

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Prince Edward County Elementary School

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## Reading can add meaning to holidays with your preschooler

Will your family be spending more time together over the winter holidays? As you strengthen your bond with your child, give her another gift: literacy skills. It's easy to weave reading and literacy activities into your time together.

To turn reading into holiday fun:

- **Blend it into baking.** Read a recipe's ingredients to your child. Ask her to bring you one of the ingredients from the pantry. Then read the directions, such as "Stir for one minute." Help your child carry out the steps.
- **Get cozy and share some books.** On a cold December day, grab a blanket, bundle up and read several books together. If the weather is warm, have a reading picnic outdoors instead.
- **Listen to audio books together.** This is the perfect activity for times when your eyes and hands are busy, such as during a car trip to visit family. Allow some time to talk with your child about what you hear.
- **Trade stories with your child.** Tell her a story about something you did this time of year when you were her age. Then have her tell you a story about something she would like to do this month. Write her story down and have her draw pictures to go with it. Read it together.
- **Have a festive read-aloud-night.** Share favorite seasonal books. Turn off the TV, grab a snack and make some happy reading memories.



## Questions get kids thinking

Preschoolers ask lots of "why" questions. But few activities make them think more than having to *answer* questions—with more than one word. So if your child asks, "Why are you getting your umbrella?" try asking her, "Why do you think I am getting my umbrella?" Just don't do this with adults!

## Boost school skills at home

Learning doesn't have to stop when the preschool day is over. Your child builds school-readiness skills when you do these things together:



- **Talk and listen.** Build vocabulary and communication skills by discussing daily life and asking creative questions. "What would it be like to live in space?"
- **Play games.** Sneak learning into activities such as playing Store (math), acting out a story (reading) and playing Simon Says (listening and following directions).
- **Practice manners.** December often includes a visit to someone's home or a special meal—great chances for your child to practice respectful behavior.



## Four P's help children learn social skills

You play a central role in helping your child develop the social skills that will help him thrive in preschool and beyond. Pediatric psychologists suggest parents teach children social skills using these four P's:

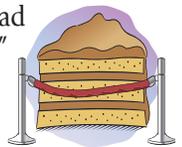
1. **Practice.** If you want your child to learn how to share, for example, try using a timer. Set it for 15 minutes. When it rings, your child must give the toy he's playing with to another child. Repeat this consistently to make sharing second nature to your child.
2. **Praise.** Be specific about what you liked about your child's actions. Say, "You let Jenny use the crayons. That was nice."
3. **Point out** examples. "Look, Jacob has the blue dinosaur. Now he's giving it to Sarah. She can play with it, then give it back. They are sharing."
4. **Prompt.** When your child forgets what to do, remind him. "You're finished with the puzzle now. I bet Ryan would like a turn."

Source: E. Christophersen and S.M. VanScoyoc, "Strategies for Teaching Important Social Skills to Young Children," [Calgarypaeds.org](http://Calgarypaeds.org), [niswc.com/4p](http://niswc.com/4p).

## Be clear about boundaries

When adults consistently explain and enforce limits, children learn to respect boundaries. To set clear expectations for your preschooler:

- **Avoid negativity.** Instead of "Don't touch that cake!" say, "I know that cake looks good. But we stick to one treat a day."
- **Consider your child's** developmental level. What looks like deliberate misbehavior may be an age-related lack of skills or self-control. Teach and practice the needed skill with your child.



Source: M. Neifert, M.D., "Why Kids Need Rules," [Parenting.niswc.com/boundaries](http://Parenting.niswc.com/boundaries).



## Is the holiday spirit overwhelming my child?

**Q:** After behaving well all year, my preschooler has suddenly started acting up. His teacher reports that he is distracted, chatty and often just doesn't listen. Could he be reacting to holiday excitement?

**A:** Certainly! You don't mention any other changes in your son's life or in the school routine. So the short answer could well be: "It's December." The decorations, parties, TV commercials and other holiday trappings can easily overstimulate a preschooler.



You can't "cure" December behavior, but you can work to minimize it. Here are some tips:

- **Maintain your child's routine.** Resist the temptation to take him to a holiday event on a school night. Put away the big tin of cookies. Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and regular, nourishing meals.
- **Find outlets for his physical energy.** Unless it is dangerously cold, bundle your child up and go outside for some exercise each day.
- **Spend time together.** Give your child plenty of relaxed, one-on-one time with you. Pay attention when he talks. Show him you always have time for him no matter how busy you are.

Your son will likely settle back into his well-behaved ways in January. If problems continue, consult his teacher or doctor for advice.



## Are you setting limits on screen time?

Many TV shows, computer games and apps are marketed to young children. But too much screen time can have negative effects on learning and health. Are you limiting your child's recreational screen time? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you allow** only interactive, non-screen activities, like reading aloud, if your child is under age two?
2. **Do you limit** your child's recreational screen time to one or two hours per day of high-quality content?
3. **Do you monitor** her screen time and talk with her about what she sees?
4. **Do you provide** healthy alternatives to screen time, such as exercising, reading or playing games?
5. **Do you select** electronic viewing that is age-appropriate?

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are actively managing your child's screen time. For each no, try that idea.

"TV. If kids are entertained by two letters, imagine the fun they'll have with child's imagination. Open a book."

—Author unknown

## Play games with language

When your child began speaking, his first words were probably nouns—things he could see, hear, touch or taste. Next came verbs. Now your preschooler can use words to describe nouns and verbs. To help, play games that use:

- **Adjectives.** Say, "I'm going to tell you two things about pancakes. They are *round* and they are *yummy*. Can you tell me two things about your milk?"
- **Adverbs.** Ask your child to clap *loudly*, then to clap *softly*. Have him run *quickly* across the room. During the day, ask questions like, "Did you come down the stairs *quickly* or *slowly*?"

Source: B. Daniel, *The Playful Preschooler*, Instructional Fair.

## Get a head start on fractions

In elementary school, your child will learn about fractions. Teaching her now about *parts* and *wholes* will give her a foundation of knowledge to draw on. Here's how to do it:

- **Show your child how puzzle pieces** fit together to make up a whole picture.
- **Divide a hunk of play dough** into two halves. Let her squish the halves back into a whole piece of dough.

## Create some wintery art

Winter weather makes this a great time for indoor art projects. Art inspires your child's creativity and helps him coordinate his hand muscles. Help your child make:



- **Decorations.** To make an old fashioned snowflake, fold a paper circle in half three times. Cut shapes from the sides to make patterns. Your child can unfold them and use markers and glitter to decorate them.
- **Greeting cards.** Have your child draw a picture and fill in the blanks: "Dear \_\_\_, I hope your New Year is \_\_\_! Love, \_\_\_."

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