

Early Childhood Parents®

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Camden County Public Schools

make the difference!



Invest in your preschooler— spend quality time together

The beginning of preschool is an exciting time for both parents and children. It is also a return to a busier schedule. The school year always comes with a longer to-do list. But spending quality time with your child is still important—and necessary for her school success!

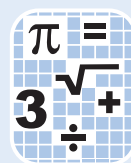
Carve out time every day for certain activities and don't let anything else interfere. Eat at least one meal together every day. Get some exercise together. Read together every day.

In addition, you and your preschooler can:

- **Start a project together.** This can be a jigsaw puzzle, a family newsletter, a weekly baking session—anything you enjoy doing together.

- **Care for something together.** If you have a family pet, such as a dog, walk and feed it together. If you don't have a pet, consider getting an easy pet, such as a fish, and learning about fish care with your child. Or take care of your indoor plants together and tend to them daily.
- **Collect something together.** Consider cards, stamps, coins or something from nature—such as leaves after they change color and start falling.
- **Volunteer together.** Your child is young, but she is not too young to help you bake cookies and deliver them to the local fire station. She can also help you collect clothes that no longer fit her and take them together to a charity.

Make math part of your daily routine



Back-to-school excitement isn't just for "big kids." Preschoolers like getting ready to

learn, too. To make math part of your back-to-school routine, plan fun activities such as:

- **Finding shapes.** Examine school-related items for circles, squares, triangles and more. "The eraser on your pencil is a circle." "What shape are the crackers you're bringing for snack?" "Your sandwich is a square. I'm going to cut it into two triangles."
- **Counting.** Discuss numbers that matter to your child. How many preschool teachers does he have? How many kids are on his class list? How many steps does he climb on the way into school? How many swings are on the playground?
- **Sequencing.** Review your child's new schedule. For example, he wakes up, gets ready for school, carries his bag to the car, has fun with classmates and eats lunch. Draw pictures of the tasks and mix them up. Then ask him to put them back in order!

Research shows the importance of talking to your young child



One of the best things you can do to help your child succeed in school costs absolutely nothing. You only need yourself, your child and your voice. Put more simply: Just talk to your child.

Separate studies have confirmed that children whose parents speak to them often from an early age (birth is best) are more prepared for school. Because they hear so much spoken language, they have large vocabularies. This prepares them to read and write.

Make it a goal to increase the time you spend talking to your child. Here are some ways to achieve it:

- **Identify everything** for your child. Many things are new to a young child. He may know the word *flower*, but does he know *rose*, *pansy*, *tulip*? Tell your child the name of everything you see.
- **Go beyond** asking, “How was preschool?” Often a child will

answer, “Fine,” or “Good,” and the conversation is over. Ask your child questions about specific parts of school: “What games did you play on the playground?” Then, tell him about your day, too.

- **Take your preschooler places.** Whenever possible, include your child on errands. Each time you do, you will find things he doesn't know about yet. Every outing presents an opportunity to talk with your preschooler.

Source: B. Carey, “Talking directly to toddlers strengthens their language skills, Stanford research shows,” Stanford Report, niswc.com/talking_language.

“Children aren't born smart. They're made smart by their parents talking to them.”

—Dana L. Suskind, MD

Studies link physical activity to academic achievement



Research shows a link between physical activity and school success—not to mention better health. To get your preschooler up and moving:

- **Decide to be active.** How does your preschooler have fun? Moving to music? Climbing playground equipment? Playing catch? Kicking a soccer ball? Navigating an obstacle course? At this age, exercise should be all about play—not work.
- **Limit sedentary activities.** These days, preschoolers are entertained

by TV, movies, video games and tablets. Provide some fun alternatives, such as taking nature walks and meeting friends at the park. Make these activities part of your regular routine.

- **Appreciate your child's energy.** Many preschoolers are constantly on the move. Next time you're chasing your child around, take a deep breath and remember it's good for her—and probably for you, too!

Source: J. Adams, “Physical activity may help kids do better in school, studies say,” The Washington Post, niswc.com/activity_success.

Does your home environment promote learning?



Parents are their children's first teachers. So that means your home is your child's first school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are making your home the best school possible:

- ___ **1. Do you tell your child** about things that interest you and about new things you've learned?
- ___ **2. Do you notice** your child's interests and praise her when she learns something new?
- ___ **3. Do you have reading material** around the house, such as books, magazines, newspapers, etc.?
- ___ **4. Do you provide learning tools,** such as paper, crayons, building blocks, puzzles, safety scissors and paste?
- ___ **5. Do you limit TV watching** to make time for other 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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Take note of these screen-time guidelines for your preschooler



You've probably heard of the "one to two hours per day" TV rule. It's the limit suggested for kids two and older by the

American Academy of Pediatrics. But that isn't the *only* viewing advice to remember. Other guidelines include:

- **Watch during the day.** Nighttime TV, computer and video game use can disrupt sleep. Bright lights and excitement aren't part of a calm evening routine. Instead, read favorite books, play soothing music, tell stories or have a quiet conversation before bed.
- **Choose educational programs.** Research links educational shows like *Sesame Street* to verbal, math and school readiness skills. When

possible, boost learning by watching together and discussing what you see. Meanwhile, don't let your child see on-screen violence.

- **Limit exposure to commercials.** There are more ways than ever to avoid ads that influence kids' eating, viewing and other habits. Record programs (and skip the ads), borrow DVDs from the library, consider free "on demand" programming, and watch commercial-free networks. And what if your child is under two? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two shouldn't watch TV at all!

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, "Smart Guide to Kids' TV," nswc.com/aap_screen.

Build reading readiness by connecting letters and sounds



The link between letters and sounds, which educators call *phonemic awareness*, is a key step toward reading. Here

are five simple things you can do at home to help your preschooler make this connection:

1. **Have your child say a few words**, such as *dog*, *lamb* and *snake*, while looking in the mirror. Show her how she uses her mouth, tongue and teeth in different ways to make the various sounds.
2. **Read nursery rhymes together.** Point out the words that sound similar, such as *cat* and *rat*.
3. **Teach your child the sounds** some letters make. "Moon starts with the letter *m*. It sounds like *mmmmm*."
4. **Read a book of tongue-twisters** with your child. It's okay if she

can't say them herself. It is more important for her to hear the sounds and for you to tell her that many of these words begin with the same sounds.

5. **Be silly with music.** Sing, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." After singing it correctly the first time, change the first letter in the word *boat*. Now it's "Row your *coat*." What other silly songs can you and your child come up with?

As your child gets more familiar with sounds and letters, you can make the activities a bit more challenging. Give her three words, such as *man*, *mat* and *boy*. See if she can tell you which two words begin with the same sound and which word is the "oddball."

Source: J. Fitzpatrick, *Phonemic Awareness: Playing with Sounds to Strengthen Beginning Reading Skills*, Creative Teaching Press.

Q: My son began preschool a few days ago and he has suddenly become anxious. He has told me repeatedly he is not going back. I am taken aback because he was so excited about it this past summer. What could be going on and how can I help him?

Questions & Answers

A: Your son is not alone. Many children have a difficult time adjusting to preschool—even if they were originally excited to go. The good news: With your support, this will just be temporary.

Here are some ways to help your preschooler adjust:

- **Remove the drama.** Beginning preschool is a milestone. But casting it as a big deal can make an anxious child even more so. Instead, remind your child of other places he has made friends and had fun learning. Tell him that preschool is similar in many ways.
- **Encourage him to talk.** Sometimes there is just one aspect of preschool that a child fixates on and becomes anxious about. If your child can tell you what is bothering him, you may be able to ease his mind with an explanation.
- **Calm your own emotions.** Many parents are teary-eyed when their "baby" spends the first few weeks in preschool. If this describes you, do your best to hide the tears from your son. Put on a brave smile and he just might, too!
- **Work with the teachers.** Preschool teachers have seen this hundreds of times. They are well versed in helping children adjust to preschool. Share your concerns with the teacher and ask for additional advice.

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance is key for your child's school success



When your child was in preschool, you probably learned that missing school meant she was missing out on a lot of fun with her class and teacher.

Missing kindergarten means missing fun, too. But it also means missing out on important learning. Research shows that kindergarten attendance affects future success in school. The only way your child can learn and progress is to be in school.

As a parent, it's your job to make sure your child attends school on time, every day, unless she is sick or there is an emergency.

Remember that:

- **Early reading instruction** begins in kindergarten. It affects how quickly and easily your child will learn to read.
- **Attending kindergarten** regularly helps the teacher learn your child's strengths and weaknesses. Then she can support your child's strengths and give her any specific help she may need.
- **If English** is not your family's first language, coming to kindergarten every day helps your child become fluent. She may get instruction in English. And she can practice all the time as she speaks to classmates and teachers.

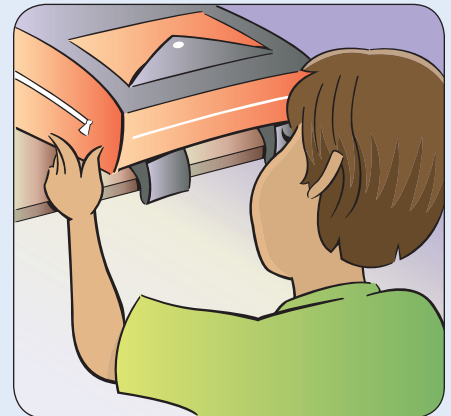
Source: Connecticut State Department of Education, "What Parents Should Know About Kindergarten Entry, Enrollment and Attendance," niswc.com/ready_kinder.

Show your kindergartner how to respect authority figures

Schools are filled with adults who are there to help your kindergartner succeed. And just like at home, your child should listen to and respect adults. This includes not just the teacher, but anyone who works with the school, including bus drivers and custodians.

Your child will need to learn to:

- **Follow the rules.** No one expects kindergartners to be perfect. But your child will be expected, over time, to learn and follow simple procedures, such as: Enter the classroom quietly. Hang up your backpack. Go to your seat.
- **Be quiet and listen** when adults are talking. Most kindergartners are naturally chatty, so work on this at home. "I am speaking. Please wait quietly until I finish."



- **Use manners.** The words *please* and *thank you* go a long way! A friendly greeting and a smile help, too. Teach your child to say, "Good morning, Mrs. Jones," "Goodbye, Mr. Smith!"

Source: T. McIntyre, *The Behavior Survival Guide for Kids: How to Make Good Choices and Stay Out of Trouble*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Encourage responsibility and reinforce school-related skills



Kindergarten is a wonderful new time for your child—filled with new freedoms and responsibilities. To help your child spread her wings, reinforce school-related skills at home. Encourage your child to:

- **Put away supplies.** When your child gets home, she should hang up her coat and put her lunch box in the kitchen.
- **Take care of her backpack.** Every day after school, sort through her backpack together—keeping

an eye out for notes to parents. Designate a spot for your child's school belongings.

- **Do homework.** Some teachers assign activities for kindergartners to complete at home. This is a great way to help your child develop a homework routine. Pick a regular time and place for your child to do homework, read or focus on other fun learning related activities. Reminder charts with pictures can help your child get used to her new routines and responsibilities.