



## Four ways to support learning and have some family fun

**F**ebruary is the perfect month to instill a love of learning in your preschooler. It's easy to do. One learning activity each day—just a few minutes daily for about one month—is all it takes to get your whole family into the habit of learning.

Here are some activity ideas to help your family get started:

**1. Have a family reading night.**

Do this often, since reading is the foundation for learning. Let your child look at a favorite book while you read something you enjoy. After 10 minutes or so, ask your child to tell you about his book. Then read it aloud to him.

**2. Practice math at mealtimes.** Place a raisin on the table and say to your

child, "Here is one raisin." Add two more raisins and ask, "Now how many do you have?" Show him how the two halves of his sandwich are rectangles (or triangles). What shape do they make when he puts them together?

**3. Create a weekly craft challenge.**

With your child, find things around the house to reuse for a project. He could cover empty cans with paper to turn them into pencil holders. Or, he could turn empty toilet paper rolls into works of art.

**4. Exchange notes with family.** Your child can tell you what he wants to say, then draw a picture and (if he can) sign his name. Family members can respond in writing.

## Sportsmanship is important for young children



Many children begin organized sports in early childhood—some by age four or five. Even if your

child doesn't play a sport, she needs to learn how to win and lose gracefully.

To teach sportsmanship:

- **Focus on fun.** Young children should participate in sports to learn, have fun and get exercise. If your child does this, she's a winner, no matter what the score.
- **Practice good manners.** Even when adults focus on fun, kids are aware of who does "well" and who does not. Teach your child to say "good game" or "good job" to teammates and opponents—win or lose.
- **Empathize.** Let your child know that it is OK to feel frustrated—but that it's no reason to quit. "Sometimes you catch the ball, and sometimes you don't. It's hard to feel good when you don't catch it, but don't give up!"

**Source:** I. Kamber, "The Importance of Sports for Children," Novak Djokovic Foundation, [niswc.com/ec\\_good.sport](http://niswc.com/ec_good.sport).

# Spark your child's creativity by making homemade valentines



This Valentine's Day, give your child the gift of art and creativity. Sit down with your preschooler and create some fun, artistic

valentines together. You can:

- **Tape a scrap of textured cloth** to a table. Lace works well. Put a sheet of thin white paper on top. Give your child a red crayon and have him rub on the white paper so that the texture of the scrap underneath appears. Fold this and turn it into a card, or cut it into a heart shape and tape it to the front of a card.
- **Paint on unusual surfaces.** Your child could paint on foil with thick red paint. Cut out a heart from the painted aluminum foil, and tape it to the front of a folded piece of paper.
- **Cut out heart shapes.** Let your child trace and color the shapes. Show him how to overlap the shapes to

make different designs. He can also form them into heart "people" or "animals." Experiment with different materials for tracing, such as paints and chalk.

- **Create a woven heart.** Help your preschooler cut out the shape of a heart from a piece of sturdy construction paper. Use a hole-punch, to make holes all along the edge of the heart. Then, let your child weave a piece of yarn or colorful ribbon in and out of the holes.

**"I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way—things I had no words for."**

—Georgia O'Keeffe

# Introduce your preschooler to the beauty of different cultures



To get along in school and in this world, your child must be able to relate to people who are different from her.

Make an effort to introduce her to people from different cultures and countries. Talk about their families, jobs and traditions and encourage your child to ask questions.

To promote the value of diversity:

- **Find child-friendly songs** with simple melodies from other countries. Sing them with your child.
- **Eat at restaurants** featuring foods and traditions from other cultures.
- **Teach your child** how to say a few words and phrases—such as *hello*, *thank you* and *good night*—in other

languages. Use them with your child throughout the day.

- **Read children's books** from a variety of cultures and places, like Barbara M. Jooose's *Mama, Do You Love Me?*
- **Find books** that give familiar stories a cultural twist, like Susan Lowell's *Three Little Javelinas*. It's a Native American rendition of the *Three Little Pigs*.
- **Decorate your child's room** with photos of children from other cultures who are her age.
- **Look for cultural events** in your community. Theater performances, fairs and museums can provide a wealth of diverse learning opportunities for young children.

# Are you helping your child handle transitions?



Transitioning from one activity to another is a regular part of school. However, many young children have a difficult

time with this process.

Are you making transitions easier for your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you give** your child notice before a change occurs? "In five minutes, we're going to leave."

\_\_\_ **2. Do you tell** your child what will happen before and after events? "We'll get ready and go to the store. After that, we'll read a book."

\_\_\_ **3. Do you offer** your child a role in transitions? "We're leaving now. Will you please shut the door?"

\_\_\_ **4. Do you use** objects to help your child move from one activity to another? "Let's take this book home to show Daddy."

\_\_\_ **5. Do you follow** goodbye rituals? "Kiss Grandma. Then we'll go."

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are doing a good job helping your child make transitions. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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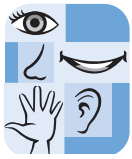
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# Teach your child about senses with taste and smell experiments



Without realizing it, many of us confuse our senses of taste and smell. They're so closely connected that sometimes we don't notice which sense we're using.

To help your child learn more about these senses:

- **Try to identify foods** by how they taste and smell. Have your child close his eyes and hold his nose. Place a small amount of fruit, such as orange, grapefruit, or lime, on his tongue. Can he tell what it is? Now have him smell the food with his eyes still closed. It might be easier to identify this way.
- **Make foods** with and without salt. You might be surprised to learn that

a little salt can make sweet foods taste sweeter. That's why it's in so many desserts. Make a cup of hot chocolate with milk, cocoa powder and sugar. Then make another cup the same way, adding a pinch of salt. Which tastes sweeter?

- **Keep track of things** you and your child smell for a day. It's fun to see how many he can recognize by smell, such as flowers, clean laundry and food items. Help him think of words that describe what he smells.
- **Share a fun fact** with your child: Different parts of the tongue taste certain things better. The tip is extra sensitive to sweet things. The middle senses salty and sour best. And the back is sensitive to bitter tastes.

## Enriching experiences can boost children's intelligence



More and more research shows that children's intelligence—once thought to be fixed and determined by genetics—actually continues to develop throughout childhood and into adulthood. Parents play a critical role in that change—not just by passing on genes, but also by giving their children valuable experiences.

Keep these points in mind:

- **The brain grows significantly** during the preschool years. But this is not the time to overwhelm your child with academics. Rather, it's the time to lay a foundation for learning. You can do that by talking to your child and taking her places with you. Read together and encourage creative play.
- **Learning by doing is critical.** To you, sorting socks may be a

boring chore. But when your child does it, she is learning to compare and classify. Setting the table helps her recognize patterns. Measuring ingredients helps her practice a key math skill. Feeding a pet fish boosts fine motor skills and a feeling of satisfaction in accomplishing a task.

- **Relationships matter.** A child who feels connected to other people is also likely to feel connected to learning. Demonstrate your love for your child with words and actions. Give her your undivided attention and listen attentively when she talks. This will help her feel secure and develop the self-confidence she needs to take on learning challenges.

**Source:** A. Stuart, "Can You Boost Your Child's IQ? What makes kids smart may surprise you," WebMD, nswc.com/ec\_brain.boost.

**Q:** I have heard that using consequences, rather than punishment, is a better way to discipline. I'd like to try this with my daughter, but I need help. How exactly are consequences different from punishment?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Great question! At first, punishment and consequences seem similar. But look deeper, and you will see some important differences.

Punishment:

- **Often happens in anger.** "You broke my vase! Go to your room!"
- **Often comes with a lecture.** "How many times have I told you not to run in the house?"
- **Does not always relate** to what happened. How does going to the bedroom relate to breaking a vase?

Consequences:

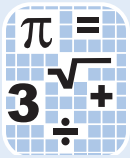
- **Involve empathy.** "I know you feel bad about running in the house and breaking the vase."
- **Focus only on the behavior** at hand, without bringing up past mistakes. "You were running in the house, which is not allowed."
- **Relate directly** to the misbehavior. "I won't be able to buy you that book at the bookstore today because we need to use that money to replace the vase."
- **Result in your child's learning** an important lesson: If I run in the house, I may break something that needs to be replaced. Replacing things costs money that could be used for doing something fun.

If you make reasonable consequences the cornerstone of your discipline, you and your child will both benefit.



# The Kindergarten Experience

## Reinforce basic geometry with your child



Kindergarten math involves much more than numbers and counting. Many parents are surprised to find out that it also includes learning the basics of *geometry*.

In a nutshell, geometry is the study of shapes, sizes, patterns and positions. And your child probably knew something about it before she even started school!

When she names a shape she sees, your child is using geometry. When she uses words like *above*, *below*, *beside*, *in front of*, *behind* and *next to*, she's also using geometry.

There are many ways parents can reinforce kindergarten geometry. Here are just a few:

- **Go on a shape scavenger hunt.** Look around your home with your child and name the shapes you see: round table, rectangular place mat, square napkin. See how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find. Look for shapes when you are outside, too.
- **Learn about lines.** Talk about *horizontal lines* which run from side to side and *vertical lines* which run from top to bottom. Then give your child a few pictures or illustrations to look at. How many horizontal and vertical lines can she find?
- **Practice positional words.** Ask your child questions about the position of everyday objects. Is the dog *in front of* or *behind* the chair? Is the clock hanging *above* or *below* the shelf?

## Strategies to maximize your parent-teacher conference

A conference with your child's kindergarten teacher is an exciting opportunity to learn about how your child is doing in school. To help things go well:

- **Arrive prepared.** Bring a list of questions and thoughts for the teacher. You are the "expert" on your child, and the teacher values your input.
- **Be on time.** Conferences are often scheduled back-to-back. Arriving late may affect the amount of time you have with the teacher.
- **Have a positive attitude.** You and the teacher are a team. If your child is struggling, solving the problem is easier when you and the teacher work together.
- **Ask questions.** If you are confused about certain elementary school terms or concepts, speak up.



- **Set goals.** Ask what you can do at home to support your child's learning. Plan to keep in touch with the teacher about your child's progress.

## Motivate your kindergartner without resorting to bribes



Have you ever made a deal with your kindergartner? "If you clean out your backpack, I'll take you to the store." "If you share with your sister, I'll give you a cookie." Deals like these may seem like effective motivators for kids. But think again.

When you present an idea to your child in this way, you are offering a *bribe*—not motivation. A bribe doesn't teach your child respect or responsibility. Instead, it teaches him that "If I do what Dad wants, I will get something for it."

To avoid falling into the bribe trap:

- **Change the way you say things.** For example, use the word *when* instead of *if*. This puts the emphasis on what you expect your child to do, rather than allowing him a choice.
- **Explain why the action is helpful or valuable.** "When you clean out your backpack, papers don't get crumpled or lost. Now we won't waste time looking for your worksheet and we will have time to read an extra story."

Source: J. Pawel, *The Parent's Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, Ambris Publishing.