



## Four ways to celebrate Earth Day with your preschooler

**D**id you know that Earth Day (April 22) is the most widely observed secular holiday around the world? This year's theme is *Invest in Our Planet*, and this month is the perfect time to teach your child ways to make sure the environment stays healthy.

To celebrate with your preschooler:

- 1. Make a family commitment** to conserve Earth's resources. Have your child turn off the water when brushing teeth and turn off the lights when leaving a room.
- 2. Find new uses for old things.** No one has the space to keep *everything*. However, converting a few things instead of throwing them out will teach your child about repurposing. Reuse an empty jelly jar as a vase for flowers. Turn

an empty soup can into a pencil holder. Decorate paper bags to make puppets.

- 3. Talk about trash.** What happens to things after we throw them away? Show your child a garbage truck and explain that it is hauling trash away to a big dump, called a landfill. Talk about some things we can do to keep landfills from getting too full, such as recycling.
- 4. Read together.** There are many children's books about caring for the Earth. Here are a few to try:
  - » *If You Come to Earth* by Sophie Blackall.
  - » *Thank You, Earth: A Love Letter to Our Planet* by April Pulley Sayre
  - » *Alba and the Ocean Cleanup* by Lara Hawthorne.

## Help your child develop a good sense of humor



If your family gets stuck in the rain, don't complain. Instead, try a little humor: "This is like a shower! Too bad we don't have shampoo!" Then scrub your head and laugh.

Kidding around teaches your child that humor can relieve frustration—and can even make challenges fun! Studies have shown that having a good sense of humor also boosts kids' health, optimism, self-esteem and resilience.

To foster your preschooler's sense of humor:

- **Read books together** that have amusing rhymes. Use playful voices while reading and giggle at the illustrations.
- **Make up silly songs** together.
- **Laugh at yourself** when you make a mistake.
- **Take turns stringing** funny words or sounds together.
- **Tell each other jokes.** Find age-appropriate jokes online or at the library.
- **Laugh at your child's attempts** at humor. You are the most important audience!

**Source:** L. Frey, "A Child's Strong Sense of Humor is Nothing to Laugh at," Akron Children's Hospital.

## Boost responsibility by using a simple phrase with your child



Developing a sense of responsibility in preschoolers can be challenging. But it's important to instill

the idea that people need to finish their work *before* they can play.

Throughout the day, try using the phrase “when ... then” with your preschooler. In time, your child will recognize it as a cue to fulfill responsibilities.

Here are some examples:

- “**When you are dressed** and ready to leave for preschool, then you can play with your stuffed animals.”
- “**When you put your jacket on**, then we can go to Jack’s house to play.”
- “**When you pick up your trucks**, then you can play with the blocks.”

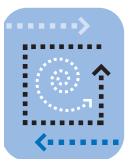
- “**When you put on your pj’s and brush your teeth**, then we can read a story.”
- “**When you gather your library books**, we can go to the library.”

When your preschooler shows responsibility, be specific with your praise. Say something like, “It makes me happy to see you pick up your toys. I bet it makes you feel proud that you can do it by yourself.”

**“If you care about what you do and work hard at it, there isn’t anything you can’t do if you want to.”**

—Jim Henson

## Develop your child’s fine-motor skills for kindergarten readiness



Little hands need strong, coordinated muscles to tackle everyday tasks, such as drawing, coloring, buttoning and zipping.

Research shows that helping children develop the fine-motor skills for these tasks also prepares kids for kindergarten.

Here are some activities to try:

- **Cover a baking sheet** with a thin layer of shaving cream, sugar or salt. Let your child use a finger to form letters, numbers or shapes.
- **Fill a spray bottle** with water and head outside. Your child can squeeze the nozzle to spray water on the fence, grass, sidewalk and flowers.
- **Challenge your child** to use tweezers or tongs to move cotton balls other small items from one cup or

bowl to another. Together, count how many your child transfers without dropping any. Then try again!

- **Make a “buried treasure” box.** Fill a shoebox or clear plastic box about halfway with uncooked rice or dry beans. Bury small objects in the filling (paper clips, erasers, toys, etc.). Can your child use a spoon to scoop up each treasure?
- **Show your child** how to use a hole-puncher to punch holes around the edges of a paper plate. Then your child can thread yarn through the holes and across the plate to make a colorful design.

Source: M. MacDonald and others, “Relations of Preschoolers’ Visual-Motor and Object Manipulation Skills With Executive Function and Social Behavior,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, Taylor and Francis Ltd.

## Are you teaching your child how to follow rules?



Children who are expected to follow rules at home have an easier time following rules when they get to school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are teaching your preschooler how to follow rules:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have a few basic rules** that help life run smoothly? The list should be short so your child doesn’t get confused or overwhelmed.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you follow routines** that help your child cooperate? Doing things the same way daily makes them easier for kids to remember.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you explain rules simply?** Be clear and specific. “Say *please* and *thank you*” is better than “Be polite.”
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you always enforce rules?** Bending the rules confuses children.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you adjust rules** when your child is ready? As your preschooler matures, show pride and confidence in new abilities.

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are doing a great job encouraging your child to respect rules. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# Help your preschooler celebrate spring with outdoor learning



The changes that take place every spring align perfectly with the changes preschoolers experience every day.

That's why outdoor learning activities are a great way to foster your child's development this season.

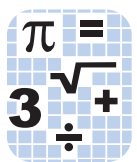
With your child:

- **Investigate the wind.** Does your child know what blows around in the wind? Find out together! Punch a hole in a plastic lid. Pull a piece of string through the hole and tie a thick knot at one end to secure it. Help your child rub petroleum jelly on the lid and hang it from a tree branch. Check after 30 minutes and see what the wind blew onto the lid.
- **Plant.** Show your child how to start something, tend it and watch

it grow. Together, pick some seeds that are easy to grow. Depending on your climate, start them indoors or plant them outside in the ground. Demonstrate how to care for the plants and talk about what would happen to them if your child stopped taking care of them.

- **Keep track of animals.** As the plants around you start to turn green, you and your child will notice more animals returning. At first, you may not see them. But if you listen, you may hear them. Listen for the chirping of birds as they come back to your area. You and your child may hear the "ribbit" of the frogs and the sounds that different insects make. Listen for sounds in the morning and right before your child goes to bed. Write down what you both hear.

# Introduce your preschooler to fun 'spacial reasoning' activities



Children love to build with blocks—but blocks aren't just for fun.

Research shows that blocks, jigsaw puzzles

and other toys that improve *spatial reasoning* can help children learn math.

*Spatial reasoning* is the ability to think about objects in relation to other objects in space. It's useful in everyday life—when loading a dishwasher or packing a suitcase for example. And it's also important when working with numbers and shapes.

To sharpen your preschooler's spatial reasoning:

- **Encourage your child** to experiment building things with materials like cardboard tubes and boxes in various shapes and sizes.

- **Remove the lids** from empty containers like coffee and oatmeal canisters, mayonnaise and peanut butter jars, storage dishes, etc. Challenge your child to match the lids with their containers.
- **Make your own jigsaw puzzles!** Remove the front panels from cereal boxes. Cut them into puzzle pieces and let your child put them back together.
- **Use spatial language.** This includes words that describe shapes, sizes or positions of objects. ("Let's walk across that curved bridge. It goes up and then down.")

Source: Z.C.K. Hawes, and others, "Effects of spatial training on mathematics performance: A meta-analysis," *Developmental Psychology*, American Psychological Association

**Q:** On the weekends, I spend most of my time playing with my four-year-old. We read, do puzzles, play with blocks and go outside. However, I think it would be beneficial for my child to play independently a little bit, too. How can I encourage my preschooler to do that?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** You're absolutely right. By the time children are four, they are ready to learn to play on their own for short periods of time. Children often come up with some of their most creative ideas when their parents are not hovering over them.

Try these strategies to boost independence and encourage solo play:

- **Be there when your child** needs you. If your preschooler *really* needs your attention, give it for a few minutes. Then suggest a fun activity to do independently. Most children play alone best after they spend some one-on-one time with parents.
- **Designate special toys,** games and supplies for your child to use during alone time. Hold back some favorites, such as a puzzle, paper and washable markers, or a box of old clothes for dress-up. Bring them out only when you want your preschooler to play independently.
- **Let your child work** alongside you. If your preschooler really wants to be with you, but you have work to do, give your child some "work" to do, too. If you are paying bills, give your child a notebook and crayons. If you are busy making dinner, give your child a task to do at the kitchen table, such as matching and folding clean socks.

# The Kindergarten Experience

## Take five steps to address clownish misbehavior



It's wonderful to have a good sense of humor. But it's no laughing matter when a student constantly disrupts

class with jokes and rude body sounds.

If your child is clowning around in school, take these steps:

- 1. Look for what's behind the behavior.** Sometimes children need attention or want to impress their classmates. Often, they try to use humor to cover up academic shortcomings.
- 2. Work with the teacher.** Together, try to identify when the problem behavior occurs and what might trigger it. Acting up after recess, for example, may mean that your child needs help settling down. The teacher might help by assigning a high-profile task like handing out worksheets.
- 3. Talk about it.** Your child might not understand when it's OK to be silly and when it's not. Explain that there's a time when being funny and "clever" is actually being disrespectful.
- 4. Establish clear guidelines.** With the teacher's help, explain to your child what type of behavior you both expect.
- 5. Set consequences** that you and the teacher will enforce if your child breaks the rules.

By following these five steps, you and the teacher should be able to get your child's behavior back on track!

**Source:** K. Levine, *What To Do ... When Your Child Has Trouble at School*, Reader's Digest Books.

## Preventing school absences leads to kindergarten success

**R**egular attendance helps promote a positive school community for students and teachers. Missing school too often can negatively affect academic success—even in kindergarten.

To limit how often your child is late or misses school:

- **Enforce routines.** Stick to a regular bedtime and wake-up time that gives your child plenty of sleep. Do as many morning tasks as possible before bedtime.
- **Show pride** when your child gets ready for school on time. To speed up a dawdling child, set a timer and issue a "beat the clock" challenge.
- **Avoid taking vacations** while school is in session. Even if students complete schoolwork while absent, they still miss class discussions, group activities and other kinds of learning.



- **Schedule appointments** for after school and on weekends. These slots fill up quickly, so consider requesting them far in advance. When absences are unavoidable, remember to talk with the teacher to find out what you can do at home to help your child catch up.

## Teach your kindergartner how to be a good sport



Many children begin participating in organized sports in kindergarten. Even if your child doesn't play

a sport, it's still important to teach how to win and lose gracefully.

To get the lesson across:

- **Focus on fun.** Young children should participate in sports to learn, have fun and get exercise. When children do this, they are winners, no matter what the score.
- **Practice good manners.** Even when adults focus on fun, kids are

aware of who does "well" and who does not. Teach your child to say "good game" or "good job" to teammates and opponents—win or lose.

- **Empathize.** Let your kindergartner know that it is OK to feel frustrated—but that it's never a reason to quit. "Sometimes you catch the ball, and sometimes you don't. It's hard to feel good when you don't catch it, but don't give up! You will improve with practice."

**Source:** I. Kamber, "The Importance of Sports for Children," Novak Djokovic Foundation.