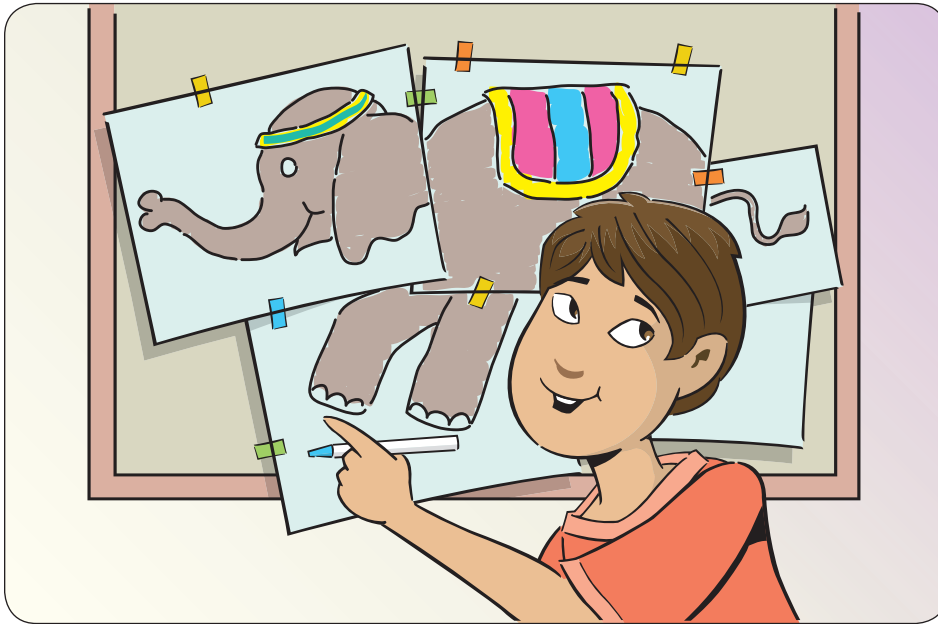


Early Childhood Parents®

February 2012
Vol. 16, No. 6

Gateway Head Start-Early Head Start
Gateway Community Action Partnership

make the difference!



Encourage your child to try activities that boost thinking

Your young child's brain is expanding rapidly at this age. He is quickly developing new abilities to analyze, understand and question. Foster these new skills with activities that enhance them.

Here are some activities that will build your preschooler's thinking skills:

- **Organizing.** Your child is learning to classify and sort things into groups. Take advantage of this as well as your child's natural desire to help you at this age. Ask him, "Can you help me unpack the groceries? Please put all the boxes on the table. Put the cans on the bottom shelf."

- **Understanding** that parts make a whole. Drawing pictures is a fun way to do this. If your child draws a person or animal, ask him to show you the head, the body and the legs. Then say, "It's great how all these parts make up the whole person!"
- **Questioning.** Most preschool and kindergarten children ask questions all day long. It can be tiring for you, but it benefits them. Remember not to supply the answers right away. Instead, ask your child: "What do you think? How do you think that happens?"

Source: Whole Child, "Thinking Skills," PBS, www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/cognitive.html.

Practice social skills at home with your child



Social skills are learned through instruction and experience—both things you can

provide at home! It's good to spend time with others, too, so your child can practice what she learns. Here's how:

- **Talk** about how experiences make people feel. "John didn't share his cookies with Allison. How does she feel?" Say the feeling out loud and draw a face to match it. This helps your child recognize and explain emotions.
- **Role-play** challenging situations with your child. What if she wants to ask another child to play? What if someone says something mean? Take turns playing different parts.
- **Plan** activities with other kids. Invite them over or spend time at a busy playground. See how your child interacts. What are her strengths and weaknesses? Be patient as she learns difficult skills, such as sharing and taking turns.

Source: J. Ireland, "Activities to Improve Children's Social Skills," Livestrong, www.livestrong.com/article/230915-activities-to-improve-childrens-social-skills/.

Teach your child responsibility toward animals this month



Caring for a pet—yours or someone else's—is an excellent way to teach your child responsibility. Seeing the pet's needs can show your child that a living creature is relying on you. If you forget your responsibilities, the creature might suffer.

Here's how to get started:

- **Allow your child** to care for a pet with you. A preschooler is too young to assume *full* responsibility for a pet. But she can scoop and pour pet food. She can put water in the pet's bowl. She can play with the pet, such as throwing a ball. Offer to take care of another person's pet if you don't have one.
- **Invite your child** along when you walk your dog, if you have one.

Talk about the importance of daily exercise—for people and for pets.

- **Teach your child** how to treat animals. Instruct your child to never go near an animal she doesn't know. If an animal is with its owner, teach her to ask the owner if she can approach the animal. Your child should always be gentle and move slowly around animals.

Source: "Be a Responsible Dog Owner," American Kennel Club, www.akc.org/public_education/responsible_dog_owner.cfm.

"It is one thing to show your child the way, and a harder thing to then stand out of it.

—Robert Brault

Routines and rules can help boost your child's attention span



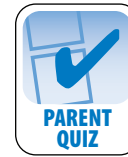
Young children need time to play, explore, dream, create and just be kids. But they benefit most from doing these things within a day of lovingly structured routines and rules. These routines and rules support school success, including a boost for attention span.

Here's how to get started:

- **Establish consistent routines.** Sleep, healthy meals and quiet play can all help your child pay attention to his best ability. Your child needs at least 11 hours of sleep. He needs predictable times for meals and snacks. He needs quiet time every day, free from loud noises and media.
- **Establish rules** and consequences. The ability to follow rules will be a huge part of your child's success in school and life. There is a link between following rules and paying attention. When a child follows rules, he is controlling his behavior. When a child can control his behavior, he is available to pay attention and to learn.
- **Practice transitions.** Give your child notice when it's time to switch activities. Prepare him for what comes next. This will ease any anxiety he may have. Being free of anxiety also frees your child to focus.

Source: J. Healy, "Helping Children to Pay Attention," The Parents League of New York, www.parentsleague.org/publications/selected_articles/helping_children_learn_to_pay_attention/index.aspx.

Do you encourage your child to explore the world?



Preschoolers are just beginning to explore the world, and they need parents' help. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you're helping your child experience new things:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to try new foods? Remember, it may take many tries before he likes them.
- ___ **2. Do you take** your child to new places? Think of destinations that will fascinate him, such as an airport or construction site.
- ___ **3. Do you read** new books along with old favorites? Visit the library to find fresh, exciting stories.
- ___ **4. Do you meet** new children, such as at indoor and outdoor playgrounds? Make sure your child has plenty of time to socialize.
- ___ **5. Do you practice** new skills, such as playing catch, singing songs, moving to music and naming letters?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're helping your child learn about the world around him. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Early Childhood
Parents
make the difference!

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

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2012 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Maria Koklanaris & Susan O'Brien.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Experts agree that effective discipline is consistent discipline



Can your child predict how you'll behave when she does something wrong? If so, you've probably been consistent!

Consistency is essential to good discipline. For example, if you always ignore begging for sugary cereal while shopping, your child learns not to beg. But if you give in once, she learns that begging works!

Experts recommend that parents:

- **Prioritize.** Pick one or two behaviors to work on, such as tantrums and talking back. Decide ahead of time how to handle them. Then stick to your plan.
- **Be patient.** Your child's behavior won't change immediately.

Give her several weeks to see that you're being consistent.

- **Use reminders.** Being consistent is tough, so post notes that will motivate you. ("Ignore tantrums." "Be calm and caring.")
- **Team up.** Join forces with other caregivers, such as a spouse, grandparent, babysitter or teacher. The more consistency, the better.
- **Be careful.** You'll have to make exceptions sometimes, but do this in advance. ("Grandma is bringing over cookies today, so you'll get to have an extra treat this week.")

Source: S. Henry, "Seven tricks to staying consistent on discipline," BabyCenter, www.babycenter.com/0_seven-tricks-to-staying-consistent-on-discipline_3657214.bc.

Four steps can help you & your child take care of the planet



Students in the United Kingdom have designated the week of February 6–10 as "Go Green Week." While this

isn't an official holiday, it's still a good opportunity to teach your child the importance of conservation and taking care of our planet.

Here are four suggestions to try:

1. **Recycle.** If you live in a place with curbside recycling, have your child help you separate glass, metal, paper and plastic. Take it together to the appropriate container. If you don't, select at least one material, and make at least one trip to a local recycling center.
2. **Conserve.** There's no need to have lights on in an empty room. The same is true of the TV. Work with your child not to use energy needlessly. But watch out: This is one

that your child will likely remember—expect to be chided when you forget!

3. **Reuse.** Before you throw an item in the trash, ask yourself: Is there any other use for this? Involve your child by showing her a plastic or paper bag. Ask: "What can we use this for?" Brainstorm ideas—liner for a small trash can, clean up after pets, cover for dirty shoes. Praise your child for any idea she can come up with.
4. **Try alternate travel.** Look for an opportunity to skip the car. Instead of driving to a store one block from the first one, leave your car parked, take your child by the hand, and walk it. On the way, explain to your child why you're walking.

Source: "Go Green Week," People and Planet, <http://peopleandplanet.org/gogreenweek>.

Q: My oldest son is four-and-a-half, and I call him my "wild child." I was talking to my neighbor, who has older children, and she said to hang in there and he'll be much better at five. Really?

Questions & Answers

A: Well, there's no sure way to predict! But chances are good that your neighbor is correct. Children at age five are usually much easier to handle than children at age four. It's not an accident that five is the traditional age for starting kindergarten. Most five-year-olds are ready for it, while most four-year-olds are not.

Your child is not going to change by magic, of course. Five-year-olds can still be very silly, wild and out of control. But you will likely see less of this than you did at ages three and four.

At five, your child will likely:

- **Be much more ready** to listen to and accept direction.
- **Be less impulsive**—and actually remember to *ask* before doing something, instead of just charging ahead.
- **Enjoy playing games** and doing other group activities.
- **Know** and use thousands of words.
- **Be curious** and ask lots of questions.
- **Have better motor skills.** He may be able to draw a person, ride a bike, and dress himself.
- **Pay attention** for longer periods of time than he did at four.
- **Be eager** to please parents and teachers!

Take your neighbor's advice and "hang in there" with your child while he's in this stage. And look forward to what is to come.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Teaching about patterns is fun for the family!



The world is full of mathematical patterns, and kindergartners aren't too young to enjoy them! Teaching

about patterns is fun for parents, too. To make the most of it:

- **Consider your child's abilities.** He might be able to recognize short patterns (such as red, yellow, red, yellow) or long ones (such as red, yellow, green, blue, red, yellow, green, blue).
- **Make a pattern together.** You might arrange blocks in a certain order, such as circle, square, triangle. Then have your child copy the pattern. He can also make a pattern for you to copy.
- **Extend patterns.** Create a pattern for your child by arranging items. Encourage him to continue it. Ask, "What comes next?"
- **Hide part of a pattern.** After you've made a pattern, cover part of it and challenge your child to guess what's missing. Or draw a pattern but leave part of it blank. Can your child fill it in?
- **Look for patterns.** They're everywhere! Find them on fabrics, fences, dishes, playground equipment and more.
- **Play with patterns.** Clap patterns or act them out. (Step, step, hop, step, step, hop.) You can even arrange people in patterns! (Parent, child, parent, child.)

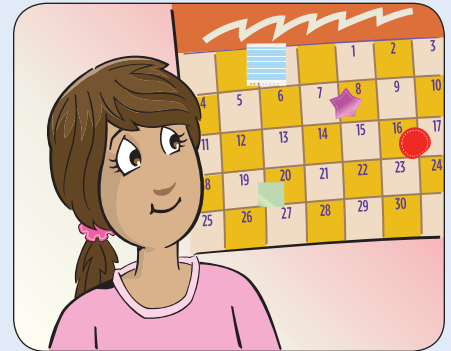
Sources: "Teaching Patterns in Kindergarten," kindergarten-lessons.com, www.kindergarten-lessons.com/teaching-patterns-in-kindergarten.html; "Kindergarten Pattern Activities," kindergarten-lessons.com, www.kindergarten-lessons.com/kindergarten-pattern-activities.html.

Use calendars to teach your kindergartner about time

Your kindergartner is so excited about an event that she asks about it every day. "When is our class field trip?!" Instead of telling her the answer, show it to her!

You can build your child's sense of time if you:

- **Keep a calendar** in your child's room. Let her mark special days with stickers. Explain that calendars are read from left to right.
- **Use time-related words** when looking at the calendar. "Let's put a sticker on tomorrow." "Jenny came over yesterday." "You have soccer on Tuesdays." "We're going on a trip February 11." "Today is Friday."
- **Count how many days** there are until something fun. "Grandpa will be here in eight days!"



- **Read books about time.** Ask the librarian to help you find books about days, weeks, months and even years. Try *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle and *Chicken Soup with Rice: A Book of Months* by Maurice Sendak.

Source: T. Geiser, "Teaching Preschoolers about Time," education.com, www.education.com/magazine/article/teaching-preschoolers-time/.

Remain involved during the second half of the school year



Your child only has a few months left of his kindergarten year! Hopefully, by now, you have met your child's teacher. You have had a good parent-teacher conference.

You have visited the classroom. But the next few months also offer good opportunities for working with your child's school. You should:

- **Stay on top** of your child's school performance. This is very important as first grade looms! Ask your child's teacher how he is doing in literacy skills, math and social skills. Also ask: What does

my child really need to work on for success in first grade?

- **Look for opportunities** to volunteer. This time of year is especially busy for teachers as they work to incorporate special activities and prepare students for next year. Ask your child's teacher how you can help.
- **Be there for your child.** Spring often brings concerts, presentations and other activities parents are invited to. Make an effort to be there whenever you can.

Source: "Helping Children Succeed in School: Parent-Teacher Communication," University of Illinois Extension, <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/succeed/communication.cfm>.