



Curiosity leads to learning and academic achievement

Many families feel pressured to teach children academics at younger and younger ages. They often use direct teaching tools, such as flash cards and worksheets.

However, studies show that young children do a lot of important learning when they are given opportunities to explore and discover things on their own. And research links curiosity to greater academic achievement.

To foster a sense of curiosity in your preschooler:

1. Ask, don't tell. When adults explain everything to children, there is little for them to find out on their own. Instead of directing your child, ask questions like, "Where could you put the toy cars so they will go really fast?"

2. Set an example. When you demonstrate that you like to try new things, your child will be more likely to want to try new things, too. Hold up the box from a jigsaw puzzle, for example, and say "Wow, did you know we can make this picture? That's so cool! Let's try to put a couple of pieces together."

3. Cheer your child on. Be excited when your preschooler figures something out independently. Say things like, "I love the colors you created when you mixed the paints. I bet your preschool teacher would love to see your picture."

Source: P.E. Shah and others, "Early childhood curiosity and kindergarten reading and math academic achievement," *Pediatric Research*.

Make reading a priority in your family



When you read with your child daily, you're doing much more than preparing your preschooler to learn to read. You're also boosting the chances of success in writing, language and math.

However, in one study, only 51 percent of parents said they read to their preschoolers every day—a drop from 69 percent just five years earlier. Researchers link the decline to preschoolers' increased use of digital devices.

Experts recommend that you:

- **Set limits** on recreational use of screen devices.
- **Find time to read together** every day. Make this a fun part of your routine. Read books with enthusiasm. Let your child turn the pages.
- **Visit the library together.** Attend events for children and ask the librarian for book recommendations.
- **Surround your child** with words. Keep a variety of reading materials handy so your child can enjoy them anytime.

Source: A. Flood, "Only Half of Preschool Children Being Read to Daily, UK Study Finds," *Guardian News*.

Head outside to observe nature's treasures with your preschooler



Preschoolers have a way of helping adults appreciate little things in nature, such as the beauty of a spider web, a pine cone or an icicle. And observing is an important school skill.

Maximize your child's observation skills by exploring outside together. Remember to dress warmly and be mindful of safety when investigating nature in the winter. Then, follow these four steps:

1. **Bring your phone** or drawing supplies to capture images of what you and your child discover. Encourage your child to look for interesting items. Say, "Let's try to find 10 things outside that we've never noticed before!"

2. **Take or draw a picture** when your child sees something new. "There are paw prints in the snow!" or "Look at that bright red cardinal!" Let your child help record the memory.
3. **Look at the pictures** when you get home. Review and talk about what they are.
4. **Do more research.** Go online together and see if you can learn more about what you found outside.

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

—Albert Einstein

Keep your preschooler active during the winter months



Preschoolers need physical activity. They use it to build muscles, bones, confidence and brain power. (Exercise "feeds" the brain glucose, oxygen and water.) The best physical activities are both fun and beneficial.

Make physical activity a daily part of your preschooler's routine—even when it's too cold to go outside. Here are a few indoor activities to try:

- **Follow the leader.** Take turns leading each other in big movements, such as waving arms, stomping feet and hopping.
- **Obstacle course.** Create a safe layout that requires crawling, jumping and more. Use words like *over*, *under*, *high* and *low*.
- **Hula hop.** Suggest your child hop in and out of a hula hoop.
- **Dance party.** Turn on upbeat music and encourage your child to move around to the beat.
- **Stoptlight.** Stand at a distance from your child. When you say, "Green light," your child should run toward you. When you say, "Red light," your child should immediately stop.
- **Tag.** Chase each other around a limited space to ensure that your child will run, pivot and duck.
- **Scavenger hunt.** Hide small objects around the room and give your child clues to find them. Add a time limit so your child moves quickly.
- **Balloon volleyball.** Hit a balloon back and forth with your child across a line or over a small table.
- **Beanbag toss.** Have your child toss beanbags at a target or play beanbag toss games together.

Does your home environment support learning?



Families are children's first teachers. So that means your home is your child's first school. Are you supporting

learning in your home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you talk** to your child about things that interest you and about new things you've learned?
- ___ 2. **Do you encourage** your child's interests and offer praise for trying new things?
- ___ 3. **Do you keep** a variety of reading material around the house, and let your child see you reading regularly?
- ___ 4. **Do you provide** learning tools, such as paper, crayons, building blocks, puzzles, safety scissors and paste?
- ___ 5. **Do you replace** screen time with learning activities, such as reading, talking and exploring each day?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are promoting learning in your home. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Simple ways to strengthen your child's sense of responsibility



Teaching young children how to be responsible can take great patience. After all, learning takes a lot of trial and error.

However, the more you support your child's efforts, the more your preschooler will accomplish at home and at school. Your child will see that hard work gets results—and that feels great. To promote responsibility:

- **Set expectations.** Clearly outline the rules you expect your child to follow. Talk about what will happen if your child doesn't follow them.
- **Be consistent** when enforcing consequences. Discuss why it's important for people to take responsibility and be accountable when they make mistakes.
- **Give responsibility.** Let your child help with age-appropriate jobs, such as picking up toys and sorting laundry. Allow your child to make some decisions, such as choosing between two shirts.
- **Embrace mistakes.** Allow your child to face small challenges, such as pouring a drink. The milk may spill in the process, but that's OK. Talk about what your child can do differently next time.
- **Develop empathy.** Encourage your child to imagine how others feel. Talk about how people should treat others the way they would like to be treated.
- **Reward maturity.** As your child becomes more responsible, adjust rules and expectations. Don't forget to compliment your child's efforts.

Explore colors, patterns and textures with art activities



Creating artwork allows your child's imagination to soar. That's why it's a great idea to build time for art into your daily

routine. You can also use this creative time to help your preschooler learn about colors, patterns and textures.

Here are a few fun ideas to try with your preschooler:

- **Veggie patterns.** Have your child dip sliced vegetables—carrots, celery, potatoes and broccoli—into paint and then press them onto paper. Discuss what you notice about their patterns.
- **New colors.** Check out a library book about the color wheel. Or, find a color wheel online. Notice how mixing primary colors (red, yellow and blue) creates secondary colors (green, orange and purple). Try it together with paints or food coloring!
- **Touchable art.** What happens when you mix textures with paint? Have your child add salt or sand to paint. Think about other items you could add to the paint, such as crushed cereal.
- **Lots of dots.** Show your child how to paint with dots. Start by using a pencil to draw a shape. Then, have your child use a cotton swab to cover the shape with dots of paint.
- **Crayon rubbings.** Place a textured object, such as a coin or a comb, under a piece of paper and have your child rub over it with crayons to create impressions of its patterns and textures.

Q: I have taught my preschooler some basic safety rules, such as looking both ways and holding hands when crossing the street. But now that my child is nearly five, I think it's time to work on some more advanced rules. Are there any that will help my child next fall in kindergarten?

Questions & Answers

A: It is great that you have been working on safety with your child. And you are correct: Five-year-olds can handle more advanced safety measures, and they are usually part of a kindergarten curriculum as well.

Introduce your child to these essential safety practices:

- **Saying first and last name.** Your child should also learn the first and last names of family members who live in your home. "You call me Grandma. But what is my name?" Talk about when it's OK to share this information, and with whom.
- **Reciting home address** and telephone number. Try to make up a little rhyme or song that includes this information. Research shows that many children learn well through music.
- **Protecting against illnesses.** Demonstrate how to wash hands and talk about the key times to do it, such as after using the bathroom or before eating.
- **Dialing 911** in the event of an emergency. Demonstrate how to use the phone. Then, teach your child to dial this number *only* in an emergency.

An emergency can be hard to explain to a young child, so be specific: "Dial the number when I tell you to, in the event of a fire and anytime you are talking to me and I am physically unable to answer you."

The Kindergarten Experience

Relate numbers and math to the real world



When you show kindergartners that the things they are learning in school are also important in the real world, they will be even more motivated to learn.

This is especially true when it comes to math. To connect math to your child's daily life:

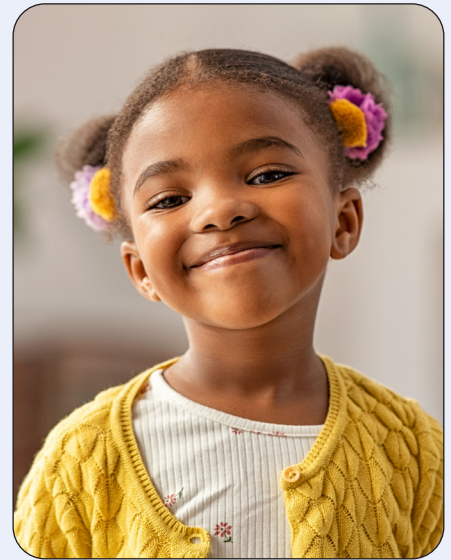
- **Use numbers in conversation.** “We need three potatoes. One, two, three.” “We live two houses away from Tracey.”
- **Cook or bake something.** Demonstrate how to measure an ingredient. Point out the number on the measuring cup. Or, count as you cook—the number of teaspoons of an ingredient, the number of pots and pans.
- **Use the calendar.** Show your child today's date. Each day, count down together to a day your family 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, “Which number is bigger?”
- **Do the laundry.** Ask your child to sort clothing by color. Or, you might have your child separate items by category (socks and towels).
- **Measure.** How much does your child weigh? How many inches tall is your child? Find out together and track growth for a few months.

Be a learning partner in the second half of the school year

Your child is about halfway through the kindergarten year. By now, you may have met teachers, visited the classroom and participated in a parent-teacher conference. The next few months continue to offer opportunities for working with the school.

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- **Talk to the teacher** about your child's school performance. This is especially vital as first grade looms. Ask about literacy, math and social skills. Also ask what skills your child should work on to be ready for first grade.
- **Ask about at-home volunteer opportunities.** This time of year is especially busy for teachers, as they work to plan special activities and prepare students for next year. Ask your child's teacher about ways you can help.



- **Support your child.** The second half of the school year often brings presentations, concerts and other school events families are invited to. Make an effort to attend whenever you can.

The new year is a great time to make learning resolutions



January is the perfect month to start over! Not only is it the first month of a new calendar year—it also falls right in the middle of the school year.

Use this time to look back on the first half of the year. Then, consider making some resolutions to boost your kindergartner's learning.

Your family could resolve to:

- **Get enough sleep every night.** Your kindergartner needs 11 to 12 hours of sleep each night in order to grow and thrive.
- **Limit screen time.** If your child indulged too much over winter break, cut back. Offer fun alternatives to using digital devices.
- **Have weekly family meetings** to promote communication and collaboration. Encourage all family members to participate.
- **Engage in fun activities** that help your child learn, such as putting together puzzles, building with blocks and playing board games. Go to the public library to check out books. Visit a local nursery to identify plants.