some specific ideas to offer, too. Some of their ideas will help your child stay healthy. They will also help her avoid spreading colds or the flu at preschool. Others reinforce good habits your child should be using at home and school.

Your child could:

- **Spend less time** on digital devices and more time looking at books.
- **Wash her hands** after using the bathroom and before eating.
- **Pick up her toys.**
- **Never tease an animal**, including a family pet.

- **Find a physical activity** (like playing tag, jumping rope or riding a big wheel) that she likes and do it at least three times a week.
- **Brush her teeth** twice a day.
- **Be nice to classmates** who need a friend or look sad or lonely.
- **Talk with a trusted adult** when she needs help or is scared.

Source: "Healthy New Year's Resolutions for Children & Teens," American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/ec_healthyresolve.

"The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written. We can help write that story by setting goals."

—Melody Beattie

Playing board games can help your child focus and follow rules



Most preschoolers are ready to start playing board games. These games are fun and can help your child

build skills such as concentration, cooperation and sportsmanship.

Yard sales are a great place to find board games, often for a dollar or less. To choose games that will keep your child's interest:

- **Check the box** for the appropriate age for players. Your child will get the most out of games that have simple rules and are geared to his age and skill level.
- **Look for games** with themes that will appeal to your child. Most preschoolers enjoy games about animals more than games about money, for example.

- **Encourage your child** to count as he moves around the board or to name the colors he sees on the game. Preschoolers like to show off what they know.
- **Help your child** use his thinking skills once he knows the game. "What do you think will happen if we draw this card?" "Which space should I move to now?"

To help your child be a good sport when he plays:

- **Explain that rules** are important in games (and in life) and encourage him to follow them.
- **Remind him** that nobody wins all the time. Some children take losing very hard. So cheer your child on when he plays fair, follows directions and takes turns—not just when he wins.

Are you building your preschooler's independence?



Parents are naturally protective. But it's also important to let young children explore the world and develop

a sense of independence. This prepares them for school and other responsibilities.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're balancing your child's safety and freedom:

- ___ **1. Do you supervise** your child's playtime with friends without hovering over them?
- ___ **2. Do you offer your child** simple choices, such as "Would you like to wear your blue sweater or the red one?"
- ___ **3. Do you give your child** a chance to solve minor problems before you step in to help?
- ___ **4. Do you show interest** in your child's opinions and respect them, even if you disagree?
- ___ **5. Do you play** with your child but also encourage independent play?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are encouraging independence. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Making good decisions requires lots of patience and practice



Success in school (and life) hinges on the ability to make good decisions. When your child is in school, she will have

to make lots of decisions—whether or not to observe classroom rules, whether or not to finish homework, etc. Her choices will affect her education and her future.

To get your child started on the path to good decision-making:

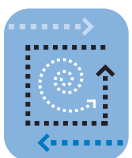
- **Offer choices.** Ask your child if she would like to have yogurt or an egg for breakfast. Would she like to go to the park or to the library on Saturday?
- **Ask for her advice.** You might ask your child to listen to music from two different radio stations and decide which you should listen to. Listen to the station she selects. Your child will feel

empowered by deciding something for you.

- **Involve her in planning.** If your child is having a friend over, encourage her to plan what they could do together. Offer a list of acceptable activities to choose from.
- **Provide explanations.** Making good choices takes lots of practice, and sometimes you will have to overrule your preschooler's decisions. When you do, be sure to take the time to explain *why*. Focus on the consequences of her choice. "I know you'd like to watch that movie, but it's scary and it would upset you. When you're older, we can think about it again."

Source: J. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, Ph.D., *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Help your child understand the concepts of *beginning* and *end*



An understanding of the concepts of *beginning* and *end* will help your child flourish in the classroom. Many

school activities are broken up into segments that have a beginning and an end.

There are unlimited ways to help your preschooler learn and master these concepts. Here are just a few:

- **Talk about them** in your daily life. Remind your child what happens at the beginning and end of a meal or a bath. Story time is another great opportunity—all stories have a beginning and an end.
- **Ask your child questions.** When you get in the car and buckle up, ask her

if you are at the beginning or end of your car trip. When you arrive at your destination, ask again.

- **Play games.** Many children's board games have pathways that the game pieces must travel. There is a beginning and an end to these pathways.
- **Create simple mazes** on a piece of paper. Guide your child's hand and show her how the pencil travels from the beginning of the maze, all the way to the end.

As your child grows, you can develop these concepts further and build thinking skills by introducing her to more complicated mazes.

Source: B. Daniel, *The Playful Child*, School Specialty Publishing.

Q: By early next month, I must decide if I will register my son for kindergarten or for another year of preschool. He has a summer birthday and I'm just not sure he will be ready for kindergarten. What should I consider as I make this decision?

Questions & Answers

A: You are not alone! Many parents wonder if their children have the maturity needed for a successful year in kindergarten. One reason may be an undue focus on academics.

Academic skills are the least of what your child needs to enter kindergarten. They are a big part of what he will learn there.

So what does a child need? Three important elements of kindergarten success are: self-control, social skills and enthusiasm for learning.

You'll know if your child has these characteristics, or is making progress toward them, by checking to see if he can:

- Wait his turn.
- Follow directions from his preschool teacher and other adults.
- Get along with classmates and friends.
- Work alone on class projects under his teacher's direction.
- Concentrate on a task for a few minutes at a time.
- Manage basic personal needs, such as hanging up his coat and using the bathroom.
- Sit still and enjoy listening to an adult read a short story.

If you are still unsure if your child will be ready for kindergarten, or if you have concerns about his development, make an appointment to talk with his preschool teacher or pediatrician.

The Kindergarten Experience

Support your kindergartner's reading skills



Most children learn how to read between kindergarten and second grade. However, there are often a few

advanced readers in a kindergarten class—which can make other students' parents anxious.

If your child isn't reading yet, don't worry—he'll get there! To support his budding reading skills:

- **Have a daily reading time.** Read stories and poems together. Sometimes, ask your child to retell a story in his own words. Or see if he can act it out.
- **Use artwork** to promote reading. When your child draws a picture, ask him to tell you a story about it. Write down the story as he tells it to you.
- **Play word games.** Say, "I'm thinking of something that is red." See if your child can guess what you're thinking about. Or see who can come up with the longest list of rhyming words.

There are a few signs that a child may have reading problems. Talk to the teacher if your child can't do these things:

- **Tell left from right.** It's important when following the text in reading.
- **Identify common shapes** like circles and squares. This is the same skill he'll need to see the difference between the letter *d* and the letter *b*.
- **Recognize beginning sounds.** Say a word like *monkey* and emphasize the *mmm* sound. Have him repeat the first sound.

Build your child's social skills for success in elementary school

Teachers consistently say that social skills are more important for kindergarten success than being able to read or hold a pencil. Yet, they report that many students don't have these skills.

Kindergartners with strong social skills get along well with others, have self-control and are confident—all of which allows them to focus on learning.

While your child has many opportunities to practice social skills at school, you can also help him strengthen them at home.

Encourage your child to:

- **Play and cooperate with others** in a group. Invite school friends over or take your kindergartner to a playground.
- **Share with friends and family.** Encourage him to take turns, let others play with his toys and offer to share treats.



- **Empathize with others' feelings.** Understanding how others feel will help him become more caring. Ask him how a character in a book feels after something bad happens.

Help your kindergartner have a positive attitude about school



When your child enjoys something, it's only natural that she will want to continue to participate in it. To build your child's love of school:

- **Ask her what she likes** best about school. Spend time every day talking about how much she is learning there.
- **Encourage her to bond** with her teachers. Talk about how much you like them. Remind

your child that her teachers care about her and want to help her learn!

- **Help her get to know** her school friends better. Consider inviting a classmate to come over to play one day. Or allow your child to invite a school friend to participate in one of your family activities.

Source: J. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.