

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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## Help your preschooler set goals for a happy and healthy year

A new year means it's time for resolutions—and your child isn't too young to make some. Help him set goals that will keep him healthy, build his independence and develop his motor and social skills. Then support his efforts to reach them!

Here are some goals your preschooler can work toward in 2017:

- **Personal care.** Have your child resolve to brush his teeth every morning and evening. He should also brush his hair and wash his face. You can help (especially with teeth), but encourage him to do as much as he can on his own. Independence is an important trait for school success.
- **Staying healthy.** Help your child establish healthy habits, such as washing his hands after preschool, after using the bathroom and before eating. Set a bedtime routine that lets him get enough sleep. These habits help ensure that he will miss fewer days of school due to illness.
- **Getting dressed.** Help your child choose clothes that are easy to pull on. On weekend afternoons—not busy school mornings—work on skills such as buttoning and snapping. These activities help develop the fine motor skills your child needs as he learns to write.
- **Minding trusted adults.** Emphasize to your child that you and his teachers, caregivers and relatives all love him and want to help him. In return, he should show respect by listening and following your directions.



## Your preschooler needs time with you

You've helped your child make New Year's resolutions. Now consider making one yourself: Spend more quality time with your child. Here are five ways:

1. **Focus on your child** when you are together. A half-hour of playing on the floor together is great. But taking your child on your Saturday errands and talking with her the whole time is valuable, too.
2. **Eat meals together.** Research shows that conversation and family bonding happens more around the table than anywhere else.
3. **Involve your child** in family life. Let her help you prepare meals.
4. **Exercise together.** Move with your child daily. Walk, bike, skate—even climbing stairs counts.
5. **Engage in her interests.** If your child likes zebras, check out a book about them and read it together. Play her favorite game with her and ask her to tell you why she likes it.

Ask her to do simple chores with you, such as sorting socks or putting napkins on the table.

## Readjust to school mode

Over the holidays, did your child stay up late? Sleep in? Watch extra TV? Or perhaps all of the above? To shift him back into school mode:

- **Reinforce a regular bedtime.**
- **Post a morning checklist** of tasks he needs to do to get ready.
- **Talk about preschool** every day. Review his worksheets and art together.

## Learn lessons at the library

Taking your child to the library is a great way to excite her about books and reading. It also lets her practice respectful behavior. On your next visit together:

- **Practice being quiet.** Explain that most people at the library are reading and trying to concentrate.
- **Ask questions.** Encourage your child to talk to the librarian. Role-play polite things to ask, such as "Would you please help me find a book about dragons?"
- **Discuss the need to care** for library books. Find a special place at home to keep them, and return them on time.



## Puzzles are skill-builders

January 29 is National Puzzle Day! The truth is that puzzles are a wonderful activity to do with your preschooler on any day. Doing jigsaw puzzles can help him build:

- **Fine motor** skills.
- **Eye-hand** coordination.
- **Shape** recognition.
- **Problem-solving** skills.
- **Spatial perception** and visualization.



Your child's early puzzles should have just a few large pieces. As his skills develop, look for more challenging puzzles.

Source: B.N. Verdine and others, "Finding the missing piece: Blocks, puzzles, and shapes fuel school readiness," *Trends in Neuroscience and Education*.



## How do I decide if my child is ready for kindergarten?

**Q:** My daughter is in pre-K. Soon I will have to let the school know whether she will return for another year of preschool or go to kindergarten. How do I know if she's ready?

**A:** Sending your first child to kindergarten is a big step. It's natural to worry about whether she will succeed in elementary school. Many parents think, for example, that if their child can't read yet, she should stay in pre-K.

That's not the case. The teachers at your child's new school will teach her to read and write. What kindergarten teachers want is for children to arrive ready to learn. A child who will do just fine in kindergarten can:

- **Listen and follow directions.** Kindergarten teachers know they are dealing with five-year-olds and won't give complex instructions. But when her teacher says it's time to sit down and listen, your child needs to do it.
- **Share and take turns.** Your child may be in a classroom of 20 or more children next year. She will need to get along with them. That means sharing materials, toys, books and the attention of adults.
- **Take care of basic needs.** On arrival, your child will be expected to hang up her jacket and put away her backpack. She should be able to use the rest room independently and wash her hands.

You may want to discuss these points with your child's pre-K teacher as you make your decision. Good luck!



## Focus on attention activities

To succeed in school, children need to be able to pay attention. Luckily, that's a skill your child can practice at home. Share activities that require concentration. You can:

- **Play games together.** Choose games that require your child to think, such as card games, board games or Simon Says.
- **Read together.** Before, during and after the story, ask questions that help her focus. "Why do you think Belle did that?"
- **Be creative together.** Draw pictures or make a collage of letters from A to Z.

Source: L.H. O'Hanlon, "How to Improve Attention Spans," Parents.com, niswc.com/spans.

## Do away with 'OK?'

To help your child learn to do as he's told, avoid adding "OK?" to your instructions. That OK implies that obeying is optional. Instead, be specific and direct.

- **Incorrect:** "Put your books away, OK?"
- **Correct:** "Pick up your books and put them on the shelf now, please."

## Let observation take flight

Celebrate National Bird Day, January 5, by helping your child observe and learn about the birds in your area. Begin by making a bird feeder together. Gather some string, a stale bagel, and some peanut butter, shortening and birdseed. Then:



1. **Tie one end** of the string to the bagel.
2. **Mix one teaspoon** each of the peanut butter and the shortening. Spread the mixture on the bagel.
3. **Press the bagel** into the birdseed.
4. **Hang the feeder** outside and watch who enjoys it!

Ask your child to draw the birds he sees. Using a bird guide, help him identify them.



## Do you add math to your child's day?

Preschoolers learn from everything they do. And since math concepts are all around us, it's easy to help your child practice math skills. Are you helping your child focus on math? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you look** for shapes with your child? "The tambourine's top is a *circle*."
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you count** things together? Point to blocks and count aloud or count stairs as you climb them.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you talk** about numbers? Help your child find them on signs, clocks, book pages, cereal boxes, etc.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you read** books to your child about math? There are lots to choose from, including *10 Minutes Till Bedtime* by Peggy Rathmann.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you practice** addition and subtraction? "You have one cookie, and I have one cookie. That makes two cookies!"

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're building your child's awareness of math. For each no, try that idea.

"From the very beginning of his education, the child should experience the joy of discovery."  
—Alfred North Whitehead

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