

Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

November 2020
Vol. 25, No. 3

St. Helen Catholic School



Caring is the cornerstone of your preschooler's character

All the pillars of character parents and teachers want to see in children are based on a foundation of caring. Children who are caring use kind and respectful words. They show concern for others. They are also reliable, responsible and honest.

To strengthen the caring trait in your preschooler:

- **Care for him.** This is not just about basic needs, or even just about love. Sympathize with your child. Let him know you understand his feelings, even if they result in behavior you must correct. Express interest in things he likes.
- **Help him think of others.** This can be challenging for young children, but they can learn. Ask your child

questions like, "Do you think your brother might want to play with your dinosaurs? He looks a little sad sitting over there by himself."

- **Point out examples** of both caring and hurtful behavior in TV shows and in real life. If you see that your child has hurt someone's feelings, explain to him exactly why what he did was not caring. Talk about what he could have done instead. And when you notice your child acting in a kind and caring way, be sure to offer encouragement and praise.
- **Read children's books** that teach compassion. *A Home for Bird* by Philip Stead, *Be Kind* by Pat Miller and *The Big Umbrella* by Amy Bates are great ones to get you started.

Introduce your child to the world of music



Research shows that listening to music can boost children's listening skills, improve concentra-

tion, promote creativity, build social skills and strengthen math and literacy skills.

To incorporate music into your child's daily life:

- **Play music during chore time.** Whether you're cleaning up after dinner, folding laundry or picking up a room, put music on while you both work.
- **Listen to music on the go.** If you're in a car, play some tunes and sing along. Traveling by bus? Pop in some earbuds and listen together.
- **Sing to your child** throughout the day. Make up silly songs together. Sing a few lullabies at bedtime.
- **Give your child musical experiences.** Participating in preschool is one way. Music is a big part of a preschool curriculum. Look for free virtual music performances in your community, too.

Source: R. Howard, "What Are The Benefits of Music for Babies and Toddlers?" The New York City Arts in Education Roundtable, niscw.com/ec_music4.

Chores build responsibility and foster a sense of importance



One of the best ways to teach your preschooler responsibility is to assign her chores at home. Doing chores teaches your child that maintaining a home is a family effort and that she is an important part of the family.

If your child is at least three years old, she can do things such as:

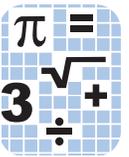
- **Set and clear the table.** Have her start with the forks, spoons and napkins. Gradually expand the job to include plates and cups.
- **Feed dry food** to family pets and give them fresh water.
- **Clean, using simple tools** such as a feather duster, a small hand broom or a lightweight handheld vacuum.

- **Help with laundry.** She can put dirty clothes in a laundry basket or put clean clothes in drawers.
- **Help with simple cooking jobs,** such as stirring ingredients and pouring cool liquids.
- **Bring in mail or newspapers,** unless this requires going out on the street.
- **Pick up toys.** Have her pick them up on a daily basis before bedtime.

“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”

—Denis Waitley

When it comes to learning math concepts, fingers count!



When your preschooler counts on his fingers, he isn't cheating. He's being smart! According to research, when children use their fingers to sort out numbers, they have an easier time of it. The reason may be that using his fingers acts as a “bridge” for your child to move from thinking about numbers to seeing them.

In fact, kids who are encouraged to use their fingers—for example, by holding up three fingers to represent the number 3—may grasp simple math concepts more quickly than kids who don't use their fingers.

To boost your child's math skills, try some “finger learning” activities:

- **Tracing.** Have your child trace small numbers in sand or on paper. For example, show him how to trace the numeral 5 with his finger. Then

ask him to show you five fingers. It'll help him make the connection between the symbol (the numeral) and the quantity it represents.

- **Make a puzzle.** Flip over one of your child's old jigsaw puzzles and write a number on the back of each piece. Now you've got a numeral-rich activity! As he picks up each piece, have him show you its value with his fingers before he adds it to the puzzle.
- **Dominoes.** This old-school game is ideal for teaching numbers! After your child matches, say, a two-dot tile to another two-dot tile, see if he can do the same with his hands. Have him hold up two fingers on one hand and then touch them to two fingers on his other hand. Voilà! The quantity comes to life!

Source: T. Jay and J. Betenson, “Mathematics at Your Fingertips: Testing a Finger Training Intervention to Improve Quantitative Skills,” *Frontiers in Education*, niswc.com/ec_fingers.

Are you helping your child build creative ability?



Preschoolers are naturally imaginative. You can enhance your child's creativity even more by encouraging him to try new things. Creative play helps your child learn to express himself. It also builds critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Are you promoting your child's creative ability? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you point out** different types of art to your preschooler, such as photography, sculptures, architecture, poetry and music?
- ___ **2. Do you make up** stories with your child and encourage him to create different endings to popular stories?
- ___ **3. Do you offer** your child tools he can use to make or draw things, such as sidewalk chalk, blocks and play dough?
- ___ **4. Do you allow** your child to get messy while working on his projects?
- ___ **5. Do you give** positive feedback when your child makes something?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're enhancing your child's creativity. For *no* answers, try that idea from the quiz.

Early Childhood
Parents
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Strengthen your preschooler's ability to recall information



The ability to remember as much as possible of what she hears and sees will contribute greatly to your child's success in school. In addition to talking to her about experiences every day, try these simple activities to help strengthen her memory:

- **Read nursery rhymes** and familiar stories. Nursery rhymes are especially effective because they contain patterns. Your child will learn to recognize these patterns, which will then trigger her memory.
- **Hide a few items** as your child watches. Then have her retrieve the items from the places you hid them. As she gets better at this, hide more

items. Or hide the items and then do another activity. After time has passed, challenge her to find them.

- **Play "I'm going on a trip."** Say to your child, "I'm going on a trip and I'm packing pajamas." Your child must repeat what you said, and then add something. Example: "I'm going on a trip and I'm packing pajamas and a toothbrush." At first your child may be able to remember only one or two items. Expand the game as she gets better at recalling.
- **Ask your child to teach you.** After you teach her a new skill, such as sorting her toys, ask your child to teach *you* how to do it. This will help her remember the steps to follow.

Good nutrition is vital for your child's future academic success



What children eat affects how they think and feel. And according to research, children who eat a well-balanced diet are likely to reap academic benefits.

- Good nutrition promotes:
- **Concentration.** When children are well-nourished, they're more alert and better able to focus. That means they won't have to struggle to pay attention—or be distracted by a rumbling stomach.
 - **Memory.** If kids don't eat well (if they skip a meal, for example), they may have trouble remembering what they've learned. If they can't retain the day's lessons, they'll have a harder time keeping up.
 - **Achievement.** Children with poor diets are more likely than their peers to repeat a grade. They also tend to score lower in math and on standardized tests.

- **Better behavior.** Undernourished kids have higher rates of suspension from school than their better-fed peers. They're also more prone to arguing or fighting with classmates. Food clearly plays a big role in your child's future school success, so start establishing positive eating habits now.

Researchers have found that young children are more likely to eat healthy foods if parents:

- **Offer options.** Let your child pick between two snacks (like apples and peaches, or carrots and celery).
- **Make it fun.** Arrange cut-up fruits into a smiley face or rainbow.
- **Include them.** Invite your child into the kitchen to help you cook. Involve him in the process of making healthy meals, and he'll be more excited about eating them!

Source: Kansas State University, "Winning the war: How to persuade children to eat more veggies," ScienceDaily, nswc.com/ec_veggies.

Q: My four-year-old daughter has a hard time telling the truth. How should I react when she tells me something that I know isn't true?

Questions & Answers

A: Young children are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. So if your child tells you something that she wishes were true, but couldn't be, it's not *really* a lie. It's practicing make-believe, an important part of her development.

Telling the truth is a quality that a young child develops over several years. To encourage this trait:

- **Model honesty.** Your child may not always listen to you. But she will mimic you. So don't let her catch you in a lie.
- **Tell the truth for your child.** You walk into the kitchen and see cookie crumbs on the table. If you ask your child if she was in the cookie jar without permission, she will probably say *no* right away. Instead, supply the truth. "I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are cookie crumbs everywhere, including on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me."
- **Appreciate honesty.** Pushing your child to tell the truth will backfire if you punish her when she does. At this stage, your child should be praised for telling the truth. Then, calmly let her know what you expect her to do next time.

Staying calm when your child is honest will also pay off when she is a teenager. At that age, dishonesty can put her in danger. Knowing she can always come to you with the truth ensures her safety.

The Kindergarten Experience

Do all kids learn how to read in kindergarten?



One of the most common questions parents ask about kindergarten is, “When will my child learn to read?” There isn’t a one-size-fits-all answer. Some children read books by the end of the year, and others don’t—and that’s OK! Simply encourage your child to move at his own pace.

To help your kindergartner develop his reading skills:

- **Establish a daily reading time.** Sit down for at least 15 minutes to read with your child. As you read, let him “help.” When you come to a familiar or obvious word, suggest that he fill it in. For example, “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you ___?” This will build your child’s reading confidence.
- **Go beyond books.** Look for words everywhere—in board games, on signs and more. Run fingers from left to right as you read aloud. Ask questions such as, “Which word starts with the letter B?” “Can you find the word *it*?”
- **Keep reading fun.** Whether or not your child struggles with reading, it can be hard work! If you sense your kindergartner is frustrated, take a break until he’s ready to read again.
- **Build independence.** When kindergartners practice reading, it’s tempting to jump in and help. Instead, let your child take the lead. Illustrations and word patterns will provide clues. If he’s really stuck, it’s OK to provide answers.

Show your kindergartner how to focus on finishing tasks

In kindergarten, students are expected to settle down and complete jobs they’re given. They can’t jump from one activity to another when they’re frustrated or bored. They must learn how to persevere and finish what they start.

To help your child develop this ability:

- **Encourage her** to engage in some quiet activities. Give her time to daydream, read or work alone.
- **Let her struggle** a little when she’s working on a task. If your child is used to your jumping in to help, she won’t develop a “can do” attitude.
- **Motivate her** to keep trying. If at first she doesn’t succeed, encourage her to try and try again.
- **Give her** only a few pieces of paper to draw on. Don’t let her throw away 10 drawings before she really gets started.



- **Play games** together that require concentration.
- **Let her run around** and be noisy when she has completed a task. She’ll learn she can let off steam after she finishes her work.

How to avoid using bribes with your kindergartner



“If you finish your homework, I’ll let you watch another TV show.”
“If you share with your brother, I’ll give you a lollipop.” Deals like these might seem like good motivators for children.

However, when you present an idea to your child in this way, you are offering not motivation, but a bribe. This does not teach your child to do the right thing. Instead, it teaches him that “If I do what they want, I will get something for it.”

To avoid the bribe trap:

- **Change the way** you say things. For example, use the word *when* instead of *if*. This puts the emphasis on what the child is expected to do, rather than opening up a bargain with him.
- **Explain why** the desired action is helpful or valuable. “When you finish your schoolwork, we will have more time to read together.”

Source: A. Brill, “Why Threats and Bribes Don’t Lead to Cooperation and What to Try Instead,” Positive Parenting Connection, nswc.com/ec_nobribes.