

# Discover Letters and Words

Letters and words are all around! Explore the world of words with your child as you are out and about. You are helping your child develop early reading skills as you talk to your child about the words you see all around you.

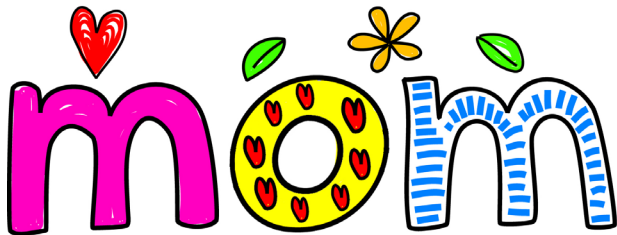
## Go on a letter hunt

Choose one letter and find as many as you can of the same letter. Try copying the letters you find on paper.



## Talk about letter sounds

Talk about letters as the building blocks of words. Identify the first, middle, and last letters. Figure out simple words together by helping your child make each letter sound individually in sequence.



## Play a name game

Names are powerful words because they represent special people in your child's life. Practice writing the names of people who are important to her.

## Point out words in print

Talk about spaces, punctuation, and uppercase/lowercase letters. Your child will learn about how words are printed.



## Find letters in the neighborhood

Point out road signs and the sports and store logos you see as you drive around your town or neighborhood. Help your child see that these icons can provide information.



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# Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Getting Ready to Read!



*Is your child between the ages of 3 and 5? If so, you can do a lot to make getting ready to read a natural part of daily life. Most 3- to 5-year-olds still have a way to go before they are ready to read and write. There's no need to rush this natural growth, but you can help your child build the knowledge, skills, and habits he or she needs to become a reader and a writer later on.*

## Turn your child's play into activities that help her get ready to read and write!

- Be sure your child has time to play with other children so he can learn to communicate with his peers.
- Engage in conversation with your child. Listen to her, and share your own ideas with her. Use “difficult” words sometimes, and talk about what they mean.
- Play games with your child using letters, words, numbers, or counting. Learning rhythm and rhyme through songs and finger-plays can help a child get ready to read.
- Take your child to grocery stores, parks, museums, art galleries, and community events. You'll be helping him learn new words and learn more about the world around him.

## Show your child how you use reading and writing in your everyday activities.

- When you make a list or write a note for someone, or when you read the newspaper, a map, or your email, your child sees that reading and writing are useful.
- Talk with your child about signs, schedules, and books, and encourage her to try reading them.
- Read aloud to your child. Don't know what to read? Your librarian can help.
- Visit the library, and help your child get a library card as soon as she can.

## Encourage children to draw, write, and use books for fun and learning.

- Keep books, magazines, and games at home where your child can use them.
- Keep materials for drawing and writing where your child can use them.
- When your child draws, ask him to tell you about the picture. Write his words down so he can go back to them and “read” them himself.
- Show that you value and respect your child's efforts to read and write. Remember that even scribbles are a step toward writing!
- Choose TV and videos wisely. Shows such as *Sesame Street* are meant to get children interested in reading and writing.
- Select electronic games carefully. Some games and apps are designed to help children learn skills they need to read and write. You can find many no-cost, ad-free games at [pbskids.org/games](http://pbskids.org/games). The Reading Rockets website also rates low-cost print awareness apps.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that preschool-age children have no more than an hour of screen time each day. After all, there are so many other things to do!

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# Get Ready to Read

*Set your young child up for reading and writing by building knowledge, skills, and habits that create a strong foundation for future literacy.*

## Knowledge

- Build conversation skills through play with peers
- Introduce new words
- Play letter, number, and counting games
- Go on community outings to stores, museums, and parks

## Skills

- Talk about the print you see around you
- Write lists
- Enjoy read-aloud books and talk about the pictures you see



## Habits

- Ask your child to tell you about what they draw/write
- Choose screen-time activities that encourage learning new words and letters
- Build reading and writing into everyday routines such as bedtime stories and grocery lists

## Start early with babies and toddlers

- Name familiar people, places, and things in photos
- Encourage scribbling to build small hand muscles for writing
- Encourage bilingualism by singing songs and reading stories in your family's heritage language



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# Getting Ready to Read and Write in Childcare



*Childcare providers often ask, “How can I do more with literacy in my center?” Here are some simple ideas for creating a literacy environment.*



## What’s included in a childcare literacy environment?

- Pillows or low chairs where children can sit to “read” or look through books
- Picture books on low shelves that are easy for children to reach
- Posters, calendars, or decorations with letters and words to help children see that print has meaning
- Displays of children’s work, including their beginning attempts to write
- Low tables and chairs where children can use drawing and writing supplies
- Small chalkboards, rubber stamps, magnetic letters, letter puzzles, and simple letter and word games



## How can playtime help children learn to read and write?

- Play helps children become familiar with print if it includes making signs, lists, or labels.
- Pretend play involves children in making up their own stories. This can help them understand story structure, which will be important as they begin to read.



## What does drawing have to do with learning to read and write?

- Using crayons and pencils helps develop motor skills needed to form letters.
- Drawing lets children tell stories before they can write.



## What else can I do to help young children get ready for reading and writing?

- Read and tell stories to the children daily.
- Encourage children to act out stories they have heard.
- Make time daily for them to dictate ideas, stories, and letters, or to write their own.
- Sing songs and play rhyming games every day.
- Make time for the children to tell their own stories, and talk about stories they hear.
- Listen to them, and help them listen to each other.

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# The Gift of Words: Conversation and Routines



*Some children start kindergarten with double the vocabulary of others. Knowing many words and understanding them are important in developing thinking skills and in getting ready to read. Here are some ways for busy parents to add to a child's school readiness with the gift of new words. It's never too early to start!*

## Conversation

Find time to talk with your child! Make it a habit to turn off the radio or the “screens” and use those moments for conversation. Talking with adults is the best way to expose a child to new words and ideas.

- When you can, include your child when talking with other adults.
- Set aside a regular time to talk with him—bedtime or mealtime are ideal.
- Rephrase what your child says and build on it, showing you understand. “You’re hot? The sun is warm today, isn’t it? Would you like a cold drink?”
- Pause after speaking to your child, giving him time to respond.

## Routines

Build vocabulary during your everyday routines.

- When you shop, talk about what you will buy and how you will use it. Discuss size and weight. Is a package small or large, heavy or light?
- When you’re cooking dinner, discuss what you’re cooking and what foods can be eaten raw. Talk about where foods come from.
- When your child watches TV or videos, watch with her. Talk about what you are watching together, especially if you think the child might have missed some word meanings. Look for children’s programs and videos that teach in fun ways, such as “Sesame Street.”
- Talk about where you’re going and what you see. “Do you think there might be a bird’s nest in that tree?” “Is that building a bank or a hospital?” “How do you know?” “Who do you think might work there?”
- Label objects with your words. “That flower is a rose. Look at the caterpillar.” Learn with your child. “I don’t know what that bug is. Let’s ask the librarian to help us find a book on insects.”

 For related Web resources, see “The Gift of Words: Conversation and Routines” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# The Gift of Words: Reading and Games



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## Reading

**Read often to your child, both old favorites and new books from the library. Comment on new words you find in books or wherever you come across them.**

- Use place words such as up, down, right, left. Talk about opposites: in and out, up and down, on or off, hot or cold, fast or slow.
- Use synonyms—words that mean the same thing. If your child talks about the time after dinner, respond using the word “evening.”
- Pick out a new word, and tell your child what it means. Use it in a clear context frequently, even over-using it for fun! If the day's word is “excellent,” use it for anything that day that's good. The next day, find another to have fun with—like “magnificent.”
- Carry a small book or two in your car, purse, or backpack to use during those “waiting times.” Or download some children's e-books to your tablet or phone.
- Visit your library for books on subjects that interest your child. Many children love books about animals or machines, and these books can introduce new words.

## Games

**Play simple word games.**

- Try a yes-no game to teach about questions. “Are you purple?” “Can a tree talk?” Let her try asking you questions.
- Play a mystery game. Give clues and let your child guess. “It's yellow. We buy it at the grocery store. You throw away the outside and eat the inside.” Add clues until she guesses “banana.” “She comes to our apartment every day. She usually leaves something. She wears a uniform.” He guesses “mail carrier.” Try reading a definition from a child's dictionary and letting him guess the word. Turn it around. “Is a vehicle a person, a building, or a car?”
- Play with categories, differences, and similarities. “How is a banana different from an apple and an orange? How are they alike?”
- Sing simple songs and recite nursery rhymes together.
- Enter into your child's games. Have fun playing house, with her playing the mommy or your son playing the daddy. Talk about what different members of the family do.

 **For related Web resources, see “The Gift of Words: Reading and Games” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Learning by Listening to Language

Exploring the sounds of language is an important part of learning how to read and write. Spend time listening, talking, and reading together to build your child's skills and confidence. These games will help your child begin to demonstrate an understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds.

## Play a game of "I Spy"

Say, "I see something in the room that starts with a b...b...b... letter B." See if your child can guess the object: b...b...b... ball!



## Rhyme time!

Say, "Do you see the cat? Help me think of rhymes! He's sitting on a mat and talking to the rat." Then repeat the rhyming words, "Cat, mat, rat!" Make up silly rhymes such as "apple, bapple, zapple, dapple."



## Sing favorite songs together

Listen for rhyming words, make up new verses, and write down your favorites. Try singing, "Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool. Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full." Ask your child to listen for the words that rhyme. *Wool* and *full*! Can you think of another idea? How about, "Meow, meow, kitty cat, have you any mice? No ma'am, no ma'am, but a couple would be nice!"



## Stretch out the sounds of simple words

Say, "I see a dog. D O G. It starts with a 'D' sound and ends with a 'G' sound. The 'O' sound is in the middle. D O G." Try spelling the word together.



## Talk about the words you see around you

"I see letters on that sign. Let's figure out what it says. O P E N. Let's put them together." Say the sounds and words slowly: "O' ... saying the sound in its name. 'P' popping on my lips. ... 'E' saying 'eh' like elephant. ... 'N' saying the last sound. O P E N. The store is open! We figured it out!"



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# Literacy across the Preschool Curriculum



*Reading and writing develop naturally when children use print every day. Adults can combine words and pictures to create printed materials that children can easily read. Preschoolers can be encouraged to do much of the writing themselves. They can also dictate words that adults write for them. Here are some ways to include print across the curriculum.*



## **Post signs where children can see them.**

Label activity centers, shelves for toys and supplies, the restroom, the library, and playground areas. Put up daily snack signs or meal menus. Combine print and pictures to create directions for classroom pet or plant care. Provide a sign-up board where children can choose their day's activities.



## **Bring print materials into dramatic play.**

Help the children make menus for a restaurant, signs for a dental office, or shelf labels for a store. Provide materials to make mailboxes for a post office and invite children to send each other mail.



## **Encourage children to communicate in print.**

Help the children write brief letters to send home about classroom activities. Show them some ways to invite family members or children in other classes to special events. Ask them to write thank-you notes to visitors or field trip hosts.



## **Use children's dictations to document their work.**

Involve the class in writing a story about a field trip. Have some children help you label photos from a project. Ask children to dictate information about a project or a pet to share with visitors or others who use the classroom space. Encourage them to make signs with titles for the block structures they have built.



## **Link literacy to music and movement.**

Use words and pictures to create cards showing simple movements for children to act out. Add signs to an obstacle course. Post a list of songs children often request during classroom sing-alongs. With the class, write new words to familiar songs for group singing.



## **Set up a reading center.**

Stock a variety of reading materials related to topics the class is studying. Include fiction and nonfiction, picture books, and magazines. Add books made by children and audio books or e-books. Help the children make a classroom dictionary of new words. Provide journals for children to write about their interests.



## **Provide simple instructions for cooking and crafts.**

Make illustrated cookbooks with recipes that children can follow on their own. Post picture-based directions for making play materials such as play dough, finger-paint, baker's clay, and bubbles.

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Literacy Activities



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Here are some great ideas for embedding literacy skills into your outdoor activities.*

## Take a casual walk

- Encourage the children to look around for letters, words, signs, and symbols. Bring a clipboard and help them to make a list of what they see to share later. Take pictures of signs and symbols. Print them out to display in the classroom.
- Help the children categorize the different signs that they see (advertisements, announcements, warning signs, directional signs).
- Discuss what the children notice in ways that expand their vocabularies: “Kayla noticed a bird’s nest on the blue awning above the store entrance!” “Amir noticed a warning sign on the gazebo. It tells people not to feed the squirrels.”
- Pause to talk about interesting things. Is the bakery especially fragrant? Invite everyone to take a sniff and describe the aroma. Are leaves falling? Collect specimens for discussion and study. Has it rained or snowed lately? How can you tell?
- After the walk, ask the children to dictate a report about it together. Help them think about sequence in storytelling: “What did we do first, next, after that, last?” Children can draw illustrations to represent different events from their walk and compile them into a book.

## Stay on the grounds

- Write simple notes for children in the sandbox: “Hi!” “Sing B-I-N-G-O.” Help them identify letters and sound out the message. Children can write their names in dirt or sand. They can also “paint” words on the building or sidewalk by using a paintbrush dipped in water. Read them quickly before they dry and disappear!
- Tell stories outdoors. Be sure everyone has a comfortable place to sit and can hear you easily. (A librarian can help you find stories about the outdoors to learn and share with children.)
- Invite children to pair up and sit back to back so they can each see a different part of the grounds. (Allow space if children do not feel comfortable leaning on or touching a peer.) Let them spend 2–5 minutes carefully drawing what they see, in silence. Then give them a few minutes to share their drawings and tell their partners about two or three things that they saw.
- Collaborate on a poem about being outdoors. Suggest that the children lie on their backs and focus for 30 seconds on what is above them. Ask them to report details of what they noticed. “How would you describe the sounds you heard? What did you see? What could you feel?” Help children write their descriptive words on a personal whiteboard or clipboard with paper. Help the group as they arrange their descriptive words into a poem to display for families.

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# The Power of the Pen: Drawing and Scribbling



*When young children draw or scribble, they are using the skills they will need for writing. To keep momentum strong, it is important to provide positive feedback to all their efforts. You can support preschoolers' first efforts to write in several ways.*

## Encourage young children to draw.

- Make sure children have drawing materials and plenty of time to use them. Drawing materials should be available daily during centers or free choice times.
- When a child has made a drawing, print their name in one corner. You might say each letter: "A-V-A spells Ava. I wrote your name!"
- If a child is not yet able to write their whole name, encourage them to write just the first letter. Finish writing their name while saying the remaining letters. You wrote the "J" and I added "O" and "N." Now it says "Jon."
- Pay attention to a child's effort to copy their name. "Oh, you worked on writing your name, Alex. There is the A, and there is the L."
- Remember that children express ideas and tell stories with their drawings. You can help a child connect print with spoken words when you invite them to dictate something about their picture while you write what they say on a piece of paper. Having trouble getting started? You might ask, "What's going on in your picture?" or "What name do you want to give your drawing?" Point to each word as you read back the dictation.

## Let children scribble!

- Keep in mind that a scribbler isn't just creating random lines and loops. They are practicing what it's like to communicate on paper. The child might not want to let others see their efforts if, for example, an older sibling talks about scribbling in an insulting way. You can help by talking about their scribbles as "working on your writing."
- Encourage scribblers to use their scribbling skills during dramatic play to make signs, play money, or pretend mail. "You made a sign for your store telling customers you open at noon." "You put a letter in the mail and sent it to your grandma."
- Talk to a child about their scribbles. You might ask, "How did you get the crayon to make that line?" "What did you think about saying?" Comment about marks they have made: "That one looks like the D in De'andre's name." "Did you enjoy making all those swirls?"
- If a child shows you some scribbles and asks you, "What did I write?", you might try asking, "What do you want it to say?" or "What were you thinking about when you were working on it?"

## Display children's drawings and scribbles.

- Label children's artwork with descriptions dictated by the children.
- Talk to parents about the important role that drawing and scribbling play as a child learns to write.

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# The Power of the Pen: Let Children Choose Writing Centers!



*“Y-E-S. N-O. L-O-V-E. H-E-L-P.” When children see the power of written words, they want to write, too. A “writing center” gives children easy access to writing materials and lets them enjoy a variety of activities while they learn skills that will help them become confident, competent writers.*

## What are the basics of making a writing center?

- A quiet space with seats for two or more at desks or a table
- Paper: unlined paper, clean scrap paper, outdated business stationery, lined paper, greeting cards, sticky notes
- Pencils, pens, crayons, chalk, erasers (NOTE: Some children work best with larger crayons or thick pencils. Others do better with thinner pencils or crayons.)
- An alphabet chart with capital and lowercase printed letters, plus numerals
- Print samples: greeting cards, calendars, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, handwritten messages, coupons

## What other materials might encourage children to visit the writing center?

- Clipboards: purchased or made from stiff cardboard and two paperclips
- Colored pencils, nontoxic markers, highlighters, bingo stampers
- Special papers: envelopes, colored paper, graph paper, postcards, index cards, appointment books, message pads, labels
- Office supplies: tape, paperclips, stapler, brads, hole punch, scissors
- Canceled postage stamps, promotional stamps
- Rubber stamps of letters and words, ink pads
- Chalkboard, whiteboard, Magna-Doodle, Etch-A-Sketch (These tools save paper and allow children to easily erase “mistakes.”)
- Magnetic letters or words; alphabet blocks; letters made of wood, sandpaper, or plastic
- Picture dictionary (Consider adding a picture dictionary or two languages other than English if you have children in your classroom who speak another language.)
- Storage for children’s work (file folders, accordion files, binders, filing trays)
- Places to display children’s writing (bulletin boards, easels, walls, doors)

## When might a child use a writing center?

- When they select writing as an activity during choice time.
- When they want to create signs, tickets, or other props for dramatic play.
- When they want to make a message for a friend or family member.
- When using centers is part of the daily schedule.

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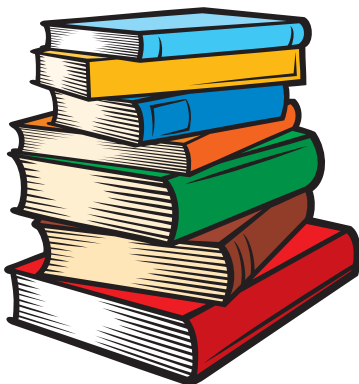
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# Read and Write Together

*Understanding stories and information that is read aloud is an important skill for young children. Make time to read aloud with your child and talk together about the stories and information you read.*

## Find new books

Travel to your local library and explore the storybooks and informational books. Children can learn from a wide variety of books.



## Ask questions as you read

Ask your child what she sees in the pictures. Encourage her to predict what might happen next. Ask her why she thinks a character might act in certain way.



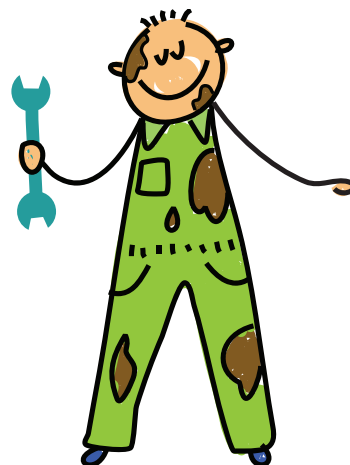
## Read stories again and again!

Encourage your child to retell you the story from the pictures. This helps your child recall the important parts of the story and understand the main ideas.



## Make your own books

Write down your child's ideas about drawings he has made. Fold and staple those drawings to make a book. By hearing his own words read aloud, he learns that the printed text communicates the meaning of his ideas.



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# Read With Your Toddler!


How to share books with a busy, independent toddler.





 Let your child choose a sturdy picture book.

 Sit where you are both comfortable.

 Let your child touch the book, point to pictures, and help you turn the pages.

 Name what you see, or read the words clearly.

 Read for as long as your child is interested – 30 seconds or 10 minutes.

 Does your child get distracted? Just try again later.

**Making reading a part of family life will help your child be ready to do well in school.**

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# Sharing Books with Your Baby



*Can you really share books with children who don't talk yet? Yes! Mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles—even older brothers and sisters—can help babies learn to love reading by reading to them. Here are some tips that have worked for parents and caregivers.*

## How do I get started?

- Talk, sing, or recite simple rhymes to your baby every day, starting when he is born.
- Introduce books when your baby begins to notice pictures. For many babies, that happens around 4-6 months of age.
- Find a place to read where both of you are comfortable and your baby can see the pages. She will probably prefer to sit in your lap. In a car, the car seat is the place for a little one when you read aloud.
- Point to a picture on a page. Let your baby touch, too. Talk about the picture or read the simple words. Babies often like to have the same book or the same page read to them over and over.

## What books can I share with my baby?

- Babies often treat books like toys, so find books that are made especially for them. Good baby books are made of thick cardboard, cloth, or plastic. They are easy to clean and tough to destroy!
- Look for books with appealing pictures of people, animals, or familiar objects, and with simple words and rhymes.

## When can I read with my baby?

- Make reading part of the daily routine. After a nap and before going to bed are two popular times.
- Tuck a book into the diaper bag when “out and about” with a baby, so sharing books can be part of waiting for the bus or standing in the checkout line.

## How long can I read to my baby?

- Read to your baby only as long as she remains interested—for a few seconds or a few minutes.
- Sing the words, change your voice, or use a puppet to help hold her attention. If reading time is short but pleasant, she may listen more another time.

## What if my baby isn't interested in books?

- Keep trying, but don't force it. Some babies are just busy learning other things.
- Let him see you reading.
- If your baby can hold objects, let her play with baby books. Offer books when she is looking for something to do. Such invitations help many children develop an interest in books.

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# Sharing Books with Your Preschooler



*Even before 3- to 5-year-olds recognize letters, they can learn a lot about reading and writing when adults share books with them. So read aloud to your preschooler—for enjoyment and for long-term benefits!*

## What books would my preschooler like?

- Preschoolers often like books with detailed illustrations. They also enjoy stories or poems with humor or adventure. Some preschoolers like children's magazines that feature poetry, stories, and nonfiction.
- Your child may enjoy stories and poems about animals, toys or vehicles, friendships, children, and families. He may have a favorite topic, author, or illustrator.

## How do I read aloud to my child?

- Sit so you both are comfortable and can see the pages easily. Let your child hold the book and turn the pages.
- Talk with your child about what you both see on the cover. She may want to look through the book before you read it aloud. Welcome her comments about the illustrations. Invite her to predict what might happen in the book.
- Speak clearly when you read. Some parents point to words as they read them aloud.
- If your child is restless, change your voice or use puppets or props to hold her attention. Invite her to recite parts of favorite books with you. Or let her fill in words at the ends of sentences.
- Remember that if your child wants to hear a book over and over, she is still learning from it.
- Try inviting your child to act out or retell a story with you.

## When and how long should I read to my preschooler?

- Read for as long as your child is interested: perhaps 5 to 10 minutes, or more. He might want to hear a stack of books! Or he may be ready for illustrated chapter books to be read over several days.
- Make reading aloud a regular part of your preschooler's day. After lunch and before bed are popular times for reading. Try reading aloud in place of screen time. Reading can make waiting time fun when you are at the doctor's office, riding the bus, or running family errands.
- Keep in mind that older siblings can read to your preschooler when you are too busy.

## What if my child is not interested in books?

- Keep telling stories, singing, and talking with your child. Offer to help him make his own storybook. He can dictate a story while you write or type his words.
- Take her to the library or bookstore. Show her books that you think she will like.
- Let your child see you reading for enjoyment. Keep inviting her to read with you, but don't force her to listen. She may be busy learning other things.

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# Sharing Books With Your Toddler



*Can you really share books with an active, independent, and busy toddler? Yes! Parents, caregivers, grandparents, aunts, uncles—even older brothers and sisters—can help toddlers learn to love reading. These tips have worked for many families and caregivers.*

## How do I get started?

- Pick a book or let your toddler choose one.
- Find a comfortable place where you both can see the pages. If your child enjoys turning pages, be sure she can reach the book. Lying down, sitting on your lap or next to you, or in her car seat—any of these places can work for a read-aloud.
- Point to a picture and read the words clearly. Encourage your child to notice details in the pictures.
- Talk with your toddler about what happens in the story. Let him say the words to favorite stories along with you, if he wants to.

## What books will my toddler like?

- Toddlers like picture books about people, animals, familiar objects, and favorite characters, with simple stories and rhymes. Your child may ask for the same book over and over, or for books about a particular topic.
- Board books are good for toddlers who are still learning to care for books.

## When should I read with my toddler?

- Try reading after a nap, after lunch, or before bed. Make reading part of your family's routines.
- Take books along when you go out with your toddler. Sharing books can be part of waiting at the doctor's office or the bus stop. Read a story instead of watching a video.

## How long should I read to my toddler?

- Read for only as long as your toddler is interested. Some toddlers will listen for 10 minutes or more to a favorite book. Some will even insist on going through a stack of books with you! Others may be too active to sit still for long.
- Vary your voice or use a puppet or other prop to help hold your child's attention.

## What if my toddler isn't interested in books?

- Keep trying, but don't force it. Toddlers are busy finding out about their world.
- Talk with your child, tell stories, sing, or recite poems. Let her see you reading. Take her to the library and the bookstore with you. Such experiences help many children develop an interest in reading.

## For related Web resources, see “Sharing Books with Your Toddler” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Talk, Listen, and Learn

Young children are developing their ability to express themselves through language. You can help your child build vocabulary and conversation skills by talking together.

## Talk about your daily routine

Say, "Let's think of all the things we will do today. First, we will eat breakfast. Next, we will put on our coats, and then we will walk to the bus stop." Encourage your child to tell you what will happen first, second, and third.



## Encourage descriptions

Look around and encourage your child to describe the things he sees. Say, "Tell me about the pictures on that store window," or "Tell me about the sounds of nature you hear. Do you hear the wind rustle or the birds chirping?"



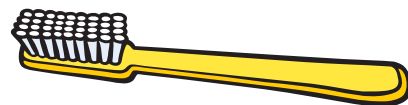
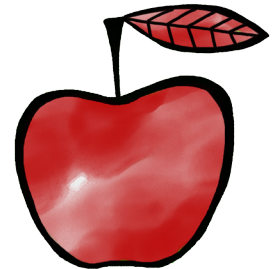
## Read together

Encourage your child to describe pictures in books and magazines. Say, "Tell me what you see in the picture." Repeat what your child says and expand on her ideas. Say, "Yes, I see the tiger in the picture, too! That tiger has orange and black stripes on her fur."



## Build vocabulary

Expand your child's knowledge of descriptive words. Say, "This apple is *crunchy* on my teeth and the skin is *shiny*," or "The toothbrush bristles feel *prickly* on my tongue."



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# Talk Together

*Everyday conversations are opportunities to help your child learn new words. Talking with you each day provides time to practice good manners. Talking together about the world around you builds your child's listening and speaking skills.*

## Explain the rules for polite conversations

Talk about manners people expect, such as waiting for the other person to finish their sentence, saying "Excuse me" when interrupting, and making requests using the words such as *please* and *thank you*.

That looks like Daddy's car.

Yes, it is green and has four doors just like Daddy's car.

## Model active listening

Rephrase what your child says and add to his ideas to extend the conversation. Look into your child's eyes and stop what you are doing so he can see that he has your full attention. Help your child learn to take turns and listen to others' ideas.

## Stay on topic

Help your child expand her ideas on a topic by asking follow-up questions. Repeat what you talked about at the end of a conversation, such as "We talked about so many ideas about the zoo during lunch today. You remembered seeing elephants, lions, and penguins at the zoo."

## Encourage good listening

Encourage your child by pointing out ways to help someone know that they are listening carefully, such as standing or sitting still and

making eye contact with the speaker. Encourage her to ask her friends questions and then listen to their ideas.



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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Language and Literacy



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait. You can help your child get ready to read and write while you're on the move!*

## **Talk and listen.**

- While you wait, try asking your child, “What are you thinking?” He will be glad to know you care about what he thinks and does.
- Create a story together. One of you starts it with a sentence or a few lines. Then everyone else takes turns adding a sentence or a few lines until “The End.” Or try retelling a favorite story or reciting a favorite poem together. Keep in mind that correcting a child's speech too often may make her want to stop talking to you! It's important to pay attention to the ideas she tries to express. If people around the child use language correctly, she will learn to do so.

## **Sing and rhyme.**

- Look for song lyrics and poems with lots of repetition. These can help your child learn sounds and language patterns.
- Try writing the alphabet on a piece of paper so your child can follow along as you sing the Alphabet Song together.

## **Look for messages around you.**

- Help your child identify the letters, words, numerals, or symbols you see. Children quickly learn to recognize road signs and logos of companies and sports teams.
- When your child knows some letters, numerals, and symbols, try playing “I Spy.” Take turns finding print and symbols around you: “I spy the letter M as in m-m-macaroni. Can you find it, too?” “I spy the Chicago Bulls logo. Can you find it, too?”

## **Write it down.**

- “Brainstorm” lists with your child: books you want to read, foods you need to buy, things you see around you, or ways to solve a problem.
- Let your child make up a story while you write down her words. She can draw pictures to go with it. Or, she can dictate a letter or text message to a relative or friend.

## **Bring a book.**

- Tuck two or three small children's books into your purse, backpack, or diaper bag—or keep some favorites on your mobile device. (Note: Children prone to motion sickness should not look at books in a moving vehicle!)
- Whenever you can, stop at the library when you run errands with your child.

## **For related Web resources, see “Things to Do While You're Waiting: Language and Literacy” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Using Predictable Books with Young Children



When we make predictions, we form ideas about the future based on what we already know or believe. A predictable book is one that features patterns, sequences, and connections in the illustrations or words that enable children to guess “what comes next” in the story. Predictable books can be used to help 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds learn what to expect from spoken and written language.

## Choose a variety of predictable books to share with very young children (ages 2 through 4).

- Picture books with basic vocabulary and simple rhyme patterns let children anticipate what word comes next. Examples: *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* by Dr. Seuss; *Rap A Tap Tap* by Leo and Dianne Dillon.
- Children often like to repeat simple phrases or refrains with a reader.
- Many preschoolers like stories that build on patterns. Examples: *Drummer Hoff* by Barbara Emberley; *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* by Verna Aardema.

## Use children’s favorite books again and again.

- Young children may want to hear the same poem or book many times. Soon they get to know the word patterns. They may enjoy saying the words along with you.
- Many children like to fill in the blank when you leave out a word or two at the end of a sentence. Pause in your reading: “One fish, two fish, red \_\_\_\_.” Look around at the children. Wait for them to call out, “Fish, blue fish!”
- Some children will enjoy catching your “mistakes” when you playfully change a few words in a familiar book: “One fish, two cats, red fish....”

## Expand on children’s predictions.

- Children can make up dialogue between characters in wordless and nearly wordless books. You might say, for example, “There are no words to tell us what is going on in this picture. What do you think this boy might say to the dog?”
- Children who know a book well can discuss different versions of the same story. For instance, you might read aloud from *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* by Simms Taback. Then show the children Alison Jackson’s *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Pie*.

Help them predict some possible similarities and differences between the two. “The lady who swallowed a fly also swallowed a spider and other animals. What do you suppose this pie-swallowing lady might eat?” Follow up by asking, “What makes you think so?”

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# “What’s Next?” Predictions at Story Time



*When we make predictions, we form ideas about the future based on what we’ve already seen or done. Preschool children are beginning to notice patterns, sequences, and other connections that help them guess what to expect from spoken and written language. You can involve older preschoolers in making predictions when you read them a book that they haven’t heard before.*

## Let the children judge the book by its cover.

- Hold the book so the children can look at the whole cover illustration. Read aloud the book title and the names of the author and the illustrator.
- Point out interesting details about the book. For example, the book may have photographs instead of illustrations. It may have pages of varying sizes, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. It may have a medal or other award on the cover.
- Now that they have some clues about the book, ask the children, “What do you think could be going on in this book?” Ask them to explain their answers. “Adam, what makes you think this book is about a frog who wears clothes?”
- Encourage children to respond to each other’s ideas. “Lola predicts that the story will be funny because she remembers another funny book by this author. Charlie, what do you think about that?”
- Ask children what they think the illustrator will do to help tell the story. “Do you expect the illustrator to use lots of colors? Or will she use just one or two?” “Corina thinks the artist will draw other things besides the frog.”
- Help children list their predictions, so they can revisit their ideas after they hear the story. Write predictions on chart paper, and after the story, read them aloud and circle predictions that were accurate.

## Read the book together to find out what happens.

- If the children don’t object, pause in the middle of a story so they can guess what might happen next. Keep in mind that this activity can interrupt the flow of a story. It may annoy the children if you do it too often.
- When a child predicts what they think will happen next, ask, “What makes you think so?” or “What gives you that idea?”
- If you’re reading the book over several days, you might invite the children to draw what they predict will happen next in the story before you continue reading.

## Check predictions together.

- When the story ends or when you stop reading for the day, ask the children to revisit their predictions. “Did the story go the way you expected?” “Did any of the illustrations surprise you?”
- Invite children to draw or dictate different endings to the story.
- Encourage children to continue discussing predictions. For example, set the story for the day on the sign-in table and ask children to write or draw a prediction as their “check in” for the day.

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# Young Authors at Work: Literature Response Journals



*Reading stories aloud in class is a great way to get young children excited about and engaged with literature. If you are looking for ways to help preschoolers comment on and retell information from stories, literature response journals encourage children to draw, write, and talk about the books you share with them.*

## Introduce literature response journals after the class has discussed a story.

- Invite the children to put their ideas about the story on paper. Start with some suggestions: “You could draw what you think one of the characters looks like. You can make a drawing of something that happens in the story. You can try writing some words, too.”
- Give each child a pencil and a sheet of paper. You might want to make booklets for them by folding and stapling several sheets of paper, or keep a file folder for each child’s journal pages. Children can also use clipboards if they are writing and drawing while sitting on the carpet.
- Begin with 3-5 minutes for responses. Lengthen or shorten the time allotted depending on how long children take to finish.
- Explain that each journal entry includes the date when it was written. Some teachers provide a date stamp that children can use to date their entries. Others print the day’s date where children can see it and copy it.
- If a child wants to write a caption, let them dictate or help them sound out words.
- Let children decorate their file folders or journal covers.

## Use the journals to spark discussion.

- Spend time with each child throughout the week to look at his or her response journal and to talk about what is in it. “I see you added a picture of a dog and the letters ‘D’ and ‘G’ to your entry today. Tell me more about what you were thinking about the book when you wrote this.”
- Invite children to share journals with others in the classroom. After a child explains one of her entries, ask, “Who has a question or something to say about Mary’s journal entry?” Make a schedule to assure that each child gets a turn weekly.
- Set aside time for pairs of children to discuss their journal entries.
- Keep your own journal of drawings and captions. Share entries after the children finish theirs, so they do not think they should copy your work.

## Extend the journal activities.

- Invite children to make up new endings to a story. Children may enjoy working in small groups to think of creative new conclusions.
- If reading a book over several days, ask children to draw what they think will happen next. Let them share their predictions with classmates.
- Encourage detailed entries by offering crayons, colored pencils, or special papers.

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# Young Authors at Work: Story Dictations



*Preschoolers are creative and imaginative and have many ideas to share with the world. Young children who haven't yet learned to write can still be authors when they dictate their stories to an adult. They might turn their dictations into books or let classmates dramatize their stories.*

## Start with dictation.

- Set aside some time at least once a week for each child to dictate stories to you or to another adult. Any staff member in the classroom can help with this activity. Young children may also enjoy sharing stories with visiting parent volunteers.
- Keep a dictation notebook or folder for each child. To save paper, you might use half-sheets of paper for the first drafts of stories.
- Let children know when their turn to dictate a story is approaching. Some children may want to take some time to imagine or chat with friends about their ideas.
- Sit where both of you are comfortable. Ask the child to begin their story. Write, print, or type their words as they speak. Some children may need reminders to speak slowly so you can keep up with what they say. Some preschoolers cannot pronounce the “th” sound; you might write “this” if the child actually says “diss.” It’s not necessary to correct a child’s grammar or pronunciation as you go. If you can’t understand something even when a child repeats it, let them know: “I didn’t understand what you said. Can you say it a different way?”
- When a child says that the story is over, read it back to them. Ask, “Does that sound the way you want it to sound?” “Do you want to change something or add anything?” Make any changes they suggest. Read them the revised story.

## Let children share their stories with peers.

- When a child is satisfied with their story, invite them to illustrate it before showing it to classmates. If they want to spread the story out over several pages, rewrite or retype it with a few words or sentences on each page.
- Offer several choices for illustration. Children may prefer crayons, paint, colored pencils, thin black markers, or even a computer-based drawing application.
- Set aside time for children to “read” their books aloud. Some classrooms have an Author Chair where children sit when they share their books. You might do the reading if a child is unready to share their book on their own.
- Encourage the listeners to make comments or helpful suggestions.

## Invite children to dramatize their stories.

- When a child finishes dictating a story, ask, “Would you like some classmates to act out your story?” If they agree, read the story aloud at group time. Then let the author choose classmates to act out the parts. Remember that some children like to play rocks and other things that have no speaking parts.
- Create a space for the actors to perform as you read the story aloud again.
- After “The End,” encourage actors and author to bow to the “audience” and to thank each other.
- Ask the class for comments or suggestions about the story and the performance.

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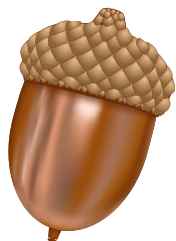
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# Counting Up, Down, and All Around!

Understanding how much or how many is an important skill for young children to develop. Help your child learn about number quantities by exploring the mathematical world around you! Here are some ideas to get you started.

## How many are in my hand?

Find a bucket of small toys, rocks, acorns, or other tiny items. Take a handful and then have her look and guess how many pieces are in your hand. Count and check to see how close her guess is.



## Practice counting

Have a real or pretend tea party and make sure each guest gets one napkin, plate, cup, and spoon. Also, if you give everyone a cupcake, how many will you need?



## Count during everyday routines

Say, "I wonder how long it will take you to put your socks on." Then count aloud to model the number words (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). Then ask your child to count how long it takes to put your socks on. Try counting numbers up to 20 (1-2-3-4, etc.) or counting down (10-9-8-7, etc.).



## Create collections of items

Count out groups of small objects such as pinecones, pebbles, or pennies. Label your collection with the numeral indicating the quantity. Count items into compartments of an egg carton or containers labeled with numbers.



## Notice numbers in nature

Sometimes we find things that have the same number of parts. A certain flower may always have six petals. Leaves may be attached in groups of three on trees. Dogs and cats have four legs. Some fruits, such as watermelon and apples, have many seeds. Other fruits, such as plums and apricots, have just one.



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# Discover Shapes in Many Places

Young children love to find shapes all around them. Understanding shapes is an important mathematical skill for young children to develop. Here are some ways you can help your child learn about shapes and to talk about and work with them in meaningful ways.

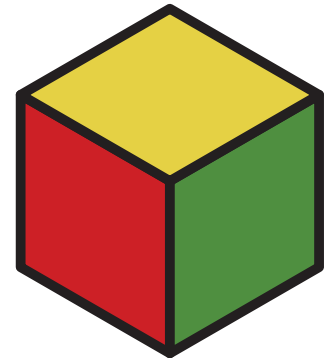
## Point out familiar shapes

Talk about common two-dimensional shapes such as circles, squares, and triangles and three-dimensional shapes such as balls, cubes, and cones. Name the shapes children often see in nature, their home, and around their neighborhood.



## Explore new dimensions

Introduce words for three-dimensional shapes. Talk about how a can has a round flat circle on top but the whole shape is called a cylinder. Show children one side of a block that has the shape of a square and explain that the whole shape is called a cube.



## Expand their vocabulary about shapes

Use words that help children describe shapes accurately. Some words to include are *side, solid, surface, point, straight, curve, inside, flat, top, and angle*.



## Explore the concept of shapes

Playing board games, participating in sports, building with blocks, and creating with recycled materials are all opportunities for children to problem solve with and talk about shapes.



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# Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Let's Measure!



*Your preschool-age child hears you talk about miles, inches, pounds, liters, acres, and minutes. He sees you measuring things. He may wonder how tall he is or how long he can stand on one foot. Here are some home activities that can help your child learn basic measurement concepts.*



## Use the language of measurement.

- Introduce your child to words such as weight, balance, size, full, yards, area.
- Ask her to compare: “Which board is widest?” “Whose boots are heavier? Yours or Dad’s?”
- Help her ask questions about measurement: “You could ask Grandpa what he measures at work.” “Let’s find out if your lunchbox holds more stuff than mine.”



## Show your child how to use measurement in family routines.

- Let your child give pets a set amount of food or water each day.
- He can use teaspoons and measuring cups when you cook together.
- He can learn to check a rain gauge or thermometer and tell you the results.
- She can help fill trash bags and recycle bins. You might help her weigh the trash or recycling each week and use a calendar to keep track of how much your family throws out or recycles.
- He can have a daily schedule for giving garden plants a set amount of water.



## Play games together that use measuring skills.

- Join your child in games that involve being aware of distances, such as tag, beanbag toss, and hopscotch. “Pathway” games (for example, Candyland) also involve distances.
- Let her use a timer during games to practice measuring time.



## Offer other activities related to measurement.

- Let your child play with nesting toys, interlocking blocks, geoboards, clay, wood scraps, stacking toys, and fabric squares.
- Offer your child measuring tools (rulers, eye droppers, balance scales, timers) for study or play. Provide clear tubes and containers for sand and water play.
- Help your child use nonstandard items (hands, thick string, shoes, floor tiles) to describe the size of things around him. “This table is five tiles long.”
- Invite your child to guess the weight of pets, family members, or toys, checking them on a scale. You might help her make a chart of her results.
- Make a quilt with your child, or let him help you build a model, a birdhouse, or other small construction project.



For related Web resources, see “Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Let’s Measure!” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Making Sense of Numbers

Learning how numbers can be added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided is important for young children. Help your child discover the mathematical world by finding opportunities to bring numbers into conversations and play.

## Add them up!

When playing with tiny toys such as marbles or small blocks, have your child take two handfuls. Count how many pieces are in each hand. Have your child hold her hands together and figure out how many she has all together.



## Find number groups

Talk about what you see. Say, "I see three birds on the fence and each bird has two wings—there are six wings. I see two cars and each car has four wheels—that's eight wheels all together."

## Count them down!

How many are in the bowl? Encourage your child to count the number of pieces in her bowl when you are eating foods such as pretzels, grapes, or crackers. Stop and recount after she eats a few pieces. Figure out how many are left in the bowl.



## Divvy them up!

Help your child create equal shares for each person when you are playing with toys or creating with art materials. Give each person one piece at a time. When all the pieces are gone, have each person count to see how many are in his share.



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# Math Sense: Learning about Coins



*Most preschoolers do not yet understand the values and uses of money. To help 3- and 4-year-olds become more familiar with money, teachers and caregivers can first engage them in investigations of coins. Keep in mind that coins can be a choking hazard so coin activities must be adult supervised.*

## Have a coin wash.

- Invite small groups of children to wash and rinse 20-30 pennies in tubs of mild detergent and lukewarm water. As they handle and converse about the coins, you can gain a sense of what they understand and misunderstand about money.
- Invite children to describe the pennies they are cleaning. Help them keep track of their thoughts and observations. Next time, tell the children you are adding coins called nickels to the coin wash. Invite them to compare nickels and pennies (colors, sizes, designs). Over time, add other coins to the coin wash.
- You might explain that a nickel can buy the same amount as 5 pennies, and so on. But do not be surprised if the children don't fully understand this idea!

## Sort and compare coins.

- Make mixed sets of 10-20 cleaned coins for sorting. Ask the children questions about their collections: "How could you tell if you have more pennies or more nickels?" Let them make patterns using their coins.
- Invite children to make stacks of 10 coins. Which is taller—a stack of 10 nickels or 10 pennies? Let them find out how many pennies fit in a row on a 12-inch ruler. Some children need help counting. Help them record their findings.

## Play with money.

- Teach children a coin-stacking game using 6-sided dice and bowls of a single kind of coin. In pairs or small groups, they can take turns adding to their stacks according to rolls of the dice. Help them keep track of how many coins are in each growing stack. Play this game on the floor so the coins do not have far to fall.
- Give a small bowl of pennies and a spoon to a pair of children. Invite them to take turns scooping coins with the spoon. Help them record how many pennies are in each scoop. What was the largest amount they scooped? The smallest?
- Play a matching game. Draw circles on a paper with the numbers 1, 5, 10, and 25 inside them. See if children can match the coin to its corresponding value.

## Investigate coins as objects.

- Invite children to try flipping a coin, making it spin, or standing it on edge.
- Place a piece of paper over some coins and use the side of a crayon to do a rubbing over the top. Help the children notice the texture and details that come through on the rubbing.
- Provide magnifiers for looking at coins. Invite children to sketch some coins. A sketch can become the basis for a model made from modeling clay or other materials.
- Help children find information such as what coins are made of, how they are made, and what is depicted on the front and back of each type of coin.

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# The Path to Math: Beginning Numbers



Children ages 3-5 are learning that anything they count needs a “number name” (one block, two blocks) and that the list of number names has a set order (1-2-3-4). They may know that numbers stand for certain quantities. They notice that amounts change when things are added or removed. Here are some ways you can help preschool children learn about numbers.

## Use the language of numbers.

- Use words such as *amount*, *enough*, *none*, *before/after*, *most*, *pair*, *take away*.
- Help children ask and answer thought-provoking questions involving numbers: “How many of our caterpillars haven’t made cocoons?” “Do I have more silver keys or more gold keys? How can you tell?”

## Make numbers part of the daily routine.

- Have children “sign in” by moving a nametag or other token from one basket to another. They can count leftover tokens to find out how many are absent.
- Ask children to set tables with one napkin and one cup per chair. Have a helper give one glue stick to each child at their table.
- Encourage voting on classroom issues. “Ten people want apples for snack Friday. Seven want crackers.”

## Provide games that involve numbers and counting.

- Teach card games such as Go Fish, War (Top That), Animal Rummy.
- Provide games such as Tic Tac Toe, Mancala, Checkers.
- Use “choosing” games such as One Potato Two Potato.
- Teach active games such as Farmer in the Dell, scavenger hunts, and variations on bowling.

## Offer activities that promote working with numbers.

- Ask children to use tally marks to answer questions such as “How many cars in the lot?” or “Who has a pet at home?” They can tabulate the marks as a group.
- Help children construct graphs to compare amounts: “Did more people eat plain popcorn or cheese popcorn?” “We voted on our favorite book. How many people chose *Caps for Sale*? How many more chose *Corduroy*?”
- Provide blocks, integer rods, plastic animals, coins, etc., for making rows, pairs, and other groupings.
- Teach songs or fingerplays such as “Five Little Ducks” or “Ten Green Bottles.”
- Invite children to “hunt” for numbers around them, and discuss what they find. “How many numbers did you see on our clock?”
- Post a number line and a 0–100 chart where the children can easily use them.
- Model using the principles of counting. Touch each object when counting aloud (“One bag, two bags, three bags. . .”).

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# The Path to Math: Classification



*There's more to preschool math than counting! Classification skills are building blocks for learning important math concepts. Children classify objects, ideas, sounds, smells, or flavors into groups (categories) according to traits they have in common.*

## What do preschool children know about classifying?

Children ages 3-5 are learning to recognize colors, shapes, sizes, and materials. They are learning about parts and wholes. They can compare: biggest/smallest, more/less. They can sort by one trait at a time—separating blue buttons from red ones, for example. But sorting by both color and size might be difficult. Here are some ways to help children gain experience with classifying.

## Make sorting a part of daily routines.

- Children can sort as they clean up (label shelves with pictures of the items they hold).
- Children can separate items to recycle.
- Children can “sort themselves” as a way to vote on classroom issues. “If you want to play outside, stand here. If you want to play in the gym, stand there.”

## Play games that involve matching traits.

- Engage children in active games: “Mother May I” (involves categories of movement).
- Provide table games: Concentration, Go Fish, Bingo, Dominoes.
- Teach guessing games: “I hear something loud and rumbly. What is it?”
- Show children shoe search: Children take turns finding their own shoes in a pile.
- Introduce onomatopoeia, which is a word that sounds like the noise it describes (e.g., gargle, zap, pitter-patter).
- Match sounds to things you see: “When you see a cow in the storybook, say ‘Moo.’”

## Offer other activities that involve classifying.

- Collections: Children can gather, display, and study related items.
- Object sorting: Children can use egg cartons or sheets of paper with two or more sections for grouping similar things—coins, tools, keys, shells, fabric pieces, plastic figures, pictures from catalogs. Explain, “For this activity, you can put things that are alike together.” When the child finishes, ask, “How are the ones in this group alike?”
- Parts and wholes: Children can cut clay shapes into pieces, match lids to containers, or put bolts and washers together.

## Encourage children to observe and compare.

- Show children a familiar item and ask them to describe it. List the traits on an easel or chalkboard. Repeat with a similar item. Compare the lists. What is alike? Different? Introduce unfamiliar items. “Malik guesses this thing is made of wood. What makes you think so, Malik?”
- Describe things clearly. “Do you want a shiny pillow or a fuzzy pillow?” Use classification vocabulary: some, all, part, pair, set, category, observe, rule, different. Words for materials, sounds, smells, and flavors are useful, too.

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# The Path to Math: Geometric Thinking for Young Children



*Children ages 3–5 are beginning to learn about shapes, spaces, and locations—basic concepts of geometry. They use geometric thinking when they build with blocks, assemble a floor puzzle, or play a target game. Here are some ways to engage preschoolers with geometry.*

## Use the language of geometry.

- Describe objects by their shape when you talk with children. “You found a square piece of fabric.” “Kaya used two cylinder blocks in her tower.”
- Use words such as *side, solid, surface, point, straight, curve, inside, flat, top, angle*.
- Look at artwork together and talk about how artists use lines and shapes. Help children recognize lines and shapes in their drawings.
- Help children ask and answer thought-provoking questions. “If Mario places these three rods next to each other, what shape will he have?” “How can you tell this is a circle and not a square?” “What could you do if you wanted to turn the square on the geoboard into a triangle?”

## Make geometry a part of daily routines.

- Have children line up to go places. Ask them who is at the beginning or end of the line.
- Label shelves with the outlines of items that should go there. Children can put away toys and supplies by matching each item to its outline.
- Help older preschoolers make comparisons of shapes and sizes. “Will that paper rectangle fit inside this round basket?”

## Plan activities involving shapes, spaces, and locations.

- Have children position their hands, feet, or bodies to make basic shapes. “Can you make a triangle using your hands?” “Can four of you lay on the ground and create a square?”
- Offer containers of various shapes (cubes, pyramids, etc.) for sand and water play.
- Encourage children to work together on puzzles, tangrams, and mazes.
- Invite children to draw or make 3-D representations of things they observe indoors and outdoors.
- Let children explore drawing aids such as rulers, protractors, French curves, and stencils.
- Provide building blocks, pattern blocks, geoboards, pegboards, straws, buttons, and beads for creating designs and structures. Teach children to weave, braid, and sew. Show them how to fold, cut, and arrange paper and other materials to make mosaics, collages, and other designs.

## Play games that involve spaces, shapes, and locations.

- Introduce table games such as Carrom, Candy Land, tic-tac-toe, and card games such as Slapjack or Memory.
- Teach active games such as Fox and Geese, Mary Mack, Musical Chairs, beanbag toss, and variations on bowling.

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# The Path to Math: Measurement with Young Children



*There's more to preschool math than counting! Children ages 3-5 may wonder about measuring many things—from how tall they are to how long it takes to walk around the school. They hear adults talk about miles, pounds, gallons, acres, and minutes. They see adults use measuring tools. Measurement activities can help young children understand basic math concepts and learn life skills.*

## Include measuring in daily routines.

Children can ...

- Refill food and water supplies for classroom pets (and chart how much they eat).
- Use teaspoons and measuring cups to help make and hand out snacks.
- Use timers to help with turn taking (for example, when sharing popular toys).
- Check a rain gauge or thermometer and report results to the class.

## Provide games that use some measuring skills.

- Teach games involving distances (hopscotch, tag, beanbag toss, Candy Land).
- Use a stopwatch or timer for relay races and other games.

## Offer other activities related to measuring.

- Provide measuring tools (trundle wheel, ruler, eye dropper, balance, clock) for children to study or to use in dramatic play.
- Help children use nonstandard items (hands, thick string, shoes, unit blocks) to describe the sizes of furniture, block buildings, playgrounds, and each other. “How many unit blocks did it take to get from the classroom door to the window?”
- Offer geoboards, nesting toys, gears, interlocking blocks, stacking toys, mosaic tiles, and fabric squares for “choice time.”
- Provide clear tubes and containers for sand and water play.
- Offer specific amounts of paint. “Can two tablespoons of finger-paint cover your paper? What do you predict?”
- Let children guess the weight of common classroom objects, such as blocks, and then check their estimates for accuracy. Help them chart their guesses and findings.
- Help children notice sizes when they make costumes or doll clothing. Invite them to create scale models of objects from clay, popsicle sticks, boxes, or papier-mâché.

## Invite children to think about measurement.

- Use the language of measurement: *unit, fill, load, balance, meter, area*. Ask children to compare: wide/narrow, heavy/light, far/near, now/later. “Which doorway is narrower?” “Is the feather heavier or lighter than the brick?”
- Use children’s questions to launch in-depth studies of how and why people measure things. “Do all lunchboxes hold the same amount of stuff?” “How much does the paper we are recycling weigh?”
- Help children survey adults about what they measure at home and on their jobs.

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# The Path to Math: More Numbers



Many 4- and 5-year-olds know that anything they count needs a “number name” (one car, two cars) and that numbers have a set order (1-2-3-4). They know that quantities change when they add or remove items. They often enjoy playing with number concepts. Here are some ways to help older preschool children learn more about numbers.



## Use the language of numbers.

- Explain and use words such as *numeral*, *zero*, *skip-counting*, *countdown*, *pair*, *whole/part*, *many/few*, *half*, *subtract*.
- Help children ask and answer thought-provoking number questions: “We have six crackers and three children. How many can each of you have so it’s fair?” “Is it always best to have more of something instead of less?” “This pizza puzzle has eight slices to make up the whole pizza. How many slices are there if you cut it in half?”



## Make numbers part of the daily routine.

- Help the class keep track of the days of school. They can take turns marking on a number line or putting a row of index cards up around the room, one for each day. Ask them to predict how long the row will be on the 100th day of class.
- Ask children to figure out how many cups and napkins to set out for snack while considering attendance on that day. “There are 15 children in our class, but three of them are not here. How many napkins will we need for snack today?”
- Let children vote on classroom issues with more than two options. “Six people want to sing ‘BINGO’; two want ‘Mary Mack’; and three don’t want to sing at all!”



## Provide games that involve numbers and counting.

- Teach games such as lotto, bingo, dreidel, HiHo! Cherry-O, Pyramid Solitaire, Double (Addition), and War.
- Simplify Yahtzee, Sorry, Uno, or Monopoly Junior for young players.
- Help small groups plan scavenger hunts: “Find four shiny rocks, three dandelions, and five acorns.”



## Bring numbers into investigations and project work.

- Help children create simple survey forms for polling classmates or families: “What color are your eyes?” “How many seeds are in your apple?”
- Encourage children to separate a large group of items (such as pumpkin seeds) into sets of 10, then skip-count by 10s.



## Offer other activities that promote working with numbers.

- Encourage children to solve addition and subtraction word problems using blocks, integer rods, plastic animals, coins, etc.
- Share books that involve numbers, counting, parts, and wholes.
- Invite children to create their own games that use spinners or dice.

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# The Path to Math: More Word Problems for Preschoolers



*Do you know a preschooler who easily solves simple word problems that involve adding and taking away? That child may be ready to apply those math skills to part-to-whole relationship questions and problems that involve comparing sets of objects.*



**Older preschoolers may be ready for questions about parts and wholes.**

- Keep in mind that you may need to explain words such as whole, part, and collection before introducing these word problems.
- You could ask the child to start with the parts of a set or group. For example, you might say, “There are two parts to Min-Yung’s coin collection—4 pennies and 2 dimes. How many coins do you think there are in his whole collection?”
- You can also ask questions that start with a whole set or group. For example, “Min-Yung’s whole coin collection has 6 coins. Four are pennies. The rest are dimes. How many dimes do you think he has?”
- You might ask children to think about splitting up whole items into equal parts. They seem to especially enjoy this activity when food is involved. “Here’s the pizza we made together. How many pieces do you think I should cut so everyone at the table gets a slice?”



**Some preschoolers are ready for word problems that compare two sets of objects.**

- Before asking children to solve these problems, you may need to explain words like *quantity*, *compare*, *amount*, *more*, *most*, *fewer*, and *less*.
- You could ask a child to compare quantities. For example, “Winona has 6 pennies and Yusuf has 4. Who do you think has more pennies?” “How many more pennies do you think that person has?”
- When a child can solve problems like this with ease, you can also try reversing the “known” and “unknown” amounts. “Winona has 6 pennies. She has 2 more pennies than Yusuf has. How many do you think Yusuf has?”
- You might want to try comparison problems that have more than one answer. For example, “Yusuf has 4 pennies. Winona has fewer pennies than that. How many pennies could she have?”



**Children may enjoy word problems more if they do not feel they must compete to answer the question first.**

- If you are working with several children, give them each a chance to reply. Ask each child, “How did you get your answer?” or “What makes you think so?” (The way a child thinks about a problem can be just as important as having a “right” answer.)
- Let children use objects to work out their answers.
- When each child has answered, ask the group to talk about which answer to the problem makes the most sense.

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# The Path to Math: Real Graphs for Preschoolers



*Graphs are tools for visually organizing and comparing data about two or more sets of items. Graphing can be a way for 4- and 5-year-olds to apply what they know about classification, counting, and one-to-one correspondence. Start by making a large grid on paper or fabric to show children how to make “real graphs” with the actual objects that are being counted or compared.*

## Show the children ways to organize objects to be counted.

- For example, you might start by asking children to look at a bowl filled with 8-10 wrapped granola bars of two different kinds. “I wonder if we have more plain granola bars or more raisin bars. What’s your guess?” Invite them to estimate how many of each kind are in the bowl. Record their guesses on paper.
- Then invite some children to sort the items into two piles. Explain that you now have two sets of things. You might ask, “What do you think now—Are there more plain bars or more raisin bars? Do you want to change your guesses?” Write down their ideas.

## Construct a real graph using a grid with large squares.

- Ask the children to count with you as you make a row of one type of item by placing each one in a square on the grid. Explain: “I’m putting all the raisin bars in a row. Each one goes in a separate square, one after the other.” Make a second row of the other type of object.
- Explain that this is a real graph, using real objects. Ask, “What do you notice about this graph?” As children respond, encourage them to explain their answers: “What makes you think so?” or “How can you tell?” Record their ideas next to their earlier estimates.
- Respond to children’s ideas using words such as *compare*, *amount*, *more*, *most*, *less*. Watch to see what they understand about making the rows line up with each other. (Some children may not yet understand one-to-one correspondence.)

## Encourage other graphing activities.

- Provide grids or graph paper for graphing sets of small objects such as handfuls of coins. Talk with children about their results. “Devontay’s graph has a row of two nickels and a row of three pennies. Eduardo’s graph has three nickels and three pennies. What else do you notice about your two graphs?”
- Encourage children to make real graphs to compare things they are investigating.
- Think of questions that involve children in being part of a real graph. For example, how might they compare the number of people wearing pants with the number of people wearing shorts?
- See if some children are ready to compare more than two sets. “Some of you are wearing long sleeves. Others have short sleeves, and some have no sleeves. How would you show that with a real graph?”

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# The Path to Math: Word Problems for Preschoolers



*Children as young as 3 years old may enjoy solving simple word problems. You can give preschoolers opportunities to work with word problems related to their investigations, daily activities, and things they are curious about: money, toys, or objects the class has collected during a project.*

## What types of word problems can preschoolers solve?

Some preschoolers can try to add two groups of things.

- For example, you might say, “Taylor had two keys. He found two more. How many keys does Taylor have now?”
- For an added challenge, you could reverse the “known” and “unknown” amounts. “Yesterday, Taylor had two keys. He found some more keys and now he has four. How many keys did he find?”

Some preschoolers can work on simple subtraction or “take-away” problems.

- For example, you might say, “Sascha had three pennies. Two of them rolled away. Now how many does he have?”
- Reverse the known and unknown amounts sometimes. “One of Sascha’s pennies rolled away. He has two pennies left. How many did he start with?”

Many preschoolers can work with zero.

- You might say, for example, “Rani had five shiny rocks. Five of them got lost. How many shiny rocks does Rani have left?”
- Try reversing “known” and “unknown” amounts. “Rani had five shiny rocks. She lost some and now she has zero shiny rocks. How many got lost?”

## What are some ways to engage preschoolers in solving word problems?

These strategies can help children get started.

- Speak clearly when you pose a word problem. Give children plenty of time to think, and be willing to repeat the problem.
- Let children use objects to work out the problem and to check their answers. “You started out with five crayons, and you took two away. You said three are left. Let’s count them to be sure.”
- When a child answers a word problem, ask them, “How did you get your answer?” The way a child thinks about a problem can be just as important as having a “right” answer.
- Keep in mind that two or three problems at a time will be enough for many preschoolers.

Children can progress from simple to complex problems.

- Start with amounts of five or less for beginners. Increase the total amounts when you see that children are catching on.
- When a child can answer simple word problems quickly, try more complex questions. “Winona collected three acorns. One got lost. Then she found two more acorns. How many does she have now?”

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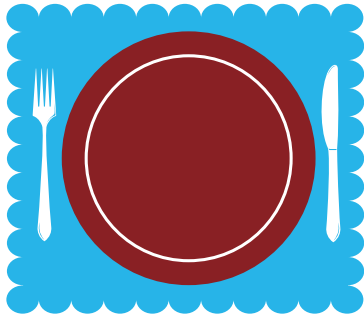
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# Sorting, Classifying, and Organizing

Sorting and organizing things into sets and groups is an important math skill for young children to develop. Have fun exploring your world while you practice these skills. Children can classify objects, ideas, sounds, smells, or flavors into groups of like items.

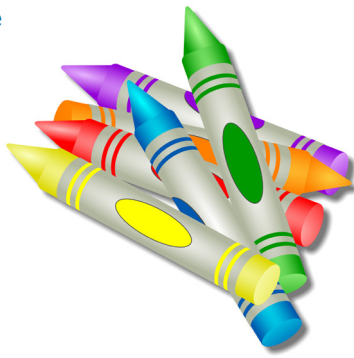
## Sort during cleanup

Sort the socks, shirts, and pants during laundry time. Organize spoons, forks, and dull knives in a basket when putting away clean dishes. Decide which drawer, basket, or closet is the right place for each item.



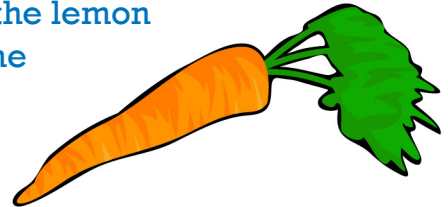
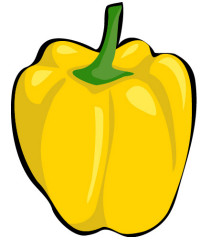
## Create collections!

Children can use egg cartons or sheets of paper with two or more sections for grouping similar things. Use natural objects such as rocks, sticks, or pinecones that you find outdoors. Small objects such as coins, crayons, or stickers that you find around the house are also good for sorting.



## Group foods

Talk about groups of different kinds of foods during meals. Classify food by type, color, texture, and flavor. For example, say “the corn and bell pepper are both yellow. Is the carrot yellow or a different color?” Or “The apple is sweet and the lemon is sour. Is the strawberry sweet or sour?”



## Talk about attributes

Ask about the attributes of people and pets around you. Who is wearing shoes and who is wearing boots? Who has shoes with laces and who has shoes without laces? Who has gloves and who has mittens? Who has fur and who has feathers? Who has a red shirt and who has a different color shirt?



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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Math



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait.*

**You can use waiting time to show your child that Math = Part of Life.**

Math is much more than just counting, adding, and subtracting! Playing with math concepts helps children become confident mathematical thinkers. Here are some quick math questions, games, and activities to engage a child who has to wait.

-  **Counting:** Use objects to help your child learn that each item we count corresponds to a number. “Let’s put one can of beans on top of each cereal box.” Ask each other questions like “How many trucks do you see?” “How many people are ahead of us in line, and how many will there be once the front person leaves?” Children like action rhymes that involve counting.
-  **Sequences and patterns:** Order is important in math. Notice sequences with your child: “Looks like we’re the second in line!” Find simple patterns together—the colors of floor tiles or the rhythms of people walking. Invite your child to make visual patterns using small objects around you.
-  **Classifying:** This means sorting things according to different properties. Make a game of sorting objects with your child, such as coins or laundry. Or you might suggest, “Let’s find all the people with hats” or “I’ll spot red cars and you spot cars in your favorite color.”
-  **Spatial relations:** This has to do with shapes and locations of objects. You can “hunt” for shapes together: squares, triangles, rectangles, and circles. Use words like “on,” “under,” and “inside” to describe where you see the shapes. Drawing shapes in the air can also be fun.
-  **Estimation and predictions:** Children often like to make educated guesses. “Will our laundry fit in two washers?” “Which is higher, a stack of five pennies or five dimes?” “How can you tell?” Make a guess first, and then check to see how close your guess came.
-  **Measurement and time:** Investigate measurement together. “How many hands tall is this jar?” “Which is heavier, your coat or your boot?” “How many steps to the car?” Your child may like timing games: “How many times can you count to 10 before we are first in line?” “How long can you stand on one leg?”

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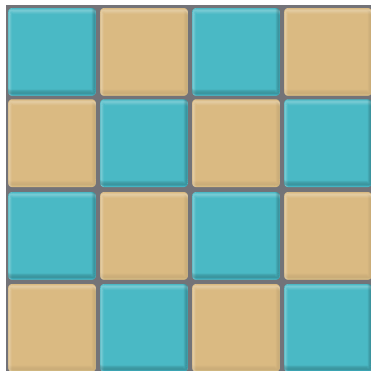
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# Math Is Everywhere

Keep children engaged when you have to wait

## Note sequences and patterns

Order is important in math. Notice sequences with your child: "Looks like we're the second in line!"



Find simple patterns together, such as the colors of floor tiles or how far apart light fixtures are placed.

## Spot spatial relations

This has to do with shapes and locations of objects. You can "hunt" for shapes together: squares, triangles, rectangles, and circles. Use words like *on*, *under*, and *inside* to describe where you see the shapes. Drawing shapes in the air can also be fun.



## Estimate and predict

Children often like to make educated guesses. "Which is higher, a stack of five dimes or five pennies?" Make a guess first, and then check to see how close your guess came.



## Measure and estimate time

Your child may like timing games: "How many times can you count to 10 before we are first in line?" "How long can you stand on one leg?"



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# Time for Preschoolers: Duration



*Most preschool-age children are not ready to fully grasp such abstract time concepts as duration (the amount of time an event lasts). But preschoolers already deal with duration in a variety of situations, such as when they have to wait for something they want. Here are some ideas for helping older preschoolers use prediction and estimation to learn how time goes by.*

-  **Invite older preschoolers to notice how long certain activities last.**
  - Ask questions such as, “Which do you think takes you a longer time: eating a cracker or drinking a glass of water?” “Do you think it takes us longer to walk to the playground or to walk out to the busses?”
  - Point out parts of a clock face and explain some ways that you use a clock. For example, have children compare the position of the hour and minute hands before and after the class goes outside. What do they notice? Explain that the changes represent seconds and minutes passing.
  
-  **Talk with the class about how people keep track of time.**
  - Explain that many people use seconds and minutes to measure the amount of time it takes to do something.
  - Try teaching the children to count seconds by chanting, “One-one-thousand, two-one-thousand...” or “One-a-penny, two-a-penny...” Let them try chanting in time with a digital timer or stopwatch that shows seconds. Keep in mind that counting to 10 or 20 may be challenging for preschoolers, whether using the chant or not.
  - Show children how to use timers, stopwatches, and hourglasses. Try adding these materials to the science or manipulatives center so the children have plenty of time to explore and practice with them.
  
-  **Adapt physical activities to help children play with time concepts.**
  - Invite children to do things for a set amount of time. For example, you might ask a child to predict how many times she can jump in 10 seconds. Then assign other children to count her jumps. Say “GO” and then start the timer when the child begins jumping. Her classmates can count the jumps until the timer sounds. Help them compare predictions to the actual number of jumps.
  - Pose new questions on other days: “How many seconds can you stand on one foot?” “How many hiders can the seeker find during 2 minutes of Hide and Seek?” “How many seconds can the class bounce a ball on the blanket before it falls off?”
  - Ask children to estimate how many minutes it will take to walk to the bus stop or all around the school building. Use a stopwatch to time the walk. Help them compare the actual times to their estimates.
  
-  **Let children investigate time while cooking.**
  - When you cook with children, ask them to predict how long certain processes will take. “How many minutes do you think it will take the oven to preheat to 425 degrees?”
  - Invite children to experiment: “Will the muffins be puffy and golden after 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes?”

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# Time for Preschoolers: In Sequence!



Teachers often wonder how to help preschoolers understand complex time concepts such as sequence. Children encounter sequence—the order in which things happen—every day. Schedules, stories, songs, dances, counting activities, and the cycle of day and night all involve sequences. Here are some activities that can help children find out more about sequences.



## Tell the children that *sequence* means the order in which things happen.

- Explain and use words related to sequence: *begin, end, start, finish, first, next, last, morning, afternoon, before, after, early, late, then.*
- Help the children use photos, drawings, and words to make a poster showing the daily schedule. Refer to it when talking with children about the day's events: "I'll read you a story before breakfast." "We're going to visit the train station after snack."
- Share picture books that focus on events that happen in a certain order. Examples include *First the Egg* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger and *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* by Simms Taback.



## Talk with the class about sequences that are familiar to them.

- Ask children to make memory drawings of what they do in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night. Have them help to make a display that shows the cycle of their day.
- Let children take turns retelling stories that they know well, or invite a small group of children to retell a story together while you write their words on easel paper. Do they all agree about what happens first, next, and last in the retold story?
- Invite children to talk about the sequences involved in things they do: "What's the first thing you do when you play checkers?" "Which blocks will you use next?"
- Link the concept of sequences to practical classroom activities to illustrate that the order of events is important. "First, we set up for lunch, then we eat, and last we clean up the table. Would lunch work if we rearranged those events?"



## Play with sequences.

- Make a race track with a starting line and a finish line. Let children "race" balls or wheel toys. Help them keep a record of which objects cross the line first, second, etc.
- Teach songs and chants that involve a series of actions, such as "Paw Paw Patch," "Alice the Camel," and "Did You Feed My Cow?" Children can also learn simple movement sequences for folk dances and step team routines.
- Give older preschoolers opportunities to "fill in the blanks" in a sequence. "Let's sing the ABC song! A-B-C-D— What comes next?" "I'm going to count my fingers: 1, 2, 3— I bet you know what's next!"
- Let older preschoolers change the order of the words in a song or the events in a story. For example, they might change the action song "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" to "Knees, Shoulders, Toes, and Head." (They may think some of these changes are very funny.) Some children may enjoy reversing the normal counting sequence (4-3-2-1-0 instead of 0-1-2-3-4).

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# CSI: Child Scientist Investigates!



*Young children are keen observers of their surroundings. Describing, collecting, and recording information are important skills. Here are some ways you can draw on preschoolers' natural curiosity to teach them about science and scientific methods.*



## Start with observation

- **Ask them about their classroom.** Is the width greater than the length? Help them measure using a yardstick or their own feet. Play scavenger hunt games, asking them to find objects of the same color, all square objects, or all objects used for writing. Show them how to weigh these items.
- **Tell them about what you noticed on the way to school.** “Three machines were digging a big hole in the concrete. It smelled like wet dirt. They were so noisy, I covered my ears.” You can introduce correct terms to describe size, shape, color, location, numbers, and activity.
- **Invite the children to take turns describing what they noticed on the way to school.** Did they see any birds, squirrels, dogs, or other animals? Did they pass any schools, gas stations, or fire stations on the way? What sounds did they hear? What odors did they smell? What did they touch?
- **Ask children to share their observations with others during group activities.** Give everyone a chance to listen to bells, whistles, or small, sealed containers of beans or sugar. Ask them to talk about the sounds: loud or soft, high or low, a clang or a whisper? Show them a bug collection or pictures of insects. Can they describe how the insects are alike and different from each other?



## Teach children to collect information

- **Provide tools for a science center.** Plastic containers (for collecting specimens), magnifiers, binoculars, magnets, measuring tapes, and balances allow children to study objects in detail. Containers of water allow them to rinse off dirt, see what sinks or floats, and observe how water changes the way some things look.
- **Set up a science table.** Materials can include boxes of buttons, rocks, sand, magnets, blocks, and marbles. If possible, include a rock with a fossil imprint.
- **Provide books, magazines, or materials downloaded from the Internet.** Children can use these resources to find information on topics they are interested in. Read aloud to the children, or let them look at illustrations. Help them take notes about the topic.



## Teach preschoolers to record their observations

- **Make observational drawings.** Each child needs a pencil, paper, and a clipboard. Ask the children to look closely at an object that interests them and draw exactly what they see. Let them compare their observations.
- **Learn to make charts and simple graphs to keep track of what they count.** They can also make murals or create models from materials such as clay or wood.
- **Use technology.** Invite them to talk about what they observe and record their voice. Later, write down their comments. Help them take photos.
- **Talk about ways to share observations with friends and family.** Help them create displays of their drawings, notes, photos, models, and graphs for others to see.

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# Encouraging Scientific Thinking: Rain or Shine



*Everyone talks about the weather—including curious preschool children. Young children are keen observers of their surroundings. Describing, collecting, and recording information are important skills they can develop as they think about the weather.*



## Talk about the weather.

Introduce weather-related words as you encourage children to observe and describe the weather each day. Ask questions such as, “Do you think it is sunny or cloudy, hot or cold, windy or calm?” If it’s raining, “Is the rain pouring or sprinkling? Is it just misty or really heavy?” If it’s snowing, “How could you describe snow to someone who’s never seen it?” “How can you tell when the wind is blowing? Can you see it?” “What sound does the rain make?” Ask the children if they have other questions.



## Think about the effects of different kinds of weather.

Discuss ways people are affected by the weather. Ask questions such as, “Why did you wear a sweater today?” “Did you need an umbrella on the way to school?” “Why do we need to know if a storm is coming?” “Why do farmers care about the weather?” “How do we stay warm in winter and cool in summer?”



## Try some weather activities.

- Set up a rain gauge on rainy days using a clear plastic tumbler or wide-mouth bottle. Let a child mark the level of the rain one day, empty it, and then set it back outside. Check it again the next day. Is there more or less rainwater in it? Help make a simple bar graph to record daily observations.
- Look up on a cloudy day. Are the clouds moving or still? Talk about the color and shapes of the clouds. Provide chalk or crayons and blue or black paper for drawing.
- Create rainbows on a sunny day by using safe prisms inside or a sprinkler outside. Talk about the colors.
- Go outside on a windy day. Ask questions such as, “What can you see being moved by the wind?” “Does the wind make you feel colder or warmer?” Let children blow bubbles to see which way the wind is blowing.
- Let your young scientists fill a plastic or paper cup with snow on a snowy day. Mark the level of the snow on the cup and bring it inside. Measure the level of the water when the snow melts. Is it higher or lower than the mark made showing the level of the snow?



## Help preschoolers record their observations.

Preschool children can chart their daily weather observations for several days. Children can draw the sun, rain, or snow and dictate a brief description. Use the chart to answer questions such as, “How many days in a row did the sun shine?” “Did it rain yesterday?” Weather observations can also be included in a class journal.

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# Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Play with Light and Shadow



*Young children often like to find out about the sun, the moon, and the clouds in the sky. In any season, help your preschooler dress for the weather, put on sunscreen, and then turn your yard or the park into an outdoor science lab!*

## Everyday sky activities

- Before going outside, talk with your child about things you and he have noticed about the sky. Share books with him that mention the sky (for example, Carolyn Lesser's *What a Wonderful Day to Be a Cow*).
- When the sun is not overhead, lie down and look up at the sky together. **Remind your child to never look straight at the sun, even when wearing sunglasses!** Talk about the colors, clouds, and flying things that you both see. Repeat the activity on overcast, misty, or snowy days. Bring paper, pencil, and sketch clouds while lying down.
- Try the same activities at night. Look for the moon, stars, constellations, and clouds. Children can't observe the night sky during preschool. That means nighttime investigation can be a special way for you and your child to learn together.

## Sunny day activities

- Help your child make chalk outlines of shadows cast by trees and other objects. About 30 minutes later, look at your outlines again and talk about what has happened to the shadow. Make new outlines in a different color. Check again 30 minutes later. Each time, notice where the sun is in the sky. Ask your child, "What do you think is going on?"
- Help your child create pictures with your own shadows. Suggest challenges: "Can we make our shadows hold hands even if my hand doesn't really touch yours?" "How can you make your shadow get shorter?"
- Bring along clear or translucent objects (for example, plastic containers) and some items that block the sun (an umbrella, cardboard tubes, etc.). With your child, explore what happens when you try to make shadows with these objects. Does a glass of water make a shadow? How about small items such as buttons or gravel?
- On a warm day, set out a bucket of water and brushes. "Paint" the sidewalk, walls, trees, and other objects with your child. After a few minutes, invite her to notice places she painted that have begun to dry. She will probably see that the brush strokes dry faster in sunny areas than in the shade.
- Ask a librarian to help you find books about sunlight, shadows, and nighttime to share with your child.

 For related Web resources, see "Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Play with Light and Shadow" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Get Growing: From Seeds to Sprouts



When preschoolers sprout seeds indoors, they can find out about the first stages of plant growth. The sprouted plants can later be placed in the garden outdoors or kept inside. Here are some suggestions for seed-sprouting activities.



## Find out what the children understand about how seeds become plants.

- Keep track of children's ideas and questions on a topic web, list, or chart. You can add to it as they find answers to their questions.
- Share books that explain such words as *germinate*, *sprout*, and *seedling*. Find books and online resources with pictures that label roots, stems, leaves, and other plant parts.



## Help the children start some plants indoors.

- Choose two to three kinds of seeds to bring in so that the class will be able to compare the ways the different seeds sprout and develop.
- Provide potting soil and cups or pots. Let children plant one kind of seed per pot. Have them put the pots where they can get sunlight. (Note: You might offer "peat pots," small containers made of pressed peat moss. Children can set peat pots into garden soil later when the seedlings are ready, without disturbing the roots.)
- Show children how to sprout seeds without soil in sandwich bags, damp paper towels, or glass jars. You can find directions in books or online.
- Pose some questions: "Do you think all of your sprouts will look alike?" "How many days do you think it will take for the beans to sprout?"



## Encourage children to keep track of plant growth.

- Offer magnifiers so that children can look closely at the sprouting seeds.
- Have a small group of children keep track of what happens to the seeds planted in pots. Another group can record what happens to the seeds that were started without soil. Encourage the children to draw or photograph what they see.
- Provide rulers, tape measures, and centimeter cubes, etc., so that children can measure seedling growth. Help them make charts of the changes.
- Each day, ask children to predict what the seeds or sprouts will look like the next time they observe. Help them follow up on their predictions: "You predicted that flowers would pop up today. Did you notice flowers in the pots?"



## Invite children to represent what they have found out about sprouting seeds.

- Let children select drawings and photographs to display on a bulletin board or in a book.
- Ask children to dictate reports about seed sprouting to add to the bulletin board or the book.
- Provide materials for making models of the new plants, such as clay, pipe cleaners, and paper. Help the children label the parts of their model plants.

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# Get Growing: Learning about Seeds



Seeds are basic to any gardening project. Preschoolers can find out many things about seeds before planting them. Here are some teacher-tested activities to help children investigate seeds.

## Collect a wide variety of seeds to share.

- Bring in seeds from plants the children are likely to see around them. Include seeds from local trees, prairie flowers and grasses, and cultivated plants like corn, squash, and marigolds. (Always use food-grade seeds or seeds taken directly from plants. Commercially packaged seeds may be treated with chemicals that children should not handle. Keep in mind that some children are allergic to nuts, peanuts, or soy-beans.)
- Invite children and their families to bring in seeds they find around them. Help the children keep track of where they found the seeds.
- In the fall, take the class on a seed-collecting walk. Give the children large socks to pull over their shoes, then walk through a safe weedy area. Then pull seeds off the socks and add them to the class seed collection.

## Offer children a look inside!

- Provide parts of plants that children can break or cut apart to find seeds. Examples could include pinecones, locust pods, sunflower seed heads, and edible fruits such as apples and melons. (Use safe cutting utensils, and supervise closely—or do the cutting yourself.)
- Cut apart some larger seeds such as pumpkin seeds, beans, and large grains for the children to examine. Offer magnifiers for a closer look, and ask children to describe what they notice through the magnifiers.
- Suggest that children make sketches of the items you have cut open.

## Learn and use seed-related vocabulary.

- Ask a librarian to help you find picture books that illustrate terms such as *pod*, *seed head*, *seed coat*, *cotyledon*, *embryo*, and *kernel*. Help the children use those words to label their sketches.
- Facilitate class discussion about what makes something a seed. “Are peas seeds? How can you tell?”

## Invite children to find out more about seeds.

- Encourage children to find answers to questions about seeds. “Which holds the most seeds—a locust pod, a peach, or a pumpkin?” “How do seeds change after they have been cooked?”
- Let children weigh and measure seeds, or classify seeds according to size, color, shape, texture, etc.
- Invite botanists or gardeners to talk with the children about seeds.
- Keep track of children’s comments and questions as they study the seeds. Make a chart of their questions, predictions, and findings.

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# Get Growing: Planning a Garden with Young Children



*A garden project can be an enriching experience for both preschoolers and adults. Here are some first steps for teachers who want to involve a preschool class in gardening—whether indoors, on the rooftop, or on the playground.*



## Decide what you would like the children to learn from a garden project.

- Keep in mind that gardening is rich in math-related activities: measuring, sorting, counting, making predictions.
- Remember that preschoolers can learn about science concepts as they find out about garden tools, plant life cycles, the uses of plants, the effects of weather on plants, and the cycle of the seasons.
- Plan for children to record and share information about the garden through drawing, writing, and discussion.
- Note ways for the children to express curiosity and take initiative while learning to solve problems cooperatively.



## Use local resources to help plan the garden.

- Do you know some experienced gardeners in the area? Ask them to suggest ways you might begin. You could start by asking parents or colleagues if they garden.
- If you don't know anyone with a garden, contact a local gardening group. Your local extension office may have one. They can help you decide where to put your garden, how big it should be, and the kinds of plants that will grow well there.
- Ask a librarian to help you find books and magazines about gardening.



## Involve the children, their families, and community members.

- In early spring, start a garden topic web by asking the children, “What are some things you already know about gardens? What are some things you want to find out about gardening?”
- Arrange for the class to visit some gardens that are just getting started. They can see what the first stages of a garden look like and get answers to some of their questions from the gardeners.
- Bring in tools and other things you will need so children can study them.
- Help the children find out more about the plants that the local gardeners have suggested. Which ones smell good? Which ones can be eaten? Which ones attract birds or butterflies?
- Ask the class to decide together what to grow.
- Invite local businesses to donate seeds or to lend tools you will need.
- Find as many ways as possible for parents to help. Families can donate cartons for growing seeds. They can also help with many tasks too difficult for the children, such as clearing space for the garden, breaking up the soil, and weeding.

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# Get Growing: Planters and Preschoolers



*Have you wondered if gardening outdoors with preschoolers would be too challenging? Growing plants in containers of clean topsoil can be safer and easier for children than gardening in “plain dirt” on the ground. Here are some tips for gardening with children—from teachers who have tried it.*

## Get some containers to use as planters.

- Ask families to donate clean containers , such as empty milk jugs, to use as planters. Invite children to help put holes in the bottoms of these planters so water will drain out.
- Take the children outdoors to look around and decide where to place their planters. Talk to them about where they think the plants could get the most sunlight and rain. Ask them to think about which places will be easiest for them to get to when they have to take care of the plants.

## Prepare the soil.

- Buy bags of plain topsoil and put some soil into a bin or wheelbarrow. Let children mix in one scoop of coarse sand and one scoop of peat for each scoop of topsoil. Offer trowels, spades, and large spoons to make mixing easy. *Note: Do not add plant foods sold in stores. They may not be safe for children.*
- Provide pails so children can fill each of the planters with the soil they have mixed.
- Have the children wear garden gloves every time they do garden work, and make sure they wash their hands when they have finished.

## Start planting.

- Find out when the danger of frost will be over. That’s the time to plant the garden!
- Let children decide what to put in each planter. Let small groups of children take charge of planting and caring for specific containers.
- If the class has plants that sprouted indoors, help children carefully transplant the seedlings. Move seedlings carefully from the small peat pots to the larger planters where they will have room to grow in additional soil.
- When children are planting seeds, call their attention to what the seed packets say about what the seeds need to grow. For example, how far apart should we plant the seeds? How deep in the soil should we plant?

## Tend the new garden together.

- Ask children to make signs with the name of each plant and set the signs in the right planters.
- Start a watering schedule. Children can take turns watering the plants as needed. They can practice pouring small amounts first, so they don’t drown the plants.
- Suggest some ways for the children to investigate the garden as it grows!

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# Investigate Together

*How does rain get into the clouds? How do fish breathe under water? Young children love to investigate and find their own answers to their questions about the world. Encouraging your child's exploration and wonder helps build a strong foundation for early learning.*

## Go explore!

Young children love to explore the world around them. Encourage your child to use his senses to explore. Young children learn best by talking about their first-hand experiences.



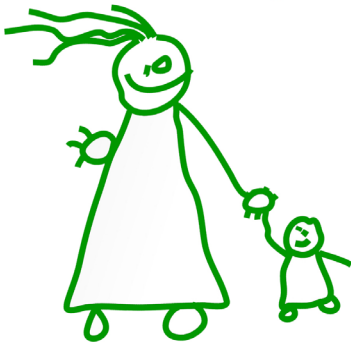
## Keep the questions coming

Encourage your child's questions. Help her think about where she can find out what she wants to know. Help your child discover there are many ways to find out answers, such as reading books, searching the Internet, asking experts, and observing the world.



## Track your discoveries

Write down your child's ideas and observations. Show her that writing and words are tools for sharing information. Encourage your child to draw pictures of what she sees and what she remembers from different experiences and places.



## Numbers are tools for discovery

Help your child count, classify, and measure things using numbers. Help him learn that numbers and math are tools for discovering the world. For example, help him sort out different shapes of blocks and count how many of each kind.



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# Natural Illinois: Birds



*You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study! Illinois is home to a wide variety of birds that are as close as your backyard, local park, or schoolyard. Birds are often colorful and musical, and highly appealing to children!*



## Collect resources about birds.

- Ask a librarian to help you find nonfiction books, nature magazines, videos, and online resources about birds to share with the children.
- Display posters of birds in the classroom. Place laminated photographs of birds in the science center.



## Find out about birds together.

- Ask the children, “What are some things you know about birds?” “How can we tell that something is a bird, and not a dog or a fish?” Make a topic web or a list of their ideas and questions about birds.
- Take small groups of children outdoors. Ask them to quietly watch and listen for birds all around them. Check for bird tracks in the dust or snow. Help children identify the birds they see using a field guide, a poster about birds, or other colorful pictures.
- Find songs from various birds online and play them for the children. Encourage them to describe similarities and differences. Ask them to replicate bird calls with their voices.
- Invite a local expert to answer children’s questions about birds. A nature center or master naturalist group may be able to help. Have the children practice their questions before the visit. Record the answers to questions on chart paper and display them in the classroom.



## Take a close look at birds.

- Be aware that people need special permits to possess wild bird feathers, nests, and eggs. Children may be able to see and touch these items at a nature center or museum.
- Find out if a local park or forest preserve cares for wild birds that have been hurt. Children may be able to sketch and photograph birds there.
- If your program’s director and custodian approve, put bird feeders where the children can see them. Provide good-quality birdseed and suet, not breadcrumbs. Help children keep a record of birds that visit the feeders. Take pictures of birds that visit the feeders and display them in the classroom.



## Encourage children to represent what they learn about birds.

- Provide clay, wire, paper, and other art supplies so children can make models of birds, feathers, nests, eggs, and bird tracks.
- Invite children to draw or sketch feathers, nests, or eggs. Encourage them to notice interesting colors and draw items to scale (e.g., an egg looks very small when in a nest).
- Offer chimes, bells, or a keyboard so children can try to duplicate bird songs.

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# Natural Illinois: Butterflies and Moths



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! Illinois wildlife is as close as your local park or schoolyard. Explore the world of butterflies and moths with children.

## Collect classroom resources.

- Ask a librarian to help you find children's nonfiction books and nature magazines with colorful illustrations.
- Display posters of butterflies in the classroom. Provide laminated pictures of butterflies and moths in the science center.

## Talk about butterflies and moths.

- Invite the children to say what they already know about butterflies and moths. Make a list or a topic web of their ideas and questions.
- Use a book illustration or a butterfly poster to point out the body parts. Use the terms *head*, *thorax*, and *abdomen*.
- Ask the children, "What are some ways that butterflies are different from moths?" Point out that most butterflies have knobs on the end of their antennae and moths do not.
- Ask, "What do butterflies or moths eat or drink?" Help children find answers in your books or on your poster.

## Observe live insects.

- Observe butterflies, moths, and caterpillars in their natural habitat, if possible.
- Encourage the children to draw a butterfly or moth they've observed. Try to provide several opportunities for drawing and sketching. Each time, help children notice a specific characteristic of the moth or butterfly.
- Ask the children to comment on their observations. How can they tell if the insect is a butterfly or a moth?

## Discuss the life cycle of butterflies.

- Use the illustrations of the butterfly's life cycle from a picture book or butterfly poster. Many kits are also available for observing the butterfly life cycle.
- Introduce the term *chrysalis*. If possible, include a chrysalis of a butterfly native to Illinois in your science area where it can be observed but not touched. Be sure to collect a chrysalis only where it's legal to do so. (Check regulations related to public property first.) Ask private property owners for permission.
- Release the adult butterfly outside near the area where the chrysalis was found as soon as it emerges. (A butterfly may need to feed on nectar and can damage its wings in captivity.)

## Provide art materials.

- Invite the children to use paint, craft sticks, clothespins, paper, clay, or paper tubes to create a picture or model of a butterfly they've observed.
- Suggest using modeling clay to mold an egg, and then form it into a caterpillar. A small bag or a covered paper tube can be the chrysalis for the caterpillar.

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# Natural Illinois: Frogs and Toads



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! Illinois wildlife is as close as your local park or schoolyard. If you look closely at a pond or damp spot under a bush or tree or listen for their calls, you are likely to find a frog or toad.

## Collect classroom resources.

- Ask a librarian to help you find children's nonfiction books and nature magazines with colorful illustrations.
- Display a poster of frogs and toads in your classroom. Place laminated pictures of frogs and toads in the science center.

## Observe a frog or toad.

- Consider observing frogs or toads outdoors, at a pet store, or in a zoo or nature center, or find a high-quality video of frogs online. The laws related to keeping wild animals and releasing them into the wild, plus meeting the animals' needs, can make it complicated to have a live tadpole, frog, or toad in the classroom.
- Ask the children, "Can you find a tail or neck? How many legs does it have? How would you describe the colors on the frog's body?"
- Help the children to discover that most frogs have smooth or slimy skin, long hind legs, webbed hind feet, and bulging eyes. Many toads have bumpy dry skin and stubby bodies.
- Encourage the children to sketch a frog or toad they observe. Try to provide several opportunities for drawing and sketching. Each time, help the children focus on a specific characteristic of the frog.

## Discuss the life cycle of a frog.

- Ask the children what they know about tadpoles.
- Use a book illustration or the drawings on a frog poster to show the stages of development.
- Introduce the word *metamorphosis*. You might ask, "What changes do you see when a tadpole becomes a frog?"
- Help the children make a mural showing the sequence of the changes they observe.

## Listen to different frog and toad calls.

- If your classroom has access to a computer or tablet, search online for frog calls.
- Listen together and ask the children, "Have you heard any of these calls near where you live?"

## Encourage children to use books or the Internet for further research.

- Introduce the term *amphibian*.
- Help them find answers to questions such as, "What do frogs and toads eat? Where do they go during the winter? Why is it sometimes hard to see a frog outside?"
- Help the children share this information by making a wall chart or a book.

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# Natural Illinois: Insects



*You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! Illinois wildlife is as close as your local park or schoolyard. Explore the world of insects with children.*

## **Collect classroom resources.**

Ask a librarian to help you find children's nonfiction books and nature magazines with colorful illustrations. Display insect posters in your classroom. Add laminated pictures of insects to the science center.

## **Talk about insects.**

Ask the children, "What is an insect?" Point out that most adult insects have three body parts and three pairs of legs. Introduce the terms *head*, *thorax*, and *abdomen*. Ask the children about insects they have seen.

Discuss what can be observed about insects, including where they may be found. In gardens? Under rocks or fallen leaves? On trees and shrubs? In the grass or on flowers? Invite a local expert to talk with the children about insects and answer questions. Contact your local community college, Audubon Society, nature center, or gardening club for speakers.

## **Go on an insect walk.**

In the warm months, take a walk with the children to see how many different insects they can find. (Note: Find out first if anyone is allergic to insect stings and bites.) For example, late summer can be a good time to see aphids, milkweed bugs, cicadas, ants, dragonflies, and grasshoppers. Be sure bees, wasps, and hornets are observed only from a distance! Provide each child with paper, pencil, and a clipboard.

Remind the children that they are to observe, not touch. When an insect is found, encourage the children to look for the three body parts and the three pairs of legs. Children can draw and take or dictate notes on the insect and where it was found.

## **Build insect habitats.**

Do the children want to collect insects? If so, make a temporary home by placing dirt, a small stick, and a bottle cap full of water in the bottom of a clear plastic cup. Poke a few small holes in the bottom of a second cup. Using a small butterfly net or another clear cup inverted over a piece of paper, collect an insect, place in the first cup, then tape the inverted second clear cup on top of it. You can also buy kits, such as ant farms.

## **Observe live insects.**

Encourage children to use magnifiers and observe the insects. Ask the children questions: Do the insects have wings? Do they buzz or hum? What colors do you see? Then return the insects to where they were found. Encourage children to observe the life cycles of insects such as mealworms (darkling beetles). Mealworms, which can be bought at a pet store, are easy to raise in a classroom.

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# Natural Illinois: Leaves Are All Around



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! From violets and bluestem to oak trees and pines, Illinois plants are as close as your local park or schoolyard. Preschoolers can learn a lot about plants by studying leaves.

## Start by taking children outdoors to collect leaves.

- Give each child a bag to fill with leaves. Be sure to ask families if any children have allergies or skin sensitivities to outdoor plants. Even if your neighborhood seems to have only crabgrass and dandelions, children can still learn about leaves on their walks.
- Invite children to look high and low to see leaves on the plants in parks, in gardens, and in the cracks on the sidewalk! Keep in mind that trees may drop leaves all year round, not just in autumn. In spring and summer, carefully trim leaves from grasses, shrubs, and flowering plants. In winter, take leaf or needle cuttings from evergreens such as boxwood, pine, or fir. (Ask permission before collecting on private property.)
- Be sure that you and the children know which leaves can hurt them, such as poison ivy or thistle. If you are not sure whether a leaf is safe to touch, tell children to avoid it. If some children do not enjoy touching leaves, let them use tongs or allow children to work in pairs. Have children wash hands thoroughly after handling leaves or cuttings. Someone may be allergic to one of the plants.

## Share resources about leaves.

- Invite a guest speaker to help the children learn more about trees and other leafy plants. Check with your local community college, nature center, Audubon Society, or master naturalist group. A classroom parent may also have expertise and experience.
- Ask a librarian to help you find resources related to leaves: nonfiction picture books, nature magazines, puzzles, or classroom kits.
- Display posters of leaves, trees, and flowers. Add laminated photos of leaves and trees to the science center.

## Invite children to study the leaves they collect.

- Ask children what they think about leaves. Make a list of their comments and questions.
- Show children books featuring leaf designs of artists such as Andy Goldsworthy or Lois Ehlert. Encourage children to make their own leaf designs.
- Keep in mind that you can learn about leaves along with the children. Help them look up differences between simple and compound leaves. Introduce words for the parts of leaves, such as *midrib*, *vein*, *blade*, and *margin*.
- Invite children to think of ways to sort their leaves (such as by color, size, or shape).
- Point out that people can look at a plant's leaves to figure out what kind of plant it is. Show children how field guides help identify plants. Help them notice leaf shape, size, and structure.
- Look up easy ways for children to press leaves to preserve them for display.

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# Natural Illinois: Mammals



*You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! Illinois wildlife is as close as your local park or schoolyard. Look carefully and you may see squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, or field mice—or the tracks they leave behind. Explore the world of mammals with children.*

## Collect classroom resources.

- Ask a librarian to help you find children's nonfiction books and nature magazines with colorful illustrations of mammals.
- Display posters of mammals in the classroom. Place laminated photos of mammals in the science center.
- Add mammal figures to your classroom collection. This could include stuffed animals or hard plastic figures for tabletop play.

## Find out about mammals with the children.

- Observe and talk about live mammals you have seen, such as squirrels, rabbits, dogs, or cats. Some mammals, such as squirrels or rabbits, may be visible on a daily basis. Invite children to look for them through the classroom window.
- Help the children discover that most mammals have four limbs and hair or fur. Warn children not to touch wild animals—or any animal—without adult permission. You can ask, “Who has petted a dog or cat? Are they warm to touch?”
- Provide sketching materials or device for children to take pictures or videos of mammals.
- Note that most baby mammals are born live rather than hatching from eggs.
- Make a topic web or a list of the children's ideas and questions about mammals.
- Invite a local expert to answer their questions about mammals. A nature center may be able to help. Help children practice their questions before the visit.

## Sort mammals into domestic and wild.

- Introduce the word *domestic* to describe animals that depend on people for their food and often live with or close to people. Ask the children whether the mammals they have observed or seen in books are domestic or wild. Help children make a chart with columns to list mammals as domestic or wild. Include photos on the chart, especially of children's pets (domestic) or mammals in the school yard (wild).
- Encourage children to use their observations, an educational poster, or books to discover where different mammals live, such as in wooded areas, grass, water, or in a house with people. Introduce the word *habitat* and add a habitat column to your chart.

## Draw a simple map.

- Help children use a large piece of paper to draw a map with areas of water, trees, grass, a house, and a barn. Provide or make small animal figures that can be put into the correct habitat for each animal.
- Discuss where the children might see wild mammals not usually found in Illinois. Let children add a zoo area to their map for these wild mammals.

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# Natural Illinois: Rock On!



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting rocks for preschoolers to study! A wide variety of rocks and minerals are as close as your backyard, local park, schoolyard, or driveway.

## Collect resources about rocks.

- Ask your librarian to help you find nonfiction books, nature magazines, CDs or videos, and online resources about rocks and minerals to share with the children. Be sure to include resources about people who use rocks in their work, such as miners, builders, artists, and geologists.
- Display posters of rocks in the classroom. Add laminated photos of rocks and minerals to the science center.

## Gather a variety of rocks to share.

- Bring in gravel, pebbles, and stones of various types and sizes. To find rocks that occur naturally in Illinois, look on beaches, by streams, or near quarries. (Ask for permission to take rocks from others' property. Do not collect rocks from state parks, nature preserves, or other protected lands.)
- Invite families to lend rocks for the collection. Garden centers or building supply stores may be willing to donate broken pieces of rock.

## Find out about rocks together.

- Invite children to draw pictures of their experiences with rocks. Ask them, "What are some things you know about rocks?" "How can you tell that something is a rock?"
- Introduce children to words that scientists use to describe rocks, such as *pebble*, *gravel*, *texture*, *hardness*, *crystal*, and *fossil*.
- Point out that there are names for different kinds of rocks and minerals. Some preschoolers may want to identify rocks using a field guide or an educational poster about rocks and minerals.
- Find experts to answer children's questions about rocks. A local museum, college, or rock collectors club might help you find someone. It helps to have children prepare their questions ahead of time.

## Take a close look at rocks.

- Let children look at rocks with magnifiers. Encourage them to notice details: "Does this rock have lines running through it? Can you see any shiny parts? How many colors do you notice?"
- Invite children to experiment with rocks. "Do you think any of these rocks will change when they get wet? What do you think will happen if you put a rock in the freezer? What do you think will happen if we set this rock outside in the sunshine?"
- Provide boxes, bins, and clear plastic bags so children can sort rocks by size, color, and other features.
- Encourage children to sketch rocks in the class collection.

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# Natural Illinois: The Trees You See



*You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! Illinois is home to a wide variety of trees that are as close as your local park or schoolyard.*



## Start by drawing children's attention to some of the trees around them.

- Ask them to look at trees from a distance and up close. What are some things they notice? Introduce tree-related words such as *bark*, *trunk*, *branch*, *leaf*, *needle*, *twig*, and *roots*.
- Invite children to draw or paint pictures of their experiences with trees. Encourage them to tell the stories that go with their pictures.
- Ask, "What are some things you know about trees?" "How can a person tell that something is a tree?" "What is the difference between a tree and a bush?"
- Bring in a local expert to answer children's questions about trees. You might try a botanist, an arborist, or a master naturalist. It helps to have the children rehearse their questions before the visit. Record the answers on chart paper and display them in the classroom.



## Collect resources about trees.

- Ask a librarian to help you find nonfiction picture books, nature magazines, and online resources with detailed illustrations of trees.
- Display posters of trees in the classroom. Add laminated pictures of trees to the science center.
- Contact your local school district or wildlife center for additional resources (e.g., coloring sheets, bark samples).



## Visit nearby trees during different seasons.

- Take along field guides, magnifiers, and drawing materials. At any time of year, give children bags for collecting specimens: leaves and nuts during autumn, twigs and evergreen needles in winter, blossoms during spring, and seeds or fruits during summer. If some children do not enjoy touching these items, allow them to use tongs or work with a peer. Display the items you have collected on a tray in the science center.
- Have children take photos and make sketches of two to three trees once a month. They can make a book that shows how the trees change over time. Draw attention to details such as the amount and colors of leaves on the trees, especially during autumn.
- Use a field guide or an educational poster to identify trees. Point out differences in leaves, needles, seeds, and bark patterns. Show the children how to make bark rubbings or leaf rubbings.
- Provide measuring tapes and nonstandard measures such as unit blocks or lengths of clothes line. Let children measure the trunks, leaves, and other parts of trees.
- Call children's attention to other living things in or near a tree such as birds, insects, or squirrels. Help them keep a list of the creatures they find.

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Science in the “Built Environment”



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Go ahead—take those young engineers outside! Shelters, fences, pathways, and bridges are interesting to young children and provide many opportunities for preschoolers to study the “built environment”—the structures around them that people have made. Here are some ways for your class to learn about some of the basic ideas of architecture, civil engineering, and construction.*

## Look around!

- Give children a few minutes to choose buildings or other objects outdoors such as signs, fire hydrants, mailboxes, and lampposts. Ask children to examine them closely, noticing parts, appearance, textures, and patterns.
- Provide magnifiers for close observations. Invite the children to draw what they see.
- Offer binoculars so students can view buildings nearby. Ask them what details they notice.
- Ask, “Do you think this thing was made by people? What makes you think so?” Keep track of their ideas.

## Take a longer look!

- Watch roadwork or other construction projects such as building additions or the framing of a new structure. Help the children list the materials and machines the workers use.
- Provide children's books with pictures of machines such as tractors and backhoes. Help the children use the pictures to correctly identify machines they see in the neighborhood.
- Encourage children to draw or photograph the work in progress.
- Collect construction materials for the children to explore: lumber, metals, concrete, tile, rock, fabric, paint, a variety of fasteners.

## Build!

- Invite children to plan and build a sandbox town. Provide child-sized, authentic tools (shovels, buckets, etc.) and pieces of plastic pipe, wood, and other materials. After buildings are created, invite the children to add people and vehicles. Photograph the finished city.
- Help the children experiment with ways to make constructions durable. “How much water does it take to erode this sand castle? What are some ways to protect it?” “What's more stable, a tall thin tower or a tall wide tower?”

## Think about it!

- The most basic questions can engage children: “What are some things that a wall does?” “Do workers start building at the top, the bottom, or in between?” “What if the school had just one window?”
- Invite children to think about construction problems: “Why don't they build fences of paper instead of wire?” “Why do you think the wheelchair ramp starts where it does?” “How is this swing set put together?”

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Sunshine Science



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Take the opportunity to make the outdoors your science lab! In any season, preschoolers can study characteristics of the sun, the moon, and the clouds in the sky. Just help them dress for the weather.*



## Everyday sky activities

- Talk with children about things they have noticed about the sky before taking them outside. Share books with them that mention the sky, such as Carolyn Lesser's *What a Wonderful Day to Be a Cow*.
- When the sun is not overhead, invite the children to lie down on a cloth large enough for everybody and observe the sky above them. **Remind them to never look straight at the sun!** Then ask them to tell what they noticed. Record their comments for later discussion. Repeat the activity on overcast, partly cloudy, misty, and snowy days. Invite children to make sketches of clouds while lying down.
- Help them create a chart to show what the sky looked like each time they observed it. Including photographs and captions on the chart will help children recall what they noticed.



## Sunny day activities

- Invite children to look at the shapes of shadows cast by trees and other objects. Show them how to make chalk outlines of shadows. Half an hour later, suggest that they revisit their outlines. They can make new outlines in a different color. After 30 more minutes, check again. Each time, ask them to notice where the sun is in the sky. Record their comments and questions about sun and shadows to discuss later. Talk about possible explanations for the changes they see.
- Let small groups of children create pictures with their shadows. Suggest challenges: "Without really touching hands, how might you make your shadows hold hands?" "Can you trace your friend's shadow, or is your shadow blocking your view? What could you do differently to solve that problem?"
- Introduce acrylic prisms, colored acetate film, and other clear or translucent objects. Invite children to see what happens when the sun shines through these items onto the ground. Do the same with objects that block the sun, too (umbrellas, papers with holes cut out, etc.).
- Provide buckets of water and large paintbrushes or rollers. Invite children to "paint" sidewalks, bricks, trees, etc. After a few minutes, ask them to notice which of the places they painted have begun to dry. They will probably see that sunny areas dry faster than shaded areas. Help them record their findings and discuss their ideas about what happened.
- Encourage children to try their own sunlight/shadow experiments. For example, they can look outside each day and predict whether there is enough sun to see shadows. Or, they can stand on a line and project a shadow, predicting what will happen to their shadow when they step forward, backward, or to the side.

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# Outdoor Field Trips with Preschoolers: Being There!



*It's outdoor field trip day! You've packed the first-aid kit, the signed permission forms, field work supplies, plus water and snacks for every child. And now your class has reached the site! These tips can help your class have a good field trip.*



## Get acquainted with the new place.

- Ask the children to stand and look around for a moment. What seems familiar? What is new or unexpected? Invite them to describe the sights, sounds, and smells they notice.
- Help the children gather in their assigned small groups.
- If a docent or guide will be with you, introduce the person to the class. Show children the restrooms and other landmarks. Make sure everyone has been to the toilet before starting a nature walk.
- During a walk, let children set the pace as much as possible. Remind them that speaking and moving quietly will help them see more animals than if they are noisy.



## Help the children start their field work.

- Hand out sketching materials and “naturalist tools” (magnifiers, measuring tools, etc.). Help children get started with finding and gathering interesting items, etc.
- Suggest that children compare the sizes, weights, quantities, and other traits of things they observe. For example, which plants are taller than a child? Which flowers have five petals?
- Encourage children to sketch an object more than once. They can also make crayon rubbings, trace outlines of objects, or compare crayon colors to the colors of things they see.



## Offer support and guidance during field work.

- Try to “check in” with each child at least once. Find out what they are wondering about. Help children take notes or label their drawings.
- Help children remember to walk on the path, stay with their groups, and pay attention to what the guides or parent volunteers tell them. Park staff will appreciate your attention to the children's needs so they can do their work.
- Provide water and snacks at convenient times. Remind children to wash hands or use hand cleaner!
- Encourage children to spend time exploring. Have them listen with their eyes closed or look up into a tree while lying on a blanket. Ask if anything they notice surprises them.



## Let children relax after their field work.

- Provide time for active play in an open space or on a playground.
- On the trip back, encourage children to talk about what they enjoyed or what interested them. In-depth discussion of their findings can wait until they are well-rested.

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# Outdoor Field Trips with Preschoolers: Deciding Where to Go



*Nature centers, parks, forest preserves, public gardens, working farms! Any of these places can become your preschool “classroom” during an outdoor field trip. Planning an outdoor field trip starts with deciding where to go.*



## Consider field trip logistics.

- Check your program’s field trip policies. Is travel by public transit, car, or school bus allowed? Are you able to collect money from families to pay for travel or other fees?
- Find out what adult/child ratio your program requires or recommends for field trips. How many volunteers will you need to help supervise the children?
- Consider how much travel time a field trip will require. How much time will the class actually be able to spend at their destination?



## Anticipate what children might gain from an outdoor field trip.

- Keep in mind that children are likely to get more from a trip related to something they are studying than from a general-interest trip.
- Consider which early learning and development benchmarks might be met during the trip. Can children investigate weather or living things? What new vocabulary might they learn? Will they have opportunities to interact and be physically active?
- Be aware that children who don’t often go outdoors may need to focus on exploring the place and “discovering” nature. More experienced children may explore but may also concentrate on making detailed observations of specific things (trees, insects, a creek, etc.).



## Collect information about places you might go.

- Find out as much as you can about key features of each place. What kinds of animals, plants, landforms, etc., will children be able to observe? Can they follow trails to points of interest? Are pathways wheelchair-accessible?
- Ask site personnel about services and facilities. Are restrooms and sources of water easy to find? Are guides available to answer children’s questions? Can teachers check out equipment such as insect nets and binoculars? Is a visitor center available? A playground?
- Find out about rules and regulations. Can children collect specimens? Is picnicking allowed?



## Before you decide, visit possible sites.

- Go to each of the sites, preferably with other adults who will be involved, such as assistant teachers and parents. How do they feel about going there with children? Do benefits outweigh concerns about a trip?
- Take note of things that may interest, distract, or worry the children.
- Pick up print materials about each site. Take photographs or videos of what the children might see to share with the class before the trip.

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# Outdoor Field Trips with Preschoolers: Follow Up!



*After the class returns from an outdoor field trip, the teacher might offer a variety of follow-up activities to help the children build upon the experience.*

## Invite the children to recall their field trip experiences.

- To begin, involve the class in a casual conversation about the trip. What interesting things did they see and hear?
- Suggest to the children that they draw something they remember from the trip. Then they can dictate or write a few words about their drawings. The drawings can be the basis for more discussion about the trip.
- Let children report on specific tasks they carried out or any items they collected during the trip. If KaChuan and Micah collected acorns and pine cones and Sierra and Ben interviewed a park worker, be sure that they all have time during class meetings to share their experiences and findings and to answer classmates' questions.
- Help the children revisit the questions they asked before the trip. What answers did they find? If they predicted what some of the answers might be, ask how their findings compare with those predictions. What new questions do they have?

## Help the class share information from the field trip with others.

- Work with small groups of children to create a book, Web page, or wall display about the trip. If the trip was part of project work, the display can be part of their project documentation. They might include specimens they collected; graphs of data; drawings, notes, and photographs; and a list of new vocabulary learned during the trip.
- Invite children to dictate the story of their trip while an adult writes their words on large paper or the computer. Encourage them to discuss the order of events. Display the completed story for parents and others to see.
- If the children collected objects during the trip, help them set up a table where they can label the items and explore them further.

## Plan other activities to build on what the children learned during the field trip.

- Help the children write thank-you notes to the staff at the field trip site.
- Photocopy children's field sketches, then offer them paint and other materials so they can add details to the copies of their sketches. Provide clay, boxes, and other materials so they can make models of things they observed during the trip.
- Let children create a backdrop for dramatic play depicting the place they visited. Add some related props to the dramatic play area.
- Encourage children to look nearby for the kinds of animals, plants, rocks, etc., they saw during the trip.

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# Outdoor Field Trips with Preschoolers: Planning Ahead



*You've chosen a field trip destination, and you know how and when your class will get there. Here are some basic preparations that can help make the trip a good experience for all.*



## Get organized early.

- Be sure all your plans meet your state and program requirements for field trips.
- Work out a schedule for the trip, from start to finish. Decide which adults will be responsible for specific tasks, such as carrying supplies or taking children to the restroom.
- Find out how much money (if any) will be needed and decide who will carry it on the trip.
- If the class will use public transit, get to know the route very well. Schedules often vary throughout the day.
- Assign children to adult-led small groups for the trip. Make a list of the children for each adult. Adjust the lists on the day of the trip if necessary.



## Help parents prepare.

- Several weeks before the trip, ask parents/guardians to sign their children's field trip permission forms. Inform families about the date, time, location, and purpose of the trip. Tell them how the class will travel. Let them know if they should provide money, sack lunches, drinking water, or other items. Send one or two reminders as the day of the trip approaches.
- Encourage family members to ask questions or express concerns about the trip. Explain how the staff will keep the children safe.
- If family members are invited to help out during the trip, explain clearly what is expected of them.



## Keep safety and security in mind.

- Review emergency procedures with staff members who will go on the trip. What should they do if a bee stings an allergic child or if the bus must be evacuated?
- Plan how children can wear their name tags so strangers can't easily learn their names. Consider having children and adults wear colorful T-shirts printed with the school name and address.



## Collect "must-have" items right before the trip—and take them with you!

- Organize and pack the signed permission forms, emergency contact information, and identification tags for each child. Take a complete list of all participating adults and children and leave a copy at school. Carry a first aid kit and any medications individual children may need, plus sanitary wipes, facial tissues, and a bag to collect trash. Keep snacks and drinking water separate from other items.
- Pack children's field work supplies (magnifiers, sketch paper, field guides, etc.) separately.

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# Outdoor Field Trips with Preschoolers: Preparing with the Children

*An outdoor field trip can be a positive experience, especially when children are well-prepared. Here are some teacher-tested hints for helping preschoolers get ready for outdoor field trips.*



## Talk with the children about the field trip site.

- Several times before the trip, share pictures, videos, and other resources related to the destination. Read aloud from picture books about animals and plants they might see there.
- Talk with the children about their questions and ideas about the field trip site. Ask them to predict what they might see and do there. Help them write questions and predictions on a list or question table.
- Correct any misconceptions children express. “Jessie is worried that the prairie has butterflies that bite people, but butterflies can’t bite.” “You said you’d like to climb trees, but the arboretum doesn’t allow tree-climbing.”



## Tell the children what to expect.

- Try making a timeline or storyboard to show what will happen during the trip. “You’ll get on the bus with the teachers. We’ll ride for about 20 minutes. When we get to the park, we’ll ...” You might invite children to act out this plan.
- Review field trip safety rules with the class several times. “Stay with your small group. Walk on the path. Before you touch anything you see, ask the guide or the teacher if it’s OK.” Try using storytelling, puppet play, or role-playing to explain the rules.
- Tell the children which small groups they are assigned to for the trip. Before the day of the trip, let them meet the volunteers who will supervise them.



## Involve children in trip preparations.

- Let children count how many clipboards, markers, containers of water, etc. will be needed.
- Help children email site staff several days in advance to ask some of their questions.
- Help each child decide on a specific task to do during the trip. “KaChuan wants to sketch two trees at the park. Who else would like to sketch some trees?”



## Let children practice doing outdoor field work.

- Take small groups “exploring” outdoors several days before the field trip. What sounds, smells, and sights do they notice? Invite them to look for insects or other living things on the playground.
- Have small groups of children practice collecting data outdoors near the school. Help them find rocks, plants, or animals to observe. Let them count, measure, sketch, and take photographs. Ask them to share their information with classmates.

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# Playground Physics: Hang in There!



*Playing with pendulums and swings can help preschool children find out more about gravity and motion. Emphasize safety: An adult should stay close by to make sure children use the pendulum safely. Remove all pendulums, especially the cords, from the playground when you are not supervising their use. Children must not swing on a pendulum or wrap the cord around any part of their bodies.*

## Make a pendulum—or two.

- Make a “bob” by putting a beanbag or other weight inside a mesh bag or clean sock. Tie the bob to a cord and hang it from a playground structure so it swings freely close to the ground. Tell the children, “This is a pendulum. You can try different ways to make it work.”
- After a while, ask questions such as, “Did you notice what happened when Davy released the bob with the cord stretched tight? What happened when Tess threw the bob?” “What can make the pendulum stop moving?” List their observations for later discussion.
- When the pendulum is at rest, invite some children to measure how far the bob is above the ground. Then invite a child to hold the bob and step back until the cord stretches tight. Then ask them to measure again: “Now how far is the bob above the ground?”
- Invite the children to imitate the motion of the bob by moving their hands through the air.
- Let a child release the bob while others count or use a timer to see how long the bob stays in motion.
- Replace the bob with a funnel or a plastic milk jug with a ¼ -inch diameter hole in the bottom. Plug the hole with a cork. Lay an old sheet or a board directly under the bob. One child can fill the milk jug bob with sand. Ask, “When we take the cork out and let the bob swing, what do you think might happen?” Let them try it, then revisit their predictions.
- Set out plastic bowling pins so children can take turns aiming the pendulum bob to knock the pins over. Or put a foam ball in a mesh bag and hang it so it is about waist-high to most of the children. They can play catch by swinging it to each other.
- If your playground has swings, invite children to observe the swings while they play. In what ways are the swings like pendulum bobs? In what ways are they different?

## Talk about pendulums.

- Introduce the idea that gravity is an invisible “natural force.” It has the power to make hanging things come to rest instead of swinging back and forth forever. That’s why it takes effort to make something swing for a long time.
- Ask, “How would you describe a pendulum to a person who has never seen one?”

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# Playground Physics: On a Roll!



Many preschoolers like to play with things that roll. Rolling activities can be opportunities to explore principles of science and engineering. Children can investigate rolling objects on inclines such as sliding boards, ramps, chutes, and hillsides at a playground or park.

## Let children play outdoors with rolling objects.

- Offer a selection of objects that roll. Try a variety of balls, tubes, hoops, discs, marbles, and small wheel toys. Include some natural objects—pinecones, acorns, and small pebbles.
- Suggest rolling the objects down hills, sliding boards, chutes (enclosed slides), and ramps at the playground or park. Ask provocative questions such as, “Do you think the ball will stop at the bottom of the hill or will it keep rolling?” “What do you suppose will land first: an acorn that drops from the top of the slide or an acorn that rolls down the slide?”

## Help children set up an outdoor physics lab.

- Provide items for building ramps, chutes, and slides. Include blocks, planks, lengths of plastic gutter, long tubes, flexible toy track, and large pieces of cardboard.
- Suggest some experiments: “What could Tae do to find out if marbles roll faster down the slide or down his ramp?” “Who would like to help Lola see how far these things will keep rolling after they come out the chute?”
- Ask children to make predictions. For example, “Winona is holding a tube at the top of the ramp. Omar is holding a soccer ball. If they let go of their objects at the same time, which one do you think will roll to the bottom first?” Ask children to explain their predictions: “What makes you think so?”

## Talk with children about their rolling activities.

- Explain that slides, ramps, chutes, and hillsides are “inclines” (or “inclined planes”). An incline is a surface that has one end higher than the other.
- Use objects and book illustrations to help explain words such as *tilt*, *level*, *wedge*, *steep*, *angle*, *slope*, *slanted*, and *path*.
- Ask children what they have noticed about inclines. “Which is easier—rolling things on level ground or on an incline?” “If you want things to roll very fast, what sort of incline would you make?”

## Suggest some rolling games.

- Let a child try rolling an object down an incline to another child at the bottom. Or let children set up plastic bowling pins to knock over.
- Encourage children to race various objects down inclines. “Let’s see which one crosses the finish line first—Marina’s ball or Kevon’s tube.”
- Invite children to make wheel toys for rolling races and other games.

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# Playground Physics: Watch for Falling Objects!



*We can't see gravity, but it affects us every day. Preschool children can find out how gravity works through simple playground activities.*

## Let children play with gravity.

- Provide a basket of sturdy objects that children can drop from playground structures at different heights. Include foam toys, blocks, balls, keys, plastic toys, rocks, and beanbags. Let children take turns dropping things onto pavement, dirt, sand, or water.
- Ask children some questions: “Did you notice what happened when you let that ball fall?” “Did you see what happened to the sand when the block hit it? What did you notice when the block hit the water?” Record their observations.

## Extend the play experience.

- Invite children to observe what happens when classmates drop things from a playground structure. Let them predict where an object will land when a classmate drops it.
- Ask children to predict whether two objects dropped from the same height at the same time will hit the ground together or at different times. Then let them try it. What do they think will happen if they drop the things from different heights?
- On a day with no breeze, let children drop inflated balloons along with the sturdy objects. Ask what they notice about how the balloons behave when dropped. Deflate a balloon so they can observe what happens when someone drops it. What do they think makes it fall differently when inflated? Help them decide where to look for an explanation. (Note: An adult should inflate the balloons. Uninflated or broken balloons are choking hazards for children under the age of 8. Be sure the children do not put balloons or balloon fragments in their mouths. Safely discard all balloon fragments when the activity is finished.)

## Talk about gravity.

- Introduce words such as *drop*, *fall*, *force*, *surface*, *collide*, *impact*, *bounce*. (Note: Some physics terms such as *mass*, *resistance*, and so forth are probably not useful to preschoolers.)
- Introduce the idea that gravity is an invisible “natural force.” It has the power to pull objects down, so they don’t hang in the air or go up into the sky. Gravity pulls hard! That’s why it takes work to keep something in the air and why falling objects sometimes leave impact marks.
- Don’t expect preschoolers to fully understand gravity. Let them know that scientists are still learning about it. Nobody sees gravity, but anybody can study what it does.

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# Say Yes to the Mess! Play with Rocks



*Materials such as rocks can be important additions to a preschool's outdoor play area. Such open-ended items are sometimes called "loose parts." When children play with loose parts, they can gain fine- and gross-motor skills. They can also apply some of the principles of art, science, and engineering.*

## Invite children to study rocks as they play.

- Set up a special space with stones of different shapes, sizes, and weights. You might ask families or businesses (garden centers, building supply stores, or contractors) to donate some rocks to your program.
- Encourage safety and respect for others' work by inviting children to help make rules for using rocks on the playground. Important considerations might include lifting heavy rocks carefully or asking an adult for help, never throwing rocks, making sure not to roll heavy rocks over another person's hands or feet, and asking before using a rock from someone else's workspace.
- Ask questions that invite children to investigate: "Do you think any of the rocks will float on water?" "Which do you think is heavier—this bucket of rocks or that bucket of sand?" "Do you think that wet rocks will stick together like wet sand does?"
- Suggest that families send "work clothes" for children to wear when they play with rocks. Some children may prefer wearing yard gloves while handling rocks.

## Encourage children to build with the rocks.

- Show the class photographs of Illinois rock formations such as those at Garden of the Gods. Share nonfiction books, builders' magazines, websites, and videos about ways people have used rocks to build or to make art.
- Invite children to plan their own rock formations, structures, and artistic designs. What do they want to make or build? Which rocks will they use? Do they want to add some other materials such as sand, sticks, leaves, or snow?
- Let children try to make their designs or structures on different surfaces—sand, mulch, and boards. Challenge them to build on ramps or uneven surfaces.
- Offer sturdy buckets, trowels, shovels, and wheel toys for moving the rocks. You might also include a heavy-duty spring scale or balance scale. Add lengths of plastic gutter that children can use as "slides" for rocks or gravel.

## Talk about what the children do with rocks.

- Invite children to report on their rock play during class meetings. Some children may have an easier time explaining their experience if they can point to a photo of their work while describing their actions.
- Introduce words such as *symmetry*, *balance*, *stack*, *base*, *collapse*, and *support* to help children describe what they have done and what they have made.
- Ask children to sketch and photograph what they have done with rocks. Make a book or bulletin board display of the photos and drawings. Include some of their comments about what they did.

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# Say Yes to the Mess! Snow Time



*Playing with snow can be an important winter-time experience for preschoolers. When children play with snow, they can strengthen their fine- and gross-motor skills. They can also apply basic principles of art, science, and engineering.*

## Help children to study snow as they play.

- Remind families to send children with warm clothing to allow outdoor snow play. Keep extra “winter work clothes” (mittens, snow pants, and boots) on hand for children who come to school without those items. Be sure to follow safety guidelines when deciding how long to stay outside in cold or snowy weather.
- Encourage safety and respect for others’ work by inviting children to help make rules for using snow on the playground. Factors to consider include not throwing snow, not stepping on someone else’s workspace, and keeping snow away from faces.
- Ask questions that invite children to investigate: “Which do you think is heavier—this bucket of snow or that bucket of water?” “Where is the snow deepest on the playground? Where does it melt first?” “Do you think this pile of snow will be here tomorrow?”
- Bring snow indoors for some experiments. For example, how long does it take for a snowball to melt on the playground? In the refrigerator? In the classroom?
- Try snow art. Place some snow on the sensory table and let children add large drops of colored water using basters.

## Encourage children to build with snow.

- Introduce words such as *pack*, *freeze*, *melt*, and *snowdrift*. Show the class photographs of snowflakes and natural snow formations. Share nonfiction books, magazines, websites, and videos about ways that people have used snow to make structures or art.
- Let children plan structures or designs that they want to create with snow. How much space will they need? How will they shape and pack the snow? Do they want to include other items, such as sticks, sand, or ice?
- Provide sturdy buckets and shovels. Add shallow bins or pans for making bricks or blocks of snow. Some children may enjoy using yardsticks to measure snow depth.
- Throughout the winter, help children notice and describe different types of snow—dry, wet, slushy, etc. Ask them to compare what it’s like to make structures or designs with each type of snow.

## Talk about snow with the children.

- During class meetings, invite children to report on their play with snow. Ask challenging questions: “How do you know that something is snow and not ice?” “What are some things you notice about snowflakes when you catch them on your gloves?”
- Let children create models of their snow structures and designs with air-drying modeling compound. Display the models along with children’s comments about their snow creations. Children may enjoy describing what they have learned in a presentation for parents or classroom visitors.

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# Say Yes to the Mess! Water Works



*Playing with materials such as water can be an important outdoor experience for preschoolers. When children play with water, they can build fine- and gross-motor skills. They can also apply some basic principles of science and engineering.*

## Help children prepare to investigate water outdoors.

- Share nonfiction books, websites, and videos about water and its behavior. Ask a librarian to help you find pictures of Illinois rivers, lakes, dams, and levees to show the children.
- Invite children to plan and build models of what they see in the pictures. Help them decide what materials to use so they can contain or move water in their models.
- Introduce words such as *flow*, *flood*, *dam*, *erode*, and *contain* to help children describe how water moves.
- Suggest that families send “work clothes” for children to wear when they play outdoors with water. Provide plastic gloves for children who want to wear them during outdoor water play.
- Encourage safety and respect for others’ work by asking children to help make rules for water play. Supervise water play carefully. Children should always wash hands after playing in water.

## Set aside part of the playground for water study.

- Pick a place where the water play will not disturb children who do not want to be wet. A space with sand or gravel may lend itself well to studying erosion.
- Some children may feel anxious about getting wet, messy, or splashed accidentally by other children. Allow them to practice by playing with indoor water tables that have clean water. Outside, they may prefer their own space away from others as they get used to the experience.
- Provide a source of water that children can use for water play. You could use a plastic beverage cooler with a spout, filled plastic gallon containers of water, a water table from the classroom, or a very shallow wading pool. Make sure that containers are safe (e.g., not too heavy or deep) and clean them appropriately as needed.
- Provide buckets, scoops, measuring cups, ladles, and shallow tubs for moving the water. Offer hoses, turkey basters, lengths of plastic gutter, and PVC pipe, including joints and elbow bends. You might ask families or businesses (garden centers, building supply stores, or contractors) to donate these items.
- Ask questions that provoke children’s curiosity. “Do you think a piece of wood will work as a dam?” “What do you suppose made your levee come apart?” “Can you make this water flow up the hill?”

## Follow up on the children’s water experiments.

- Invite children to draw or take photos or videos of what they do with water. Let them report on their water play during class meetings.
- Let children create a display about their water study for visitors to see. They may enjoy showing videos of their water experiments while narrating.

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# Things Change



*To a 3- or 4-year-old, it may seem that one day is much like the next and that life never changes. The preschool years are a good time to introduce the idea that all things change—both nonliving and living. Note that some things change slowly and some quickly—that some changes we welcome and some we just accept. You can begin with easily observable changes, then introduce the concept of life cycles.*

## Nonliving things change.

- Experiment with water. Let children paint with water outside on a sunny or windy day. How does the water painting change? Put water into cups and place the cups in the freezer. How does the water change? Place cups with ice cubes in different locations—for example, nearer or farther from a window or perhaps on different sides of a room—and predict which ice cube will melt first.
- Discuss how heating or cooking changes food. What things get hard when you cook them (e.g., eggs) and what things get soft (e.g., butter)?
- Discuss and chart the weather for several days. How has it changed during that time?

## Living things change—including plants, animals, and people.

- Help each child fill a clear plastic cup two-thirds full with potting soil. Demonstrate how to plant seeds such as lima beans under the soil next to the side of the cup where they can be seen. Label the cups with the children's names, place them in a shallow pan, and water the seeds. Keep the cups moist in a warm, sunny place. Ask the children to predict what will happen. Follow up the children's predictions with "What makes you think so?" Discuss the plants as they begin to sprout.
- Use a vase of cut flowers as an art subject. In a few days, have the children compare their drawings or paintings of the flowers with the real ones. Ask them, "What changes do you see?"
- Cut open an apple and examine the seeds. Let the children curl up like seeds, and then pretend to grow tall like a tree. Talk about how the seeds grow into an apple tree. Show the children a picture of an apple tree with apples on it and explain that apples ripen when the tree grows up. When the seeds in these apples are planted, they can grow into new trees.
- Read books about eggs and chickens; tadpoles and frogs; and cocoons, caterpillars, and butterflies. Ask the children if they had a puppy or kitten that is now grown. Read a book about a baby animal growing up. In what ways does an animal change as it grows? What things about the baby animal are the same as its mother? What things are different?
- Let children bring in baby pictures of themselves for a display. Children who may not have access to such photos can draw pictures of how they may have looked as babies. Talk about what they can do now that a baby can't do.

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# Curious Young Scientists

Keep children engaged when you have to wait



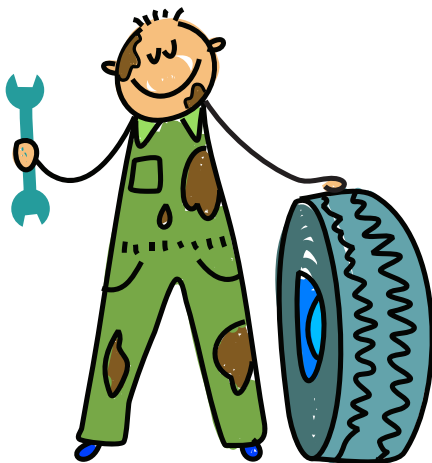
## Observe the world

Help your child notice sights, smells, and sounds around you.



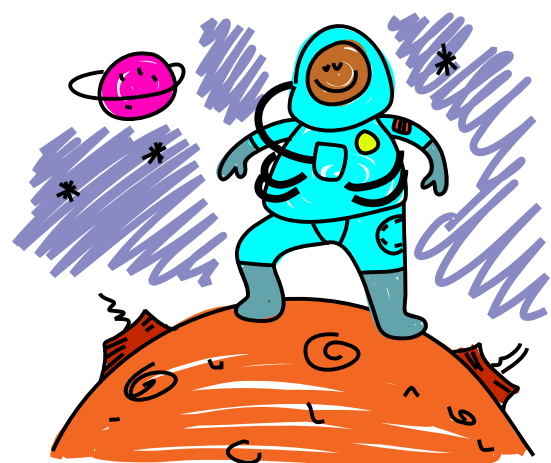
## Think like scientists

Talk about causes: "What's making Mommy's hair go sideways?"



## Make predictions

Let's guess how long it will take Daddy to change the tire?



## Imagine!

Ask questions: "What would you do if we could go into space?"

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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Science



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait. So don't just wait—investigate!*

**You can help your child to start thinking like a young scientist by ...**

-  **Taking notice.** Scientists pay attention to what is around them. Invite your child to listen, look, touch, taste, and smell with you! View the world together through magnifiers or listen through cardboard tubes. If it is safe to do so, you and your child can touch the plants, rocks, and other items around you. Tell each other what you notice, or make drawings. Not much to see? Study textures of your clothes or each other's hands.  
  
Making observations can also be a game! Look for ten seconds at what is around you, then cover your eyes and say what you recall. Your child can check to see if you have remembered correctly. Then switch roles.
-  **Making connections.** Scientists look for cause and effect in the things that change in the world around us. You might talk with your child in ways that help her think about connections. Ask her to think about why things happen. Share your ideas about what you observe. What makes that tree seem to bend over and straighten up again and again? What attracted so many birds to the park today? What holds the bridge up so all the cars can go across?
-  **Making constructions.** Putting things together is important in science! You might keep small building toys, nuts and bolts, or puzzles in a purse or backpack. Which pieces fit together and why? How many different shapes can your child make with those pieces? You and your child can also examine building materials around you. What holds bricks together? Where do those pipes lead? What can you and your child use at home to make a model?
-  **Making guesses and checking them.** Scientists make predictions. You and your child can, too! How long will the car wash take? Where will that squirrel jump next? You might carry a bag of small objects (pebbles, seeds, wheel toys) your child can use to make and test predictions. “Will that seed move when you blow on it?” “Which pebbles will sparkle in sunlight?” Remember that such investigations are best when they don't disturb others.
-  **Exercising your imaginations.** Scientists think creatively. “Wondering out loud” is a great way to invite your child to think about questions that don't have just one right answer. “What if we were small as mice?” “I wonder how we could find out how a bicycle works.”
-  **Seeking more information.** Your child can find answers to her questions in picture books about science. You might keep a few in your purse or backpack to share when you wait with children.

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# Toys from Throwaways: Boxes



*Have you ever seen a child unwrap a gift, then play more with the box and wrappings than with the toy? It's no surprise that children can find ways to play with many kinds of household items that you might otherwise throw away. You can be kind to the environment and encourage your preschool child's imagination by recycling boxes that you no longer need. Building with boxes can encourage the development of math skills such as measurement and geometry. Here are some ideas to get you started. The possibilities are endless!*



## Practice safety first

Make sure all materials to be used by children are clean and free from sharp fasteners or sharp edges. Avoid boxes that contained food, such as meat containers. Wrapping paper or paper towel tubes are fine but, for sanitary reasons, avoid using toilet paper rolls.



## Build with boxes

Use different shapes and sizes of boxes for building. Discuss what children might want to make—a robot, a car, a house—then help them decide what boxes they will need. Boxes can be glued or taped together and then painted. Large open-ended boxes can be taped together end-to-end to make tunnels for children to crawl through. Smaller boxes or cardboard tubes can be made into tunnels for toy cars.



## Try a train

Work with your child to make a box train. Boxes with open tops, such as shoe boxes, work well. An adult can cut the top off of closed boxes, such as tissue boxes, to create an open side. Let your child decorate the boxes with scrap paper, markers, or crayons. Poke a hole in the ends of each box, and then tie the box train cars together with yarn. Young children enjoy filling boxes with blocks or toys, then pulling the train along. As you talk with them about the train, introduce related words and sounds. Suggest reading a book about trains together.



## Turn a large box into a television screen

Cut out a large opening. Position it so a child can stand behind it with their head showing in the screen. A small box can be colored to become the remote control. They might want to give a weather report or news story on a recent family event. Your child might prefer to use a puppet or a doll as the reporter.



## Make some music

Almost any box or container can become a drum. Children can use a wooden spoon as a drumstick, or they can drum with their hands. Make a shaker to add to the music by placing small beads, buttons, or gravel inside a covered container and taping the lid on firmly. Try a rubber band banjo. Stretch several different rubber bands across an open shoe box. Try varying the width and tension of the bands to produce different notes with your new banjo.

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# Toys from Throwaways: Let's Recycle!



*Have you ever seen a child unwrap a gift, then play more with the box and wrappings than with the toy? It's no surprise that children can find ways to play with many kinds of household items that you might otherwise throw away. You can be kind to the environment and encourage your preschool child's imagination by recycling household items that you no longer need. Here are some ideas to get you started. The possibilities are endless!*



## Practice safety first

Make sure all materials to be used by children are clean and free from sharp fasteners or sharp edges. Food containers, such as milk or egg cartons, should be thoroughly washed and dried. Do not use meat containers. Wrapping paper or paper towel tubes are fine but, for sanitary reasons, avoid using toilet paper rolls.



## Provide magazines or catalogs, scissors, glue sticks, or tape

Colorful magazines are a great source for pictures that your child can cut out and paste into homemade books or collages. Make a guessing game using the front of a large windowed envelope or a piece of scrap paper with a window you've cut out of it. Put a picture cut from a magazine under the window so only a part of the picture shows. Can your child guess what the picture is? Show the whole picture and talk about it.



## Reuse no-longer-worn clothes

Old clothes are great for imaginative play. Clean adult clothes can make great dress-up costumes. Your child will enjoy dressing up in shirts, dresses, shoes, and handbags. Old socks can be turned into sock puppets by drawing on eyes and a mouth and adding some yarn hair.



## Share the unwanted mail

Open the mail first to check the contents—then share envelopes full of colorful advertising. Coupons can become part of a grocery store game. Large empty envelopes can hold cut-up art projects or other treasures. The front of a pretty card can be cut out to become part of a new card or an art project.



## Make a treasure chest

Paint and decorate a small box or plastic tub to hold a child's special treasures. Label it with the child's name. An egg carton is great for storing coins, small rocks, and other items that can be sorted.



## Weave a fruit basket

A clean plastic mesh fruit basket can become a doll bed or a pretty container for pencils or crayons. Tie one end of a piece of yarn or ribbon to the mesh; stiffen the other end with glue or tape to make a stiff point. Show your child how to weave the yarn or ribbon in and out of the holes to make patterns.

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# Asthma: Easing the Wheezing



*Kyle's preschool teacher notices that he often misses school because of colds. She hears a wheeze or whistling sound when he plays hard. Could he have asthma? Asthma causes the airways to swell, tighten, and fill with mucus. Severe asthma episodes can be life-threatening.*

## What are the warning signs of asthma in young children?

- frequent coughing, shortness of breath, or complaints of a tight feeling in the chest
- chest congestion with colds or colds that seem to last longer than other children
- coughing or wheezing when the child plays hard, laughs, or has a temper tantrum
- inability to keep up with peers when running or playing because of trouble breathing

## What factors might bring on an asthma episode?

Although the cause of asthma is unknown, some episodes are triggered by

- smoke, dust, or air pollution
- allergies to pets, pollen, mold, grass, dust mites, and cockroaches
- strong odors such as paint fumes, cleaning products, and perfume
- changes in temperature, particularly exposure to cold air
- exercise or strong emotions
- respiratory infections such as colds

## What is the teacher's role?

If teachers suspect asthma, they can urge parents to contact their child's health care provider. For each child who has a history of asthma, teachers and caregivers can

- obtain the child's asthma action plan prepared by the child's parents and their health care provider.
- help the child avoid known triggers
- respond calmly to mild episodes and quickly use needed equipment or medications
- make sure the child uses their rescue inhaler or nebulizer when they are showing the warning signs of asthma

## How would a teacher know if a child needs emergency help?

Call 911 and the parent/guardian if a child

- is showing signs they are struggling to breathe, such as nose flaring or their skin is pulled into their neck or rib cage when breathing
- can't walk or talk easily
- has lips or nails that are blue or gray

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## This Tip Sheet was produced in collaboration with the Center for Food Allergy & Asthma Research (CFAAR) at Northwestern University: [cfaar.northwestern.edu](https://cfaar.northwestern.edu)

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# Autism: Be Aware of the Signs



*Each child is unique. Infants reach such milestones as waving bye-bye or smiling in response to a smile at different ages. One child says several words at 12 months while another talks at 18 months. However, consider screening for a child who seems to be much later than others his age in reaching developmental milestones. Remember autism is only one possible reason for delays. Discuss any concerns with a doctor so the child can be screened. A child who is identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can begin getting special help. This may limit the symptoms and help the child lead a fuller life.*

## What are autism spectrum disorders?

ASDs are developmental disabilities that can cause social, language, and behavior problems. The symptoms and severity of ASDs vary greatly. This can make it hard to define or diagnose them. Be more concerned if your child has more than one sign or symptom.

## What are some common physical development symptoms? Be aware if your child ...

- reaches milestones such as rolling over, sitting, pulling up, or walking later than most children
- has trouble with fine motor skills, such as holding a spoon or picking up a small toy

## What are some common social skill symptoms? Be concerned if a child ...

- does not respond to a smile or to her name
- does not point at objects to show interest
- has poor eye contact
- resists cuddling
- seems uninterested in adults or other children and prefers to play alone

## What are some common language symptoms? A child with an ASD ...

- may not talk before age 2
- may say some words early then lose the ability to do so
- may repeat words or phrases without using them meaningfully

## What are some common behavior symptoms? Children with ASDs may ...

- move constantly
- repeat movements, such as spinning or flapping hands
- focus for long periods of time on one object or part of an object
- object to any changes in routines
- have intense temper tantrums
- show unusual sensitivity to light, sound, and touch
- not engage in pretend play, such as driving a car or feeding a doll

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# Building Endurance: Let's Get Physical!



*Building endurance (increasing the length of time that one can continue a physical activity) is a central part of physical fitness. Fitness is important for preschool children because health habits begin early and can influence later childhood and adult health. Teachers play an important role in supporting children's physical activity.*

## **Young children need to move!**

Keep children active throughout the day by integrating movement into your lesson plans. If the children are reading a story about an animal, take time to stretch as tall as a giraffe or walk like an elephant or crab. Make a letter T by holding arms out straight. Count by jumping up and down five times. Start and end circle time with a dance.

## **Provide time for structured physical activity and self-directed play.**

Plan for at least 30 minutes each day of structured activity that includes stretching, large muscle activities, and time to cool down. Make it fun by including games and dancing. Avoid competitive games that may discourage the inactive child.

## **Teach skills and attitudes that encourage healthy, active lives.**

Teaching children to stretch, warm-up, and cool-down when exercising helps avoid injury. A child who learns basic movement skills, such as throwing and catching a ball, or jumping with both feet and landing safely, may be more confident in her ability to enjoy sports and games. Be aware of disabilities, developmental delays, and limitations and plan movement activities that can include everyone.

## **Teach fitness for children as an ongoing process.**

Emphasize regular vigorous exercise and healthy lifestyles. Encourage children to set and meet their own exercise goals and not compare themselves to others. For example, "Caron, I noticed that you rode the tricycle around the play equipment three times today! I wonder if you could ride it around the equipment four times tomorrow." Or, "Jimmy, great job balancing on one foot for 10 seconds. Can you try to do 12 seconds next time?"

## **Make an activity pyramid with your class.**

Begin with a broad base of exercises that can be done everyday. Add a layer of the kinds of vigorous exercise and active play the children should enjoy several times a week. Top with activities to cut down on, such as watching television and playing video games.

## **Involve parents.**

Many adults are interested in improving their own fitness and endurance levels. Encourage parents to walk and play actively with their children. Having a screen-free afternoon and going for a walk or dancing to music can be fun for everyone in the family.

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# Dental Health for Babies and Young Children



*Strong baby teeth are essential to a child's health. Families can help promote healthy dental care habits and prevent childhood tooth decay.*

## Practice daily dental care

- Gently wipe a baby's gums with water twice a day before they have teeth. Use a clean, damp piece of gauze, washcloth, or soft infant toothbrush with water. This time can be pleasant if you smile and talk to them: "This is how we clean your mouth!"
- For toddlers and preschoolers, go shopping together to select a fun child-sized toothbrush in their favorite color. Brush their teeth very gently twice a day, starting when their first tooth comes in.
- Ask the dentist when to use toothpaste. Your preschool-aged child may be ready when they understand how to spit out toothpaste in the sink after brushing, rather than swallowing it. Together, select a children's toothpaste in a flavor they enjoy. Just use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste each time you brush.
- Be a good model! Let your child see you brush and floss regularly.

## Protect your child from tooth decay

Everyone, even babies, can get tooth decay. If you see brown or black spots on your child's teeth, that is a sign of decay. The good news is that there are ways to prevent tooth decay.

- With infants, gently take them from the breast or take the bottle from their mouth as soon as possible if they fall asleep while feeding. If the bottle or breast stays in their mouth while sleeping, the liquid can pool around their teeth.
- Avoid sugary food and drinks, which can damage the teeth and cause cavities.
- Teach your child to drink water or milk from a cup or spill-proof cup after their first tooth appears. They need practice drinking out of cups to be successful!

## Prepare for your child's first dentist visit

- Ask other parents or your health care provider to recommend a dentist. Many family dentists and pediatric dentists specialize in working with babies and children.
- Some dentists may want to see a child when the first tooth erupts at 6–12 months. Others may want to wait until the child's first birthday or later.
- Before the visit, share picture books about teeth and dentists. You can help your child get used to opening their mouth for the dentist by playing "How Many Teeth?" and other "open mouth" games. A toddler or preschooler may want to pretend play "dentist's office."
- At the visit, bring along books and comfort toys. Arrive a bit early so you and your child can look around and meet the staff. Expect to stay with your child during the checkup.

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# Do You Hear What I Hear?



*Young children use all their senses—especially hearing—to explore their world. Temporary or permanent hearing loss may be present at birth or may follow frequent ear infections, injuries, or disease. Hearing loss can slow language development and lead to other learning problems. In Illinois, the law requires all hospitals to test hearing in newborns. All preschools and licensed child care centers are required to screen children 3 years old or older every year. Parents and teachers also play an important role in identifying children who may need further screening.*

## What are the signs of normal hearing development?

- By 3 months, an infant responds to a parent's voice by becoming more alert. A 6-month-old turns toward a sound and babbles in a series of sounds.
- By 12 months, a baby begins to imitate sounds and may say a few words, such as “mama” or “bye.”
- Around 2 years, a toddler understands action words, such as *run*; follows simple spoken directions; and uses two- to three-word sentences.

Ask your health care provider for a hearing checklist or obtain free information by calling the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at (800) 638-8255.

## What are some common signs of hearing loss?

- A child with hearing loss may seem inattentive or resistant.
- He may misunderstand words or seem to hear some sounds but not others.
- She may not be interested in television or radio.
- He may not speak clearly or be difficult to understand.

## What should I do if I suspect a child has hearing loss?

Ask your child's health care provider if screening by a trained professional might be needed or ask to speak to your local school district's hearing consultant.

## How important is treatment?

Early treatment can make a lifelong difference. Research shows that children born with hearing loss usually can begin school with normal language and learning skills if appropriate care is begun by 6 months of age. Treatment can include finding the underlying cause; making environmental changes; and providing training, exercises, hearing aids, or surgery. Treat any hearing loss quickly to avoid hearing-related learning and social problems.

## For related Web resources, see “Do You Hear What I Hear?” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Eating Right = Healthy Children!



*Good nutrition is essential for supporting preschoolers' healthy growth while avoiding obesity. Parents can offer the foods that children need and help them develop good eating habits. Here are some ideas for helping children eat right.*

## What do 2- to 5-year-old children need in their daily diet?

The amount of food that your child needs depends on their age, size, and activity level. Many children will eat more some days than others. You can learn more about the daily recommended amounts for your child at [MyPlate.gov](http://MyPlate.gov) and [HealthyChildren.org](http://HealthyChildren.org). Children should not be pressured to eat more than they want. As you plan the day's meals and snacks for your child, keep the following in mind:

- Grains, such as bread or cereal, at least half whole-grain
- Vegetables, of varied colors
- Fruit
- Milk or dairy, including nondairy milks, low-fat for most children
- Protein, including meat, beans, eggs, and peanut butter

## What about sweet drinks and desserts?

It's best to limit these but not to completely ban any food. Sweet foods should not be used as rewards. Water is the healthiest drink most of the time. Sweet drinks and foods may...

- Interfere with your child's appetite for more nourishing food.
- Lead to tooth decay.
- Make it easier for your child to consume too many calories.

## How can parents teach their children good eating habits?

The best way to encourage healthy eating is by setting a good example. You can offer fresh foods to avoid preservatives and the added salt, sugar, and fat often found in processed foods. You can also plan for the family to eat together at home as often as possible. Here are some more ideas:

- Offer a variety of foods and let your child help with food choice and preparation.
- Encourage your child to try new foods.
- Serve small portions, with seconds available.
- Help your child recognize and stop when they have had enough.

## Are occasional fast food meals OK?

When you eat fast food, talk to children in advance about making healthy choices. You can also ...

- Replace soda with milk or water and fries with fruit.
- Choose grilled foods rather than fried foods.

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# Eyes Right! Find Amblyopia Early



*Good vision depends on the eyes and the brain working together. The pathway between the eyes and the brain can be affected when one eye sees more clearly than the other. The eye with less clear vision is not used as often and becomes even weaker. This condition is called amblyopia, or “lazy eye.”*

## What causes amblyopia?

Any condition that causes the brain to favor one eye and ignore the image in the other may cause amblyopia. Common causes include crossed eyes, cataracts, eyes that differ a lot in the degree of nearsightedness or farsightedness.

## When should amblyopia be treated?

Early treatment is easier and more likely to be successful than treatment that begins after age 5. All children should have a formal eye test before age 5. Have a child examined for amblyopia if one eye turns in or out, the eyes don't appear to move together, the child seems to consistently prefer one eye over the other, the child has poor depth perception, or you believe he has a problem with vision. Often, amblyopia can be detected only by an eye doctor.

## How is amblyopia treated?

Treatment focuses on increasing the use of the weaker eye. Children often wear an eye patch on the stronger eye, take eye drops to temporarily blur vision in that eye, or wear corrective lenses. Surgery may be necessary first for some conditions, such as crossed eyes or cataracts. Treatment continues until vision is normal or a doctor determines it is no longer improving. Parents can call the Illinois Vision and Hearing Program at (800) 545-2200 for more information. If a child is not covered by health insurance, parents can call (866) 255-5437 for information about All Kids, the state health insurance program for children.

## What if my child objects to the eye patch?

Sometimes children resist wearing the eye patch. They see less well through the weaker eye and may find that adhesive patches irritate their skin. Be sure to tell the child why the patch is necessary in terms she can understand. Try including some special time for fun when the patch is put on. Keeping the child active with small motor tasks such as eating or drawing will reduce her focus on the patch while requiring the visual system to work. Set simple rules, such as only Mom or Dad can touch the patch. Use a timer to sound when patch time is over. Let her decorate her patches. Prevent Blindness America offers an Eye Patch Club that kids can join. Call (800) 331-2020.

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# Eyes Right! Your Child's Vision



*What is more beautiful than your child's bright eyes? How well he sees with those eyes is important to his learning and development. Parents and teachers need to be aware that a child might not know if his vision is normal.*

## Arrange for regular vision screenings.

Newborns are checked for general eye health in the hospital nursery and at well-baby visits. Illinois requires yearly vision screening for all preschool children 3 years of age or older in any public or private preschool program or licensed child care center. If screening finds a problem, the child should see an eye doctor. Before they enter kindergarten, children need a complete vision exam and an *eye alignment* evaluation by an eye doctor.

## Be aware of risk factors.

A child may need more frequent eye exams if she was premature or has developmental delays. Other risk factors include an eye injury, other illnesses, or a family history of eye disease.

## Learn the signs of possible eye and vision problems.

Parents should talk to their health care provider if their infant's eyes—

- Always turn in or out, or they don't appear straight in photographs
- Don't appear to move together normally by age 3 months
- Appear very different from each other
- Don't focus on a parent's face by 3 months, or on toys held in front of him by 6 months
- Have pupils that are NOT black, round, and in the center of each eye

Parents should talk to their health care provider if their preschooler—

- Squints, rubs her eyes, or frequently has teary eyes
- Sits too close to the television or holds a book too close
- Tilts her head or closes one eye to see better
- Is more sensitive to light than her peers
- Avoids activities that require near vision, such as looking at a book, or activities that require distance vision, such as catching a ball
- Complains frequently of headaches or tired eyes

## How can I find an eye doctor?

Do you think your child has an eye problem? If so, ask his regular health care provider for a referral to an eye doctor for a full exam. Catching eye problems early can prevent later difficulties. Many county health departments offer eye tests for children over 3 years old. For general information, contact the Illinois Department of Public Health's Vision and Hearing Program at 217-524-2396 (voice) or 800-547-0466 (TTY).

If your child needs eyeglasses, let her help pick out the frames. Explain how wearing them will help her see words in a book better or recognize her friends across the playground.

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# Fight Germs! Wash Your Hands!



*Washing your hands often and well is an easy way to help prevent the spread of many infections, including the common cold. Illinois law sets standards for handwashing in childcare centers and day care homes.*

## What are the best times to wash hands?

*Children should wash their hands* as soon as they arrive at the school or childcare center **AND...**

- **BEFORE** going home
- **AFTER** using the bathroom or having diapers changed; handling pets or animals; sneezing, coughing, or blowing and/or wiping their nose; playing outside; or touching anything soiled with body fluids or wastes, such as blood, saliva, urine, stool, or vomit
- **BEFORE AND AFTER** using the water table or each meal or snack, cooking experience, or otherwise handling food
- **ANYTIME** hands look, feel, or smell unclean

*Parents and teachers should wash their hands* as soon as they arrive at the school or childcare center **AND...**

- **BEFORE** going home
- **AFTER** using the bathroom or helping a child use the bathroom; changing a diaper; sneezing, coughing, blowing and/or wiping their nose, or helping a child wipe and/or blow their nose; handling items soiled with body fluids or waste (e.g., blood, drool, urine, stool, or vomit); handling pets or pet objects (e.g., cages or leashes); or handling or caring for a sick child
- **BEFORE AND AFTER** eating, drinking, or preparing, handling, or serving food; dispensing medication or administering first aid; changing rooms or caring for a different group of children
- **ANYTIME** hands look, feel, or smell unclean

## What is the best way to wash hands?

*Use warm, but not hot, running water.* Run the “cold” water first. Then, gradually increase the amount of warm water, testing the temperature yourself before the child puts her hands under the tap.

*Use soap.* Apply enough liquid soap to develop a good lather. Lather the fronts, backs, between fingers, under fingernails, and up to the forearm areas of the hands. Scrub vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Rinse well.

*Dry your hands* with a fresh paper towel. Then use the towel to turn off the faucet. Discard the towel.

*Help young children wash their hands* using the above method. As they become experienced, you can teach them how to wash their hands while you supervise.

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# Food Allergy Awareness



One in 13 children has a food allergy. Children can be allergic to any food, but the most common food allergens in young children are milk, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, eggs, fish, shellfish, and sesame. To keep children safe, caregivers should:

## Be prepared when caring for a child with a food allergy.

- Ask if the child has an Emergency Action Plan from their doctor. If so, request it and read it.
- Read food labels and avoid allergens; *never* assume you know the ingredients.
- Wash hands before and after snacks/meals and wipe down tables, chairs, and playground equipment.
- When preparing or serving food, avoid cross-contact with utensils (e.g., using the same spoon, spatula, or scoop).
- Ask parents about previous reactions, necessary precautions, and how to use the child's epinephrine autoinjector.
- Know where their medicine is kept and take it with you when you go outside or on field trips.

## Watch for reactions to allergens.

Suspect an allergic reaction is happening if a child has mild or severe(\*) symptoms in any of the following body systems:

1. Mouth: swelling of the lips and/or tongue
2. Skin: itching, hives, redness, or swelling
3. Stomach: vomiting, nausea, or stomach pain
4. Lungs: wheezing, coughing, or tightness\* in the chest/trouble breathing
5. Heart: dizziness\*, weak pulse\*, or fainting\*

A mild reaction typically includes only one of these five body systems. A severe reaction includes any severe symptoms and/or more than one body system. A severe reaction is called *anaphylaxis*, which can be life-threatening.

If a child has trouble breathing, has a weak pulse, or faints—or if there are symptoms within *two or more* of the body systems listed above—administer epinephrine and call 911.

## Teach *all* children to be careful.

At meal/snack time, we want every child to:

- Stop before they eat.
- Look at their food.
- Ask if it's okay.
- Go eat the food *only if* an adult says it's okay.

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 This Tip Sheet was produced in collaboration with the Center for Food Allergy & Asthma Research (CFAAR) at Northwestern University: [cfaar.northwestern.edu](https://cfaar.northwestern.edu)

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# Healthy Children Eat Right

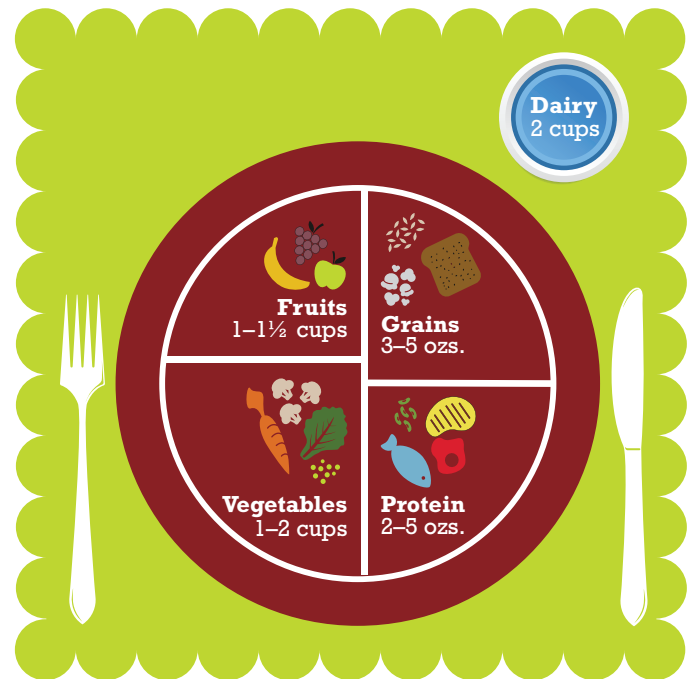
Good nutrition is basic for supporting preschoolers' healthy growth while avoiding obesity

## What do 2- to 5-year-old children need in their daily diet?

The amount of food that your child needs depends on his or her age, size, and activity level.

Children should not be pressured to eat more than they want.

As you plan meals and snacks, keep in mind the food groups and portions shown on the plate on the right.



## What about sweets?

It's best to limit these, but don't completely ban any food.



## Teach good habits

Set a good example by offering more fresh foods.

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# Keep Young Children Safe in the Car

*Car accidents are the leading cause of death for young children in the United States. Always use child safety seats positioned in safe spots in the car. Remember these key rules to keep children safe:*

## Use the right seat for your child's weight and height

Use a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) rated car seat. Select a car seat based on your child's weight, height, and positioning needs. Children under age 2 must be properly secured in a rear-facing car seat. Children under age 8, weighing less than 40 pounds, must be secured in an approved child safety seat. Children taller or heavier than the recommended limits for forward-facing car seats need booster seats placed in the rear seat secured with seat belts.

## Put children in a safe spot

The safest place for children of any age to ride is the rear seat of a vehicle. Each child and each safety seat require a separate seat belt. Truck beds are not a safe place for children to ride.

## You are required to use a child safety seat

The parent or legal guardian of a child under age 8 must provide a child safety seat to anyone who transports his or her child. Children with physical disabilities that prevent the use of standard child safety seats are exempt from the law if the disability has been certified by a physician.



## Make sure seats are installed correctly

Consult with a car seat technician if you have questions about installation or rules about your child safety seat. To find a technician in your area, go to <http://cert.safekids.org/get-car-seat-checked>

## Never leave children alone in a vehicle

In just a few minutes left alone in a car, children can be in danger from heat and dehydration, even if the windows are partly open. A child can wriggle out of a seat, hit the controls, and cause the car to move.

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# Keeping Healthy and Safe: Arriving at School or Childcare

*Young children are learning new procedures for arriving at school or childcare. Adults can support them with simple explanations, visual supports, and practice.*

## Provide a Simple Explanation

Use simple phrases, such as “When you arrive at school, your parent will say goodbye at an outside door instead of at your classroom. When you arrive, someone will take your temperature.”

## Use Visual Supports

Post pictures of parents and children saying goodbye outside.



## Set Them Up for Success

Provide pictures of children getting their temperature taken.

## Provide Practice and Encouragement

Help children and parents develop a drop-off routine, such as a special handshake or hug at the door. Encourage children to describe their routine to their classmates.

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# Keeping Healthy and Safe: Face Coverings

*Young children are learning to wear face coverings and to see others wearing them. Adults can support them with simple explanations, visual supports, and practice.*

## Provide a Simple Explanation

Use simple phrases, such as “People wear masks so they won’t pass their germs to another person.

When everyone wears masks, we all keep our germs to ourselves.”



## Use Visual Supports

Provide pictures of masks. Post pictures of family members, classmates, teachers, and the children wearing masks.



## Set Them Up for Success

Demonstrate the correct way to put on and wear a mask and remind them to avoid touching or fidgeting with their masks.



## Provide Practice and Encouragement

Provide encouragement for children to wear face coverings and praise their success.



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# Keeping Healthy and Safe: Fighting Germs

*Young children are learning the importance of clean hands and clean environments. Adults can support them with simple explanations, visual supports, and practice.*

## Provide a Simple Explanation

Use simple phrases, such as “Washing hands is one of the best ways to get rid of germs! Washing our furniture and supplies helps germs go away, too!”

## Use Visual Supports

Provide pictures of children washing their hands or using hand sanitizer.



## Set Them Up for Success

Have children sing the ABCs as they scrub their hands to make sure they wash their hands long enough.

## Provide Practice and Encouragement

Stamp children’s hands and have them scrub off the ink to make sure they thoroughly wash their hands.

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# Keeping Healthy and Safe: Physical Distancing

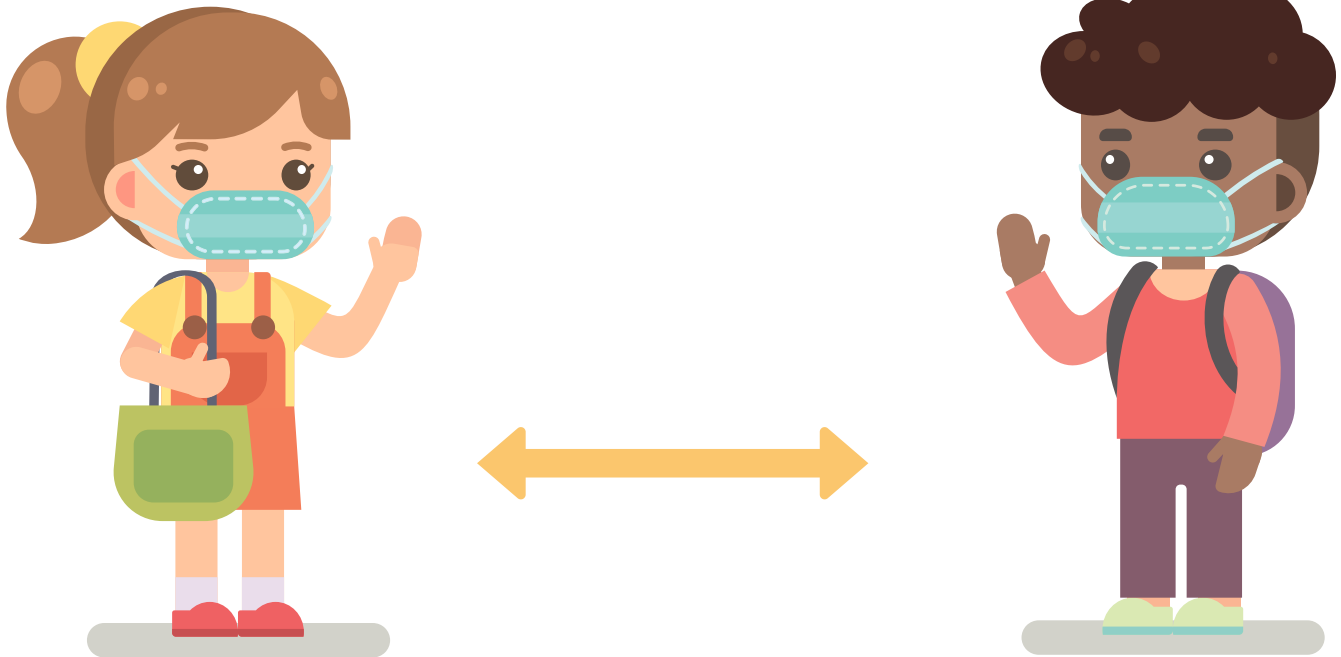
*Young children are learning to sit or stand six 6 feet apart from each other, when possible. Adults can support them with simple explanations, visual supports, and practice.*

## Provide a Simple Explanation

Use simple phrases, such as:  
“Germs can hop from person to person, and we don’t want that! When we scoot far apart, we won’t share germs.”

## Use Visual Supports

Provide pictures of children having fun but standing far apart. Put tape or stickers on the floor to remind children to keep their distance.



## Set Them Up for Success

Mark available seats with colorful tape, carpet squares, or stickers. Allow distance between tables and cots.

## Provide Practice and Encouragement

Demonstrate new ways to show affection, such as air high fives, air hugs, silent cheers, and thumbs up.

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# Keeping Healthy and Safe: Play Time

*Young children are learning that sometimes, sharing toys and supplies is not helpful. Adults can support them with simple explanations, visual supports, and practice.*

## Provide a Simple Explanation

Use simple phrases, such as “It is so nice to want to share toys with friends, but our germs can get on these things. We can be kind by keeping our items to ourselves.”



## Use Visual Supports

Post pictures of children playing, each with his or her own toys or supplies.



## Set Them Up for Success

When possible, provide supplies for each child in a bin labeled with his or her name.

## Provide Practice and Encouragement

Role play substitute behavior. Say “I like your doll. I’m going to get my doll and play near you!” instead of saying, “I like your doll. Can I play with it?”

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# Keeping Healthy and Safe: Smaller Group Sizes

*Young children are attending programs that may have smaller groups or different groups. Adults can support them with simple explanations, visual supports, and practice.*

## Provide a Simple Explanation

Use simple phrases, such as “Your group is smaller or different now so that people can have room to spread out. This helps us keep our germs to ourselves.”

## Use Visual Supports

Post individual pictures of all the children in a class or group.



## Set Them Up for Success

Support children who talk about friends who are no longer in their group. Encourage them to draw pictures for them or write letters to them.

## Provide Practice and Encouragement

Play name games to help children learn the names of everyone in the current group.

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# Lice Aren't Nice!



*Your child complains of a tickling feeling in her hair or you notice that she often scratches her head. You look closely at her scalp and see sores or what look like tiny white sand grains attached to her hair. Oh, no, your child has lice!*

## What are head lice?

Head lice are small insects that feed on human blood. They are not dangerous nor do they carry diseases, but the bite can cause itching and sores.

## How did my child get them?

Lice are very easily passed from one person to another by contact with infected clothes, bed linens, towels, combs, and hats. Children frequently pass them to others by sharing a blanket, stuffed toy, carpet, or hat.

## Can head lice be prevented?

Having lice is not a sign that a child is unclean, but taking some precautions can lessen the chances of getting lice:

- Avoid close contact with an infected child.
- Teach your child not to share personal items, such as combs, hats, scarves, or hair bands.

## How should head lice be treated?

- Ask your health care provider to recommend a hair treatment for lice. Carefully follow directions when using medicated treatments. Avoid using lice medication on a child under 2 years old. Your health care provider can recommend alternative treatments if you prefer not to use lice medication or if your child is under 2.
- Wash bed linens and clothing in very hot water (128.3 degrees Fahrenheit) or put them in airtight bags for 10 days. Combs, brushes, hair ribbons, or other items should be soaked in hot water or in the lice medication (or they should be thrown away). Vacuum floors and furniture, especially couches and areas used by children. Throw away the vacuum bag immediately.
- If other family members have lice, treat them at the same time as you treat your child.
- Repeat the treatment in 7 to 10 days as recommended by your health care provider. Some eggs may have survived the first treatment so this is done to kill new lice that may have hatched.

## When can my child return to child care or preschool?

Illinois state day care licensing standards for child care centers require a child with head lice to be excluded from child care until the morning following the first treatment. Ask your child's teacher about the policy of your child care center or school.

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For more tip sheets on other topics, please go to <https://illinoisearlylearning.org> rev. 11/21

# Organized Sports and Young Children



*Parents often wonder if organized sports offer a safe way for their preschoolers to be active. Some doctors and psychologists feel that young children can benefit from well-planned sports classes offered by park districts and other groups. Others think that it's healthier for a child to have a lot of active free play and "family time" instead—hiking, sledding, playing catch. Here are some questions to ask before you enroll your preschooler in a sports program.*

## Is the program a good match for my child?

- Consider your child's interests and abilities. Does he enjoy playing games with large groups of children? Does he show any interest in sports? Can he run, kick, or throw yet?
- Look for a class that promotes skill development, safety, and fun rather than rules and competition: "Everyone plays. Everyone is a winner."
- See if instructors use a "show and tell and try it" approach: modeling what to do, telling when and how to do it, then letting children practice.
- Keep in mind that a child won't excel in a sport just because she learns its skills and rules early in life. Her bones and muscles may not be ready for what a sport demands. She may become seriously injured if she plays sports by rules meant for older children.

## Is the program committed to safety?

- Find out if staff members are trained in first aid and CPR. Accidents can happen any time children are physically active.
- Notice whether instructors have children warm up, keep moving, and cool down. Uneven activity—waiting a long time to run, catch, or kick a ball, and then exerting a lot of energy all at once—can lead to cramps or muscle strains. Be sure children are allowed plenty of water to avoid dehydration, especially in hot weather.
- Keep in mind that contact sports are dangerous for young children. Safety gear cannot give enough protection against injuries when children play adult-style basketball, football, soccer, or hockey.

## Do the adult leaders know children as well as they know sports?

- Ask program leaders about their philosophy, training, and credentials. Do they seem to be aware of preschoolers' physical development and abilities?
- Watch the staff in action. Are they patient with the children? Do they keep children engaged while waiting for a turn?
- Notice if instructors model ways to encourage without pushing a child too hard. Scolding and yelling take the fun out of games and will not make a child learn faster or play better!

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# Physical Fitness for Preschool-Age Children



*Healthy habits, such as fitness, are the building blocks of lifelong well-being for children. Physical activity is important for children's growth and development. Preschool-age children should have opportunities to be active throughout the day.*

## What physical activities can you expect preschool-age children to do?

During the preschool years, children will learn a variety of physical activities, including going up and down stairs by alternating their feet, jumping in place, throwing overhand, catching a bounced ball, jumping with a running start, pedaling a tricycle, skipping by leading with one foot, rolling like a log, and pumping on a swing.

## What can you do at home or in childcare to help young children be physically fit?

- **Encourage them to get moving.** Make positive comments that focus on effort: “Wow, you zoomed down the slide!” “You almost made a basket!”
- **Provide opportunities for active free play.** Offer riding toys, balls, beanbags, climbers, balance beams, and obstacle courses. Let children pedal, throw, roll, climb, run, skip, dig, and jump in a safe space until they are tired.
- **Plan for structured physical activity each day.** Families and caregivers can teach creative movement, dance, and game-playing skills. Many park districts offer classes in swimming, group games, or ballet for young children. Classes should focus on skills and fun, not winning and losing. In most cases, organized sports are more appropriate for older children.
- **Think about safety.** Help children remember hats and mittens during cold weather. In hot weather, see that they cool off in the shade and drink plenty of water. Whatever the weather, help them avoid too much exposure to direct sunlight.
- **Reduce screen time.** Leave more time for active play. In children, too much screen time is associated with poor sleep, lower grades in school, and poor mental health. Preschoolers should not sit in one place for an extended time unless they are sleeping.
- **Set a good example.** Let children see you eating healthy food and being active. Start adding physical activity or try something new, such as yoga or strength training, to your daily routine and watch your child imitate you. It is better to talk about becoming strong and healthy than being thin or losing weight.
- **Exercise together.** Try sledding, hiking, gardening, and games such as catch or tag. Some preschoolers may enjoy a few minutes of playing two-player video games with you that are based on being active together. Stress cooperation and fun rather than winning.
- **Share books that show the importance of fitness.** Offer children books about dancers, athletes, construction workers, farmers, and other physically active people.

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# Physical Fitness for Toddlers



*Toddlers can keep us so busy that we might think they will always be physically fit. However, toddlers who get used to an inactive lifestyle are at risk for obesity later in life. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents and caregivers to make children's physical activity a way of life.*

## What physical activities can you expect toddlers (ages 1½ to 3) to do?

- By 18 months, most children can walk well (even backwards), go downstairs backwards on hands and knees, and roll objects on the floor.
- By age 2, most children can run, push a chair in position to obtain out-of-reach objects, and turn handles to open and close doors.
- By age 3, most children can jump, throw overhand, and go up and down stairs by alternating their feet.

## What can you do at home or in childcare to help a toddler be physically fit?

Offer play equipment and toys that help toddlers get moving. Provide large blocks, construction toys, riding toys, balls and beanbags, and climbers. Playgrounds and natural play spaces also offer many opportunities for toddlers to move.

Toddlers should be active throughout the day. Let them set their own pace! They can walk, run, climb, slide, pull, push, throw, and jump until they're tired.

Turn off the screens. Toddlers should not sit in one place or lie down for more than an hour at a time, except when sleeping.

Plan ways to make exercise fun. Structured physical activities can be good for toddlers:

- *Lead them in creative movement.* Toddlers practice skills and learn new ways to move by pretending to be animals, workers, or machines.
- *Make an obstacle course.* Indoors or out, toddlers can take turns going over, under, around, and between furniture, boxes, and climbing equipment.
- *Move to music!* Bounce, sway, clap, march, dance, or play rhythm instruments. Teach musical games such as "Freeze Dance."
- *Exercise together.* Make it a part of your routine. Do stretches before lunch. Play in the park or take a walk before the sun goes down.

Set a good example. Let toddlers see you walk, run, bike, dance, climb, or play ball.

Keep safety in mind.

- Help toddlers put on hats and mittens for outdoor play in cold weather.
- In hot weather, see that they drink enough water and avoid too much sun exposure.
- If a child has a medical condition that limits active play, a health care provider can suggest ways to help the child be active and safe. Check with a health care provider if you have questions or concerns about the physical activities that toddlers can do.

Share books about people being active. Stories about activities such as sledding, canoeing, dancing, gardening, or playing sports show toddlers the benefits of being fit.

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# Preventing Lead Poisoning in Children



*Exposure to lead can harm your child's health and development. Any amount of lead is bad for your child. A little lead can do a lot of damage, especially to children under the age of 3. Even small amounts can cause lower IQs, learning difficulties, and behavior problems.*

## Know the risks

- Be aware that a child exposed to lead may have no symptoms. Other children may have headaches, stomachaches, decreased appetite, or sleep problems. Some children may seem hyperactive or irritable. Parents who see these common symptoms may not think that lead is the cause.
- Keep in mind that sources of lead exposure vary. Mothers can pass lead to babies through breast milk. Children can breathe in lead in dust, or they can swallow it. Common sources include lead-based paint, toys or crayons, some home health remedies, and lead in soil. Other sources include lead smelters and battery recycling plants.

## Stay informed

- Find out if you live in a high-risk ZIP code area by asking your health care provider or calling the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- Check the labels on toys and be aware of the source of toys and other objects your child will handle or chew. Check lists of toys and products recalled by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- Get information on safe lead removal. Houses built before 1978 are a greater lead-paint risk. Removing paint by sanding, scraping, or heating releases lead dust into the air. IDPH has a list of licensed lead risk assessors, paint inspectors, and abatement experts. Ask IDPH or your local health department whether financial aid is available for lead removal in your area.

## Protect your child

- Get your child screened. All children 6 months through 6 years of age must be assessed for lead poisoning by a health care provider before entering child care, preschool, or kindergarten.
- Get your child's blood lead level tested at the doctor's office if you live in a high-risk ZIP code area or are eligible for Medicaid or All Kids health insurance.
- Teach children not to put things that might contain lead in their mouths. This includes paint chips or dirt. Offer toddlers safe teething toys to chew. Teach older children to wash their hands often and to put only food in their mouths. Use a wet mop regularly to remove dust from floors, and take off shoes when entering the home to avoid tracking in dirt.
- Help your children eat a healthy diet of nutritious foods. Foods high in vitamin C, calcium, and iron slow the absorption of lead into the bloodstream and increase the amount of lead that is flushed out of the body.

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# Protecting Children from Preventable Disease

*Vaccines can guard children against diseases. Here are some answers to questions that Illinois parents often ask about immunizations.*



## Why do children need immunizations?

- The viruses and bacteria that cause preventable illnesses still exist. They can be carried to any community. Every year they cause outbreaks of childhood illnesses.
- Vaccines help prevent specific diseases. Some of these diseases can be fatal or cause permanent damage to a child. These include diphtheria and polio. Other diseases may affect some children more severely than others. A mumps infection may be mild or leave a child deaf. A case of measles can cause a rash or lead to brain swelling.
- Immunizing babies may lower their risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).
- Illinois laws require vaccinations before children can enter child care or school.
- When most people are immune to a disease, it cannot spread easily. This helps to protect children who are too ill or too young to be vaccinated.

## Can vaccines harm my child?

- Vaccines are much safer than the diseases they prevent. They are widely tested. A vaccine is monitored for safety as long as it is being used.
- Talk to your health care provider before your child is vaccinated. Tell her if your child is ill, has allergies, or has had a bad reaction to any vaccines or medicines.
- Any medicine can cause side effects. The injection site may be sore. Your child may have a mild fever. Only a few out of a million shots cause a severe reaction.
- Extensive scientific research has found no connection between vaccines and autism.

## Who decides on the immunization schedule?

- Doctors and disease experts design a schedule based on recent research.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Family Physicians approve the schedule.
- Your child's doctor should recommend the best schedule for your child.

## Is it okay for an infant or small child to get so many immunizations?

- Vaccines use very small amounts of antigens to help your child's immune system recognize and learn to fight serious diseases. Antigens are parts of germs that cause the body's immune system to go to work.
- According to the CDC, vaccines in the 1990s used 3,000 antigens to protect against eight diseases by age 2. Today, vaccines use 305 antigens to protect against 14 diseases by age 2. Thanks to advances in science, today's vaccines can protect children from more diseases using fewer antigens.
- Vaccines contain only a fraction of the antigens that babies encounter in their daily life.
- A healthy child is well able to handle several vaccines over a short time.
- Postponing vaccinations leaves a child unprotected against serious or fatal illnesses.

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# Returning to Childcare During COVID-19

Families returning to childcare during the COVID-19 situation may have many questions and concerns. Children may show anger, sadness, or frustration. Having big feelings is normal during this transition. Help your child by talking openly about their feelings. Here are some ways that you can support your child during this challenging time.

## Talk about what is the same. Your child will still:

- Receive the same level of care.
- Receive snacks and meals.
- Have time to play.
- Have time to read books.
- Have time for large motor play.
- Have positive interactions with teachers and other caregivers.



## Try strategies to help your child understand the changes at childcare.

- Use pretend play to talk about the new routines such as drop-off and pickup.
- Read books about childcare. Talk about what will be different and what will be the same as before COVID-19.
- Consider ways to help children manage their feelings, such as using breathing or short calming phrases.
- Get back to your routines for bedtime, waking up, meals, getting out the door, and getting dressed.
- Stay positive and upbeat with your child and the caregivers.
- Consider creating a special goodbye routine. This can be a special song or kissing their hand before you leave.



## Ask your childcare provider questions to help you feel comfortable and confident.

- What are the new drop-off and pickup procedures?
- Can my child bring something from home to keep at the center?
- Will my child be with the same group of children and caregivers all day?
- How will health screenings be done?
- How will you comfort my child if they get upset?
- Will all of my child's friends be there?
- What changes will be made to naptime?
- Will my child's teacher be there?
- Can I still observe my child's classroom?



For related Web resources, see “Returning to Childcare During COVID-19” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Say Yes to Healthy Snacks!



*Snacks are an important part of children's daily nutrition in childcare as well as at home. Be aware that a young child may eat little one day and a lot the next. In planning healthy snacks, consider food safety and known allergies as well as "snack appeal"!*

## Serve snacks from a variety of food groups.

**Grains and carbohydrates.** Young children will enjoy these snacks as part of the grains needed each day: crackers with cheese spread, ready-to-eat cereal, mini rice cakes, and graham crackers.

**Vegetables.** Snacks can be a good way to work vegetables into a child's daily diet. Try vegetable strips, such as cucumber or squash, cherry tomatoes cut into small pieces, steamed broccoli or carrots, green beans, or sugar peas. Offer a low-fat dressing or hummus for dipping.

**Fruit.** Sections of fruit (apples, tangerines, bananas, or pineapples), canned fruits, and juices are good choices. A child needs fruit each day.

**Milk products.** Some good choices include milk shakes made with fruit, cheese slices or string cheese, and mini yogurt cups. Nondairy items such as rice milk and soy milk are in this group.

**Meat and protein.** Children may enjoy hard-cooked eggs; peanut butter spread thinly on crackers, fruit, or vegetables; or bean dip thinly spread on crackers.

**Sweet and high-fat foods.** Everyone enjoys an occasional treat. Try to limit the number of these foods. Eating them may keep a child from eating the foods he needs and can lead to overeating.

## Take safety precautions in serving food.

**Watch out for foods that may cause choking,** including hot dogs, meat chunks, chips, nuts and seeds, popcorn, raisins, grapes, cherries, marshmallows, pretzels, large chunks of fruit or raw vegetables, peanut butter (when eaten by the spoonful), and round or hard candy. Some of these foods (like grapes or cherries) can be served if they are cut into small pieces. Peanut butter can be spread thinly on crackers or bread. Children love finger foods!

**Know a child's allergies.** Be sure that anyone who cares for a child is aware of her allergies and reports any allergic reactions to her parents. Severe reactions can be life threatening and may require emergency medical attention.

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# Sensory-Friendly Events



*Many young children attend experiences and events in their community. While theaters, festivals, and parties provide opportunities for learning, fun, and friendship, they can be overwhelming for some.*

## Understanding How Senses Impact Experiences

The five commonly known senses are hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch. While everyone experiences senses differently, here are some examples of contrasting high- and low-intensity experiences.

- Listening to announcements through a speaker system vs. listening to a quiet voice
- Watching flashing lights in a holiday display vs. viewing a painting with neutral tones
- Smelling a freshly painted room vs. smelling the familiar scents of your bedroom
- Tasting a lemon vs. tasting a piece of plain bread
- Touching wet, gooey slime vs. touching a soft blanket

## Considering the Sensory Experience of Events

Some experiences are full of sensory input, such as a children's concert with flashing, colorful lights; a thumping bass line that can be felt through the floor; and music amplified by speakers throughout the room. Add in some sour candy and a room tightly packed with people and all five senses are fully engaged. This can make an experience overwhelming for some children.

## Creating Sensory-Friendly Events

Creating a sensory-friendly event can often be accomplished by “toning down” the sensory input of an experience. Here are some strategies:

- Lower the volume of music; lower the bass on speaker settings
- Provide consistent dim or natural lighting; avoid bright, flashing, or fluorescent lights
- Ensure the environment is free of strong scents, such as cleaning products, air fresheners, or certain foods
- Offer foods with mild flavor and a pleasant and easy texture for eating (e.g., pretzels); avoid strong flavors or extremes, such as very sour or spicy foods
- Limit the attendance so people don't feel cramped or have to wait in long lines
- Don't use paper wristbands or nametags that may itch or feel uncomfortable

## Accessing Sensory-Friendly Events

- Be on the lookout for announcements about these events in your community. Park districts, children's zoos, and local theaters often incorporate them into their schedule.
- Don't be afraid to reach out to community organizations to request a sensory-friendly version of an event. They may not know you need one until you ask!
- Consider making your own events sensory friendly. Back-to-school night or a child's birthday party may be more enjoyable for everyone.

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# SIDS: Back to Sleep



*Losing a baby to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is a tragedy that devastates parents, family members, friends, and others who care for the child. The good news is that all of those who provide care for an infant can help reduce the risk of sleep-related deaths.*

## What is SIDS?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is the cause given when an infant dies suddenly and no other cause can be found.

## How can parents and caregivers lower the risk of SIDS?

### **Create a safe sleep space.**

- Always place babies to sleep on their backs.
- Use a *firm* sleep surface with a tight-fitting sheet. Use only cribs, bassinets, portable cribs, or play yards manufactured after June 28, 2011, because these must meet federal requirements for overall crib safety. Parents also should check to make sure the product has not been recalled ([www.cpsc.gov/recalls](http://www.cpsc.gov/recalls)).
- Keep your child's crib bare, making sure it is free of crib bumpers, blankets, pillows, soft toys, or anything else that could obstruct his breathing.
- Infants should sleep in the same room as their parents for the first six months.
- Babies should not sleep alone on soft surfaces such as couches or recliners, and especially should not do so with any adult.
- Consider offering the baby a pacifier at nap time and bedtime.
- Do not use home monitors or commercial devices marketed to reduce the risk of SIDS.

### **Practice healthy behaviors.**

- Avoid exposing babies to smoke during the pregnancy and after birth.
- Avoid alcohol and illicit drug use during pregnancy and after birth.
- Breastfeed the baby for at least six months.
- Infants should receive all recommended vaccinations.

## What about “tummy time”?

Provide “tummy time” while the baby is awake and being observed. This can help motor development and help prevent flat spots from forming on the back of the baby's head. A baby can usually roll over alone around 4–5 months. After that, you will not need to keep moving the baby onto his back. Sleeping on the back and supervised play on the tummy are both good for infants.

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# Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Participating in the Assessment

*When a child is being assessed for special education services, the process can sometimes feel long and confusing. Your local education agency (LEA), usually a local school district, has defined steps and timelines for this process to ensure that a thorough assessment is conducted.*




## Participating in the assessment process

Here is some helpful information about different aspects of the assessment process:

- Signing an agreement to an assessment sets the wheels in motion. The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the assessment be completed within 60 days of you signing the consent.
- Several professionals may ask you to participate in interviews and complete questionnaires. Each professional needs information for their specialty. For example, a speech therapist will observe and ask questions about communication skills, while a teacher may look for information about global development and your child's daily living activities.
- The assessment will include interviews with you and those who are the closest with your child, observations of your child, and formal assessments of your child.
- Your LEA will create a written report with assessment findings. You will meet with the LEA to review the results.

## How can I advocate for my child during the assessment process?

- **Communicate and share information.** Information you give should be accurate and current. Let your assessors know whether anything could make your child behave differently than usual or if any new information arises (e.g., test results from a doctor). If your child is sick, it's okay to ask for the assessment to be rescheduled.
- **Gather contact information.** Write down the name, title, and contact information of professionals who have met with you. You may want to create a binder where you keep business cards and other information you received during the process.
- **Ask questions.** If you are not in the room while your child is assessed, ask questions beforehand to learn more about the process. If you are observing the assessment, you may have questions about what is happening. For example, your child may be reaching for a cup just out of reach without using words and the assessor may not give them the cup. They are likely encouraging your child to say or sign the word "cup." Consider writing your questions down and asking them at the end of the interactions.
- **Be patient.** This 60-day process can feel stressful. If you experience urgent issues, such as challenging behaviors at home, feel free to ask for help from the assessors while the process is happening. You may be directed to websites, written materials, or local parent groups.

 For related Web resources, see "Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Participating in the Assessment" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Referral and Getting Started

When a caregiver in a preschooler's life notices signs of a disability or developmental delay, they may suggest an assessment through the public education system. A diagnosis, or confirmation of a delay or disability, can lead to the child receiving educational services and supports.



## Starting the assessment process

There are many avenues that can lead to an assessment, such as:

- A parent or caregiver has expressed concerns about your child's development.
- Your child has received a diagnosis (e.g., autism) from a medical provider.
- Your child has already been receiving services through early intervention.

## What should I know about the assessment process?

- Assessment is used to determine a child's developmental strengths and areas of need. Play activities, observations, and caregiver interviews are used to gather information.
- A formal assessment for special education requires your written permission.
- Your local education agency (LEA), such as a school district, will conduct the assessment.
- You should receive an assessment plan that outlines the type of assessments the LEA wants to do, the areas of development they want to assess, and who will conduct them.
- The LEA will likely request assessments in multiple domains. It is common to assess all developmental areas to get a global picture of a child.
- You may request additional assessments not included on the proposed assessment plan. For example, if the LEA wants to assess cognition and physical development but you also have concerns about your child's communication skills, you may ask for a communication assessment.
- You may also decline a portion of the assessment, but it is best to discuss why the assessment is being requested first.
- Within 60 days, the LEA will complete the assessment, share the results with you, and develop a plan for special education if your child qualifies.

## How can I advocate for my child during the referral process?

- **Listen to others' concerns.** It may be difficult to hear others' concerns about your child. It's possible you have not seen any of these concerns. It may be helpful for you to schedule a time to observe your child in their early childhood setting.
- **Understand your rights.** You should receive a document titled *Procedural Safeguards Notice* from your LEA. This document explains your rights.
- **Ask questions.** The assessment plan may be hard to understand. It's okay to ask someone to go over the document with you. You should understand what you are signing.
- **Share your concerns.** The parent and school relationship is a partnership. The LEA can address your concerns.

## For related Web resources, see "Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Referral and Getting Started" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Special Education Assessment for Preschool-Aged Children: Reviewing Results and Next Steps

*When a child is assessed for special education services, first the assessment is conducted and then a meeting is held to review the assessment report results. There are typically two possible conclusions. One is that your child qualifies for special education services and an IEP (Individualized Education Program) is created. The other is that your child does not qualify for special education services. In this case, your LEA may suggest other ways to support your child.*




## Reviewing the assessment results report

- Your local education agency (LEA), such as a school district, will schedule a meeting to review the assessment report.
- You will receive a copy of the report at the meeting or before the meeting. If you want to review the report before the meeting, let the LEA know in advance.
- As you review the report, note errors or questions. Sometimes miscommunication can lead to inaccurate information within the report. For example, if you told them your child said their first word at 16 months but later remembered it was actually 14 months, you can ask for that to be corrected.

## How can I advocate for my child during the assessment report meeting?

- **Support yourself first.** Consider bringing a trusted person to the meeting; it helps to have someone else hear the information with you. You may want to record the meeting; if so, let the meeting organizer know in advance. During the meeting, if you feel overwhelmed or frustrated, ask to take a break.
- **Communicate with the assessment team.** You are a vital member of your child's educational team. Share your family's goals, values, and expectations for your child. If you are unsure of a term or acronym, ask for clarification. When asking questions, be clear and specific, listen to the response, and ask follow-up questions. If you don't understand something, ask for it to be stated in a different way or ask for an example.
- **Learn about your child's team.** If roles and responsibilities are not explained, ask about each person's role with your child. Request business cards or a contact list.
- **Review the draft documents.** Be sure that any important ideas discussed during the assessment meeting, such as services or strategies the team will use with your child, have been noted. If you would like something clarified, reach out to team members after the meeting to make sure that you understand what you are signing.
- **Ask for next steps.** A timeline of what will follow will help you understand what happens next and set your expectations for school services and supports. If your child is eligible for special education services, obtain information about when and where those services will begin. If your child is not eligible, obtain information about other types of programs that may meet their needs.

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# Teaching Children to Avoid “Stranger Danger”



*As our preschoolers grow more independent, we still need to supervise them closely, but most of us also want to teach our children about dealing with strangers. Alerting children to “stranger danger” can both help them to be safe and reduce parents’ anxiety. How can we teach children to be wary of strangers but not to be overly fearful?*

-  **Tell her more than just “Don’t talk to strangers.” Teach which strangers are safe.** She may not understand that strangers look like the people she sees every day. She may also wonder why it’s all right to talk to a new teacher or neighbor—people who are strangers at first—and not to others. Police officers, firefighters, teachers, store clerks, or librarians are examples of safe strangers.
  
-  **Explain simple rules for staying safe.** Try practicing or role-playing situations involving the use of these rules with your child.
  - “It’s okay to talk to someone if I’m with you or when I tell you it’s all right.”
  - “Grown-ups who need help should ask other grown-ups, *not children*, for help. This includes carrying a package or finding a place or a lost puppy.”
  - “Stay where you can see me or another grown-up with you in public places, such as stores or parks.”
  - “If you’re not close to us, stay an arm’s length or more from someone you don’t know. Back up or run for help if an unfamiliar grown-up gets too close. Scream and kick if a stranger grabs you.”
  - “If you get lost, find a police officer, security person, or store clerk. If separated from me or the grown-up you’re with in a public place, such as at a store or shopping mall, stay in that spot until someone finds you.”
  - “Don’t go *anywhere* with someone you don’t know.”
  - “Never take anything from a stranger.”
  - “Listen to your feelings. If you’re scared, get away and look for someone to help you.”
  
-  **Read books on strangers with your children and talk about what you’ve read.** Your librarian can suggest titles, or you may want to consider these children’s books:
  - *A Stranger in the Park* by Stuart Fitts and Donna Day Asay (1999)
  - *Never Talk to Strangers* by Irma Joyce and George Buckett (2009)
  - *Once Upon a Dragon: Stranger Safety for Kids (and Dragons)* by Jean E. Pendziwol and Martine Gourbault (2006)
  - *The Berenstain Bears Learn About Strangers* by Stan and Jan Berenstain (1985)
  
-  **Read more on keeping your children safe.** *Personal Safety for Children: A Guide for Parents* is available online at [www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/safety/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/safety/index.html)

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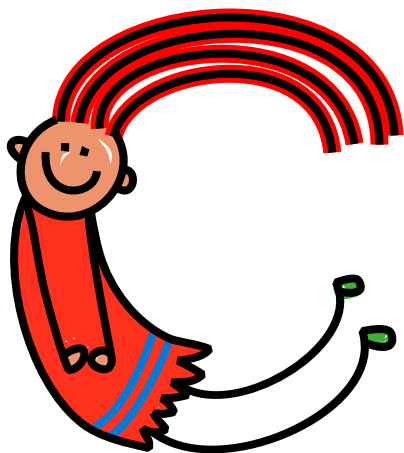
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# Get Physical

Keep children engaged when you have to wait



## Let's pretend!

Flop your bodies like rag dolls.  
Then be stiff like robots.



## Time to play!

Fingerplays, clapping games,  
and songs get hands moving.



## Challenge time!

Make up challenges: "Stand on  
one foot while I count to 10."



## Snuggle up!

Sometimes hugging  
is the best physical activity.

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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Physical Activities



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help keep children engaged when they have to wait.*

Too much time in a car seat or stroller can make a child irritable. How can you help your child find a little freedom of movement in a confined space?

## Snuggle Up!

Sometimes, hugging is the best physical activity. Invite your child to pretend you are puppies or other animals as you give each other lots of hugs.

## Time to Play!

“Simon Says” and “Mother May I?” are timeless games that let children move in a small space. Fingerplays, clapping games, and songs get hands moving. Try old favorites like “Patty-cake,” “Miss Mary Mack,” or “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.”

## Let's Pretend!

If your child still has energy to burn, try some of these activities:

- **Flop your bodies like rag dolls.** Then be stiff like robots. Stretch your necks like giraffes, or be shy turtles pulling heads and limbs in toward your bodies. Pretend to dig holes or pour cereal. With very young children, decide together what to act out, then find different ways to do it. As your child learns the game, she can play a part while you guess what she is doing. Then switch roles.
- **Be athletes in the Finger Olympics.** Use hands and fingers to show skiing, skating, pole-vaulting, or other sports.
- **Play the mirror game.** This activity works when you can face each other. When your child is the leader, he can make any kind of motion suitable for the space—arm movements, funny faces, silly walks. Imitate his movements as if you were a mirror image. Trade places often!

## Challenge Time!

Make up physical challenges for each other. Be sure your challenges fit the space and don't interfere with anyone else. For example: “Try standing on one foot while I count to 10.” “Can you touch your nose with your elbow?” “Can you lift the cereal box over your head 10 times?” “Which letters can we make with our fingers?”

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# Too Sick to Go to Child Care?



*Do you wonder if your child is too sick to go to preschool or child care? Here are some things to keep in mind.*

-  **Colds.** On average, a child catches 6–8 colds per year. If he is over 4 months old, there is no need to keep him home with sniffles or congestion—as long as his temperature is lower than 100 degrees and he has no other signs of illness.
-  **Vomiting or diarrhea.** Keep your child home. Call the doctor if these problems persist or your child seems dehydrated. She can go back to child care when she can drink liquids without problems—at least 24 hours after the last time she vomits, and at least 12 hours after the last time she has diarrhea.
-  **Stomachache, headache, earache, toothache.** Observe your child. If he is in severe pain, call his doctor immediately. If he doesn't look or act sick, try gentle encouragement (like reminding him of something fun he will be doing that day). Call his doctor if he complains of pain frequently, his pain persists, or you're unsure he is ill.
-  **Conjunctivitis (“pinkeye”) or strep throat.** Your child should stay home until she has been on an antibiotic for 24 hours and has no fever. Red “bloodshot” eyes and yellow or greenish discharge from the eyes are signs that she should see a doctor. If she has a bad sore throat or a sore throat and a fever, she should be tested for strep at the doctor's office.
-  **Rash.** You don't need to keep your child home for a minor diaper or heat rash. If he has an unusual rash with fever or acts unwell, see a doctor before sending him to child care or school. A child with impetigo (a skin infection characterized by blisters that itch) should stay home for 24 hours after starting to take antibiotics. Cover any remaining blisters or scaling with a bandage or dressing when he returns to child care.
-  **Head lice.** Keep your child home until the morning after her first treatment. Some programs may ask you to keep her home longer. Note: Some treatments work better than others do, so check your child's head thoroughly before sending her back to child care.
-  **Chicken pox.** Keep your child home at least 6 days after the rash first appears.
-  **Other general suggestions:**
  - Ask about your caregiver's or program's policies on sick children before enrolling your child. By law, Illinois child care providers must screen children for obvious signs of illness each day. State guidelines help these providers determine whether a child should be sent home. Some programs may be stricter than the state guidelines require.
  - Plan ahead. You may need to stay home or find a relative or trusted friend who will stay with the child on short notice.
  - In general, keep your child home if he is not well enough to take part in the usual class activities or might infect others. Ask your health care provider if you are unsure.

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For more tip sheets on other topics, please go to <https://illinoisearlylearning.org> rev. 11/21

# What Is an IEP?



*An IEP is an Individualized Education Program for a child age 3 through 21 who has been diagnosed with disabilities or developmental delays. IEPs provide a roadmap for special education services. This is especially important for preschoolers, who may be receiving special education services in a variety of settings, such as public preschool classrooms, Head Start programs, or private childcare centers.*

## Who is involved in IEPs?

- Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are created by a team. Families, teachers, child care providers, and specialists, such as speech and language therapists, are involved in the IEP process.
- Families are an important part of the IEP team! Families know their child best and can contribute important information about their child during meetings.
- Everyone on the IEP team works together to improve the education of the child with disabilities or delays.

## How is an IEP created?

- First, an educational team assesses a child and determines whether the child is eligible for special education services. A child is eligible if the assessment reveals a disability or developmental delay.
- If the child is eligible, the team, which includes the family, meets to create an IEP for the child. This document is used to guide the child's educational services and supports within their educational setting.
- The IEP team meets annually, or more often if needed, to review the child's progress toward goals and to make any needed changes to goals or services. New annual goals are written each year.

## What does an IEP look like?

- The IEP is a document that lists educational goals for the child. It describes the services that the child will receive, such as speech or physical therapy. It also describes accommodations that the child will receive, such as materials in Braille or adapted seating.
- The IEP is based on the child's individual strengths and challenges.
- Just like children, no two IEPs are alike.

## Tips for parents

- Talk with your child's teacher or someone from your local school district if you have questions or need more information about the IEP.
- Celebrate your child's progress toward their educational goals!

## For related Web resources, see "What Is an IEP?" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# What Is Assessment?



*Families may wonder about assessment for young children. It is common for a child's caregiver, teacher, pediatrician, or other involved adult to use assessments. Assessment is one way to learn more about a child and their development. Assessment gives families, caregivers, and teachers helpful information about a child.*

## Why assess?

- Assessment helps early childhood professionals gather information about a child and reveals details about their strengths and challenges.
- Assessment information helps families and teachers make decisions about a child's learning and support. For example, an assessment may reveal that a child has language delays, leading to the creation of communication supports.

## Who is involved in an assessment?

- Family members
- Early childhood educators, special educators, home visitors, and childcare providers
- Specialists such as speech therapists and physical therapists, as needed

## What does assessment look like?

- A teacher might watch a child playing at home, at childcare, or at school
- A therapist might ask a child to try fun activities that involve moving, talking, or drawing
- A parent might answer interview questions about how a child speaks, acts, or moves
- A parent might complete a questionnaire about their child's skills

## What happens after an assessment?

- Assessors review the information they have gathered to understand the child's strengths and challenges
- The information is summarized in a report and shared with everyone involved, including family members
- Families and professionals meet to talk about the assessment and consider whether additional services or supports, such as special education services, are needed for the child

## What can families do to support the assessment process?

- Provide information for the assessment process; this will help the assessment team create an accurate description of the child's needs
- Share any concerns about their child's interests, behaviors, and skills in daily home life
- Ask and answer questions about their child and what they can and can't do
- Keep track of appointments for the assessment and any additional meetings

## For related Web resources, see "What Is Assessment?" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# When Should I Send a Sick Child Home?



*A child is too sick to be in child care if he feels too ill to take part in the planned activities OR if she needs more care than you can give without spreading the illness to others. Illinois State Licensing Standards for Day Care Centers say child care centers must screen children for illness every day when they arrive. Children with certain signs of illness must be excluded. Here are the minimum state requirements. Your center's standards may be more stringent.*



## What are some signs that I should send the child home?

- **Fever:** has a temperature of 101 degrees F (oral) or higher and change in behavior
- **Skin:** has rash and temperature of 101 degrees F (oral) or higher, OR rash with behavior change, OR impetigo (itchy, oozing sores)
- **Eyes:** has purulent conjunctivitis (pinkeye—the white of the eye is pink or red, with white or yellow discharge or crust)
- **Behavior:** is very tired or irritable; cries a lot more than usual (especially infants)
- **Respiratory:** has trouble breathing
- **Digestive:** has diarrhea; has vomited two or more times in the past 24 hours (unless you are sure the vomiting is related to a non-contagious condition and the child is not likely to become dehydrated)
- **Mouth:** has mouth sores, with drooling
- **Symptoms of a serious communicable disease** identified in the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Control of Communicable Diseases code



## When can the child return?

- **Chickenpox:** at least 6 days after the rash began
- **Impetigo:** after 24 hours of treatment, if affected area is covered
- **Head lice or scabies:** the morning after the first treatment
- **Conjunctivitis (pinkeye):** after 24 hours of treatment
- **Mumps:** 9 days after the glands below the ears began to swell
- **Strep throat:** after 24 hours of treatment AND 24 hours without fever
- **Mouth sores:** when health care provider says child may return
- **Whooping cough:** after completing 5 days of antibiotic treatment
- **Measles:** 4 days after the rash is completely gone
- **Other serious, communicable diseases noted in the IDPH Code:** after the health care professional says the child can return to child care



## What else do many health care professionals recommend?

- Caregivers should contact parents and separate a child who has green or yellow mucus in the nose or eyes; OR coughs up green or yellow mucus; OR has discomfort (toothache, sore throat, earache, or nausea), even without fever.
- Caregivers may contact their area's child care nurse consultant for more information.

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# Young Children's Mental Health: What Is Essential?



*When we think of children's health, we usually think of their physical well-being. "Are they active and fit? Do they get sick often?" Mental health is just as important as physical health. "Mental health" includes how we feel about ourselves and other people, and how we cope with life. Mental health in young children is related to their social and emotional development. Caregivers, teachers, and family members all have roles to play in fostering young children's mental health.*

## For good mental health, young children need—

- safe places to live and play
- the right amount of healthy food to eat
- love, care, and comfort from caregivers and family members
- plenty of time for active play with other children
- time to relax and follow their own interests
- caregivers and teachers who are supportive and encouraging
- experiences that help them feel confident and capable
- time to express and understand their own emotions
- guidance and discipline that are firm but not harsh

## A child's mental health is probably good if he or she usually—

- seems to feel safe and comfortable rather than fearful
- shows a range of emotions, both positive and negative
- is interested in other people's well-being and treats them with respect
- treats animals with kindness
- can "bounce back" from disappointments or frustrations
- can show anger without hurting self or others
- chooses to act in ways that are safe
- uses positive ways to get attention
- stands up for himself or herself
- gets involved in activities at home and in the classroom
- is willing to try new things (activities, foods, friendships, etc.)
- will persist when trying a challenging task
- can express feelings to some trusted person, instead of keeping them "bottled up"

## Factors that might contribute to a child's mental health problems include—

- illness or genetic factors
- exposure to lead, mercury, or other environmental poisons
- abuse or neglect
- natural disaster that disrupts family life
- exposure to violence in the family or community
- difficulties related to poverty
- serious family problems, including divorce or death of a loved one

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# Children's Votes Count!



*Young children who vote on meaningful issues in a classroom learn to participate in decision making in their society. (See the Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmark 14.C.ECa: Participate in voting as a way of making choices.)*

## Why include voting in your classroom?

- Children learn to be responsible for making and abiding by decisions.
- Voting can be used for resolving conflicts.
- Children begin to understand the idea of the rule of the majority, while learning to consider the rights of the minority. They see that each person's opinion counts.
- Voting encourages children to practice verbal skills as they explain their ideas and counting skills as they count votes.

## What are some appropriate issues for voting?

- Issues should be real. They should involve the children's interests and affect the group. First voting experiences should involve issues where there are no losers and each child gets his choice. For example, children can vote on apple juice or orange juice for snack time.
- Problems that arise that affect the whole group can become voting experiences. For example, if a ball is being left outside after playtime, should the child who took it out bring it in, or should the last child to play with it do so?
- Some issues can introduce the idea of majority rule. Children can vote on which book to read or game to play.

## When does voting not work?

- Voting on national candidates or issues is not age appropriate.
- Voting is not useful when the children's decision is likely to be unacceptable, when everyone agrees, or when determining fact, such as where polar bears live.
- Voting should be avoided if any children would be unfairly affected.

## How is voting done?

- The teacher leads the class in stating the issue. Children then have time to discuss the issue and the pros and cons of alternatives.
- The teacher then asks the children to vote by calling each child's name. Young children may not understand voting if the method used is raising hands. Recording each vote by name helps children see that their votes are heard. If a more private vote is needed, simple ballots can be used.
- The teacher can count the votes with the children. The children can say which number is larger.

## What about tie votes or minority choices?

- Deciding a tied vote can result in more discussion. Can a compromise be worked out, or do some children want to change their votes?
- Help the class to empathize with those who preferred the less popular choice and to find ways to respect their preferences.

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# “It Takes Money”: Economics for Preschoolers



Many preschoolers are aware that “it takes money” to do many things in life, though they do not fully understand money’s values and uses. Here are some ways to help 4- and 5-year-olds begin learning about how people trade money for things they need and want.



## Introduce picture books about money and its uses.

- Ask a librarian to help you find stories and informational books to share with the class.
- As you read aloud, invite children to discuss what they know about how people use money. Point out concepts and vocabulary such as *trade*, *buy*, *save*, *money*, *coin*, *cash*, *change*, *credit cards*, *swipe*, *tap*, *services*, and *merchandise*.



## Help children study some of the ways people use money.

- Encourage children to observe adults in their lives using money. For example, ask them if they have seen parents or older siblings buying things with cash or coins; writing a check; buying something online; swiping, tapping, or inserting a credit card; or having their phone scanned.
- Find a vending machine with relatively healthy foods (juice, crackers). Show how the machine gives something back when you insert enough money.
- Take children on site visits to retail shops and other businesses. Help them make up interview questions and create simple surveys to find out how people who work in the businesses use and keep track of money. What goods or services does each business provide? What are the prices? What machines and methods help workers count, store, and dispense money?
- Give children time to sketch what they see on their visits. Items to sketch or draw could include computers, cash registers, card readers, price tags, sale signs, and receipts.



## Turn the dramatic play area into a business, using information the children have collected.

- Invite children to decide what their business will be—restaurant, hair salon, pet shop? Ask them to list props they will need, such as receipt books, order forms, a toy cash register, a real adding machine, “merchandise,” and play forms of money, including credit cards and smartphones.
- Ask some children to make price tags or advertisements, such as signs, fliers, or coupons.



## Explore the value of money with a “Snack Shop.”

- Talk with the children about food as a resource that people want and need. Invite a group to set up a “store” to sell food and drinks to classmates at snack time. Help them draw a menu of available snack items with prices, for example: *Apple Slice, 2 cents. Granola Bar, 3 cents. Juice, 2 cents.* Children should be able to buy at least two items for 5 cents.
- Give five pennies apiece to any child who wants to visit the Snack Shop. Help each child decide what to buy. Children can take turns working in the Snack Shop. While coins are not used often in today’s society, using them provides a concrete way for children to experiment with money and purchasing choices.

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# Neighborhood Geography with Young Children



*“Where’s my new preschool?” “What does ‘prairie’ mean?” Children’s natural curiosity about places is the basis for learning about geography. Here are some tips to support young children as they express beginning geographic thinking and learn to locate objects and places in familiar environments.*

-  **Explore the neighborhood.** Preschoolers and babies learn from watching the world, especially if you talk with them about it. “That’s a noisy red truck!” “Mm, do you smell that bread baking?”
-  **Help preschoolers predict what they might notice on a walk.** Make a list and take it along, adding to it as you go. What animals, plants, machines, or buildings do they see? What sounds and smells do they notice? They can sketch what they see, if time permits, or take photographs. Later, they can build models or make a book of drawings to share with their families. Or they can create a mural of the neighborhood.
-  **Encourage children to talk about what they see.** If you describe places precisely, children learn to focus on details too. When they are very young, start using words that describe direction and position (“above,” “left,” etc.). Children also need terms for natural features like “hillside” or “beach” and words for colors, temperatures, sizes, and shapes. This vocabulary is useful on walking trips: “Turn left at the big tree!”
-  **Ask children to collect things to document the trip.** Business cards, fliers, leaves, seeds, and rocks are items you might collect on a walk through the neighborhood. Resealable bags or “fanny packs” are handy for carrying specimens. The children can make displays of what they have collected.
-  **Invite children to investigate transportation.** How do people, things, and ideas get from place to place in the neighborhood—by road, trail, railroad, waterway? What kinds of vehicles are used? Where are they going? Blocks, small wheel toys, and materials such as sand or water allow children to play with geography.
-  **Let children experience the tools of geography.** Maps, a sturdy compass, and measuring devices are useful for young children. They won’t fully understand these tools yet, but they can begin to learn their uses. Display a laminated map on a tabletop. Use it to show how the map represents rivers, mountains, towns, and highways. Children might want to trace the map, copy it, or just take a look.
-  **Read picture books with geographic themes.** They can spark discussions of how other places are like, and different from, the neighborhood.
-  **Plan walks throughout the year.** Children can keep track of ways the neighborhood changes through the seasons. They might do an in-depth study of a park or a business. Children can do observational drawings of signs and logos they see. Encourage children to create and use maps of places in their neighborhood.

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: The Places You'll Go!



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Go ahead—take those young social scientists outside! Take along compasses, clipboards, paper, pencils, field glasses, measuring tools, and maps to help children study places and people outdoors. The activities listed here can work on the spur of the moment or be part of in-depth class investigations.*

## Living in the world

Invite the children to find out “Who lives near our school?”

- Look together for homes of animals and people. Help the children list and describe homes they see—from anthills to apartments.
- Discuss what materials are used to make these homes. Ask the children to guess how people or animals make their homes.
- Arrange for children to measure, photograph, and make field drawings of a home.

## Moving along

Investigate a transportation route.

- Ask children what they see that carries a load. What is its cargo? How does it move?
- Let the children count how many people are in the cars or buses going past. They can take turns using a counter or making tally marks to record how many vehicles pass by in one minute. One child can operate a timer or stopwatch.
- Invite children to measure and make field drawings of vehicles, waterways, roads, and paths. You might help older preschoolers map a transportation route.

## Keeping things clean

Learn how a neighborhood is maintained.

- Help children notice things that are used to promote a clean environment, such as a “No littering” sign or bags that dog owners can use to clean up after their pet while on a walk.
- Identify receptacles for trash and recyclable items. See how many containers you can count in a local park.
- Point out trash collectors, street sweepers, and maintenance workers. Ask them about their roles in keeping a clean and tidy neighborhood. Encourage children to make observational drawings of their uniforms or equipment.

## Going places

Visit an unfamiliar playground.

- After they play, invite the children to compare play spaces. You might ask, “How is this place different from the school playground? Who comes here? What can you do on this play equipment?” Write down their ideas.
- Encourage them to make observational drawings of the play area.
- Discuss with the children what to include in a model of the playground and how they might make the model.
- Let them build a model in the sandbox or sand table.

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# Remember When ...



*History is the story and record of the past. Children begin to develop a concept of history as they develop the concept of time. Predictable routines and records of the past help them begin to see time as a continuum with the present as a point in time that follows the past and precedes the future. Consider using these strategies to help children understand the concept of history.*

## Discuss daily routines.

Predictable routines help children learn the concepts of past and present. “We had circle time already. Now it’s time to visit our different learning stations.” “We had story time already. Now it’s time to get ready to go home.” “Tomorrow we will have a visitor.”

## Use vocabulary related to time.

Young children may use abstract terms for time without really understanding them. They may not be able to distinguish between the immediate and the distant past. Connect the vocabulary of yesterday and today, before and after, and past and present to remembered or observable events. “Yesterday we played inside because it was raining. Today we are going outside to play.”

## Work with the children on a class journal.

Students can dictate entries about special classroom events for you to record. As the year progresses, read from this journal occasionally to recall the past. “Last week we planted the flower seeds. Remember the very first day of school when we talked about class rules?” “Let’s read what you said about the visitor we had who...”

## Encourage your preschoolers to interview a parent or other grown-up.

The school librarian or a class volunteer can share a story about the past. Discuss possible questions the children might ask: “What was your favorite toy or book when you were my age?” “Do you remember something fun your family did together?” Write the stories down as the children dictate them. Add pictures drawn by the children and make a history book to share.

## Explore the history of the school or immediate neighborhood.

What was at this location before the school was built? How has the neighborhood changed? Plan a walk to observe local historical markers, statues, or dates on buildings. Put dates into context: “This building was built when I was a child.” “This statue is of the person who started our town. That was even before your grandparents were your age.” Perhaps a teacher, administrator, or parent could help with this project.

## Use a project time line.

Add words and pictures to document the beginning, development, and conclusion of each project. Invite children to use the time line to tell the story of the project to other classes or to visiting parents.

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# Things We Need: Economics for Preschoolers



*Preschoolers begin to learn basic economic principles when they use concepts such as needs and resources in their investigations, play, and discussions. Here are some teacher-tested ways of introducing economic concepts to preschoolers.*

## Introduce economic concepts through play.

- Teach children games that call for set quantities of items. Examples include *Go Fish* and *Connect 4*.
- Explain the game rules using words such as “need” and “enough.” “You need four cards of the same color; three aren’t enough.”
- Play *Musical Chairs*, which uses principles of supply and demand.

## Talk with children about needs and resources.

- Show that a *need* is something that people, animals, or plants must have to survive or that people require to finish a task. For example, you could ask, “What do you think these plants need in order to grow?” “How much blue paint do you think we’ll need to cover this whole sheet of paper?” “How many cartons of milk should we get from the cafeteria so everyone has one at lunchtime today?”
- Explain that *resources* are things that are used to meet needs. Ask questions to find out what the children know about resources needed to survive (air, water, food, shelter). “Remember what happened to our flowers after six weeks of no rain?” “One of our classroom jobs is to help take care of our class pet. What are the different things we need to do for our bunny each day?”
- Help children investigate questions such as “What are some ways that animals or plants get things they need?” “Where does our food come from? How do we get the water that we drink?” Arrange for them to interview doctors, veterinarians, or gardeners about the survival needs of people, animals, and plants.
- Help the children make a chart of the foods that various animals need to be healthy. Start with classroom pets and other familiar animals. Children can get information from nonfiction books and magazines or from animal care experts.
- Invite children to talk about things that they need to survive. Ask the children to make a list of things they need and where to find them in their home, school, and community. “We need water, and we can get that from the water fountain or sink.” “We need food, and we can get that from our kitchen, cafeteria, garden, or a food pantry.”

## Help the children put economic ideas to use.

- Ask children to think about what they need to finish tasks. “How much tape do you think you need for your project?” “What other resource could you use if you run out of tape?”
- Invite children to notice that amounts of resources can affect plants and animals around them. “What do you predict will happen if this plant gets just one drop of water every day?” “Isaac says that birds will come here if we put out seeds for them. What do you think about that, Ava?”

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# Who Are the People in *Your* Neighborhood?



*Children are curious about the work that people do in their community. Teachers can help children understand more about their communities and think about what they might like to do when they grow up by helping children identify a variety of community workers and the many services they provide.*



## **Begin with workers children have observed.**

Help the children list the jobs their parents or other family members do. Work with them to find a tool or picture of a tool that a particular worker would use, such as a keyboard or laptop for the office worker, a spoon for the restaurant worker, a hammer for the construction worker, cash register for the retail worker, a toy tractor for the farmer, or a toy stethoscope for the nurse. Let the children tell the group how the tool is used. Consider adding these tools to centers in the classroom so that children can explore them.



## **Encourage parents to come into the classroom to talk about their jobs.**

Before the parents come, discuss possible interview questions with the children. Where do they work? What do they like about their job? What is hard about it? How did they prepare to get their job — college, apprenticeship, or training program?



## **When possible, consider field trips to workplaces.**

Start with your school or program. Who are the people who work to make sure children are safe and comfortable at school? The custodians, cooks, bus drivers, and grounds crew have valuable skills that they can describe or demonstrate to children. Consider taking children to an office building, the post office, the public library, or a grocery store. Help children prepare questions and encourage them to ask their interview questions of the workers they meet.



## **Read books to the children about a variety of occupations.**

Choose current books that do not reflect outdated stereotypes (e.g., doctors are men and nurses are women) in their text, illustrations, or photographs. Books should depict individuals with a variety of cultural backgrounds and ability levels in various occupational roles. After reading a book about an occupation, ask the children questions. How is that job useful? What do you need to know to do it? Would our neighborhood be different if no one provided that service?



## **Help children represent their knowledge.**

Create a mural starting with a family, adding drawings of all the people whose work help their home and school community. Make a chart of all the occupations they have discussed and add to it throughout the year as children encounter new occupations. Ask children what types of jobs they might like to do when they grow up. Help them express their ideas through drawings, dictations, and dramatic play.

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# “Who’s the Leader?”



Leaders play key roles in every community. Good leaders “take charge” to help people work together on tasks that they couldn’t do alone. Preschoolers can begin to develop awareness of roles of leaders in their environment. Simple games, activities, and class discussion can help children learn about what goes into being a leader and being a follower.

- ★ **Teach games in which every child gets a turn to be a leader.**
  - After you teach the game *Follow the Leader*, let children volunteer to lead. The class can then be divided into two groups, each with its own leader.
  - For very young preschoolers, change the rules of *Simon Says* and *Mother May I?* to downplay “tricking” other players. Children can practice giving and carrying out directions as leaders and followers.
  
- ★ **Provide authentic opportunities for children to have leadership roles.**
  - Offer a range of “leader” jobs throughout the week (line leader, song leader, etc.).
  - Ask volunteers to assist a new child in class. For example, Winona and Naresh could show Leah around the classroom and take turns helping her during her first week in school.
  - Have children act as tour guides during special events. For example, during an Open House, small groups of parents could follow pairs of children through the project displays. Each guide might prepare a sentence or two to say about the displays.
  
- ★ **Invite class discussions about leading and following.**
  - Encourage children to think about what it is like to lead and to follow. For example, you could ask, “What’s it like being in front during *Follow the Leader*? What’s easy about it? What’s not so easy?” “What is it like being a follower?”
  - Use what you observe of their experiences to start thoughtful conversations. “Sometimes the line leader got far ahead of the followers. What do you think about that?” “How was being a tour guide like playing follow the leader? How was it different?”
  - Pose possible problems for children to discuss. “When you’re the leader, what are some ways to get people to follow you?” “When you’re a follower, what could you do if the leader starts to go somewhere that’s dangerous, like into the street?” “Are there things a leader or a follower shouldn’t do?”
  
- ★ **Help children identify people who are leaders in your program or in the wider world.**
  - Invite those people to come to school to talk about their work. Examples include the program director, a parent-teacher group officer, a bandleader, the fire chief, someone who heads a community group, or an elected official.
  - Help the children prepare questions for the guests. Let some of the children be tour guides for the visitors.

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# Drama and Young Children



*Drama involves pretending in a variety of situations. It helps children develop imagination, language skills, cooperation and other social skills, confidence, and creative expression. Here are some ways you can encourage the children in your program to engage in dramatic play.*



## Props and dress-ups

Provide ample props and dress-ups to create a variety of real-world situations: mechanic's garage, restaurant, grocery store, campsite, or shoe store, for example. Introduce props that go along with a project, a field trip, a visitor, or a special event. Offer props that appeal to children with various interests.



## Manipulatives and blocks

Combine small toys with building blocks to encourage dramatic play. Farm animals, small cars and trucks, miniature people, and furniture are examples of small toys that can be used with blocks of all kinds—wooden unit blocks, cardboard blocks, small cubical counting blocks, and plastic interlocking blocks.



## Participation stories

Read or make up a story. Ask children to dramatize actions in the story from where they are sitting without using sound. A story about camping, for example, can include actions such as setting up a tent, gathering wood, fishing for dinner, and roasting marshmallows over a fire.

Make up a short story using sounds. Ask the children what the sounds suggest. "I was walking down the street one morning when suddenly I heard... [Snap your fingers rapidly to create the sound of rainfall.] What was it?"

Continue with the story. Include children's ideas and new sound effects with your hands, such as drum rolls, a light tapping sound with a single finger, or a loud steady beat with your full hand.



## Pantomime games

Have children dramatize familiar actions without using words. Write the ideas out on cards. Then read them in private to each child or pair of children. Invite other children in the group to guess what is being pantomimed. Ideas can be simple—brushing teeth, sawing wood, or talking on the phone—or more involved, such as playing soccer, grocery shopping, or getting ready for bed.



## Creative movement

Use a drum as a signal to stop and start movement. When you beat the drum, ask children to move around the space as circus animals. When you stop the drumbeat, ask children to freeze. When you beat the drum again, ask children to move as a character from a favorite fairy tale. Other movement ideas include snowmen melting in the sun, baby birds hatching from eggs, or members of a marching band.

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Close Up with Visual Arts



*Children love spending time outdoors, especially when the weather is nice! They notice beauty around them. The world outdoors is the perfect setting for hands-on visual arts activities that bring children close to nature!*

## Beauty on a small scale

- When the class is sitting outside, ask, “What makes something seem beautiful to you?” “What are some very small things that you would call beautiful?” Offer a few examples of your own if children are having trouble thinking of ideas.
- Before going outside, be aware of any children’s allergies or sensitivities to leaves or plants. Invite children to collect several small items that they feel are beautiful or appealing: pebbles, acorns, leaves, twigs, pieces of bark. Only collect items that have already fallen to the ground and are not part of a person’s private property or yard. (NOTE: Be sure no noxious plants are nearby.)
- Indoors, the children can arrange their collections in ways that they think are beautiful. Photograph the arrangements and display the photographs in the classroom. Label each photograph with the child’s name and a caption that they dictate. Later, the class can return the items to where they were found.

## Sketches revisited

- This project is best done over two or more days. Show the children a book, such as Thomas Locker’s *Sky Tree*, in which the artist focuses on changes in a single object. Invite children to make observational drawings of objects that they select outdoors. Provide drawing pencils, paper, and clipboards or other portable hard flat surfaces.
- Make two photocopies of each drawing. Give each child one of their copies. (Keep the original and the other copy.) Provide crayons, pastels, chalk, colored pencils, and watercolors. Invite children to “revisit” their copies to add color and other details that they saw but did not put in their original drawings.
- Give children their second copies. This time, let them add details that they imagine but did not see. It may be helpful to model this step for children who have trouble thinking of additional details.
- Display each set of three pictures together and ask each child to dictate captions.

## Photograms or “fade pictures”

- Give each child a piece of light-sensitive paper or construction paper that fades in sunlight. Help them anchor the papers on a flat surface in direct sunlight. Children can arrange flowers, twigs, rocks, and other collected items on their papers. (Do this activity on a day without much wind!)
- After several hours, ask the children to check the progress of their photograms. (NOTE: Some colors of paper fade more readily than others. Test the paper ahead of time to see how long it takes to fade.)

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Dancing on the Sidewalk



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Take the opportunity to help them investigate actions, space, and other elements of dance while outside.*

## Help children practice the coordinated body movements that are a big part of dance

- Show children the movements to folk dances, line dances, and round dances so they can dance together. Try old favorites such as the Bunny Hop and the Hokey Pokey, too. Point out actions that involve *following*, *leading*, *passing by*, and *connecting with each other*. Then dance for the fun of it! (Note: Grassy areas can have hidden hazards, and it's hard to move a wheelchair or walker on grass. Try using a paved area swept clean of anything that might cause injury to children.)
- Ask children to think about dancing on different surfaces. You might ask, "How do you think it would feel if you danced in the sand box?" Then let them test their predictions. Invite them to compare experiences. "How was marching in sand different from marching on the sidewalk? On the lawn? In the wading pool?"
- Help children organize a dance- or step-team routine. Take notes to help them remember their plan: "Min-Yung says to march for eight steps. Kayla says to jump four times and then wave your ribbons."
- Encourage children to dance by using different parts of their body. Ask children to sit on their bottoms or on their knees and dance using only their torso or arms. Help them focus on moving certain body parts, such as knees, elbows, or shoulders, to the beat.

## Invite children to experiment with space

- Use cords to mark circles on the ground large enough to hold several children at once. Ask the children to dance inside their circles without touching anyone. Repeat the activity several times, making the circles smaller each time. Invite the children to talk about what they did to manage their movements in the smaller spaces. Then enlarge the circles so they can finish with large movements.
- Using cords, chalk lines, or footprints in snow, mark long paths for children to follow. The paths do not need to be simple and straight. They can twist and turn and go under playground equipment. Ask children to follow the paths while clapping their hands in rhythm or while you play recorded music. Let them try moving backward, too.
- Let children create new paths, choose music, and decide what actions to make. "Adam says swing your arms. Lola says take baby steps. Maybe you can try both at once!"
- Add props such as baskets, bells, or ribbons. Children can dance along a path, moving their props as the music inspires them. Make sure the paths you choose are wide enough for wheelchairs and accessible to students using walkers.

Note: Some children in the group may come from religious backgrounds in which dance is not allowed. Tactfully ask their parents to be specific about what is not permitted. For example, can the child play "Follow the Leader" if no music is playing?

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Make Some Music



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. Go ahead—take music outside! Preschoolers can have fun investigating dynamics, rhythm, and other elements of music while they participate in music activities outdoors.*



## Outside is a great place to play with dynamics

- Choose a place outside where children can sing with big voices, without disturbing anyone. Let them sing songs they know, as loudly as they want. Then invite them to clap hands, stamp feet, or play rhythm instruments loudly. Ask, “What did you do to make those loud sounds?”
- Ask the children to use their voices, hands, feet, or instruments to make the softest sounds they can. Invite them to talk about what they did to produce the quiet sounds.
- Encourage the children to change their dynamics gradually, moving from loud to soft, then soft back to loud.
- Try call-and-response activities. The children can stand in two lines facing each other a few yards apart. Using songs or chants such as “Did You Feed My Cow?”, one side will be the callers, and the other side will respond. Ask the children to vary the loudness: “This time, the callers whisper, and the other side can shout.”



## Outdoor rhythm activities let children make music together

- Ask the children to stand in two lines, a few yards apart. Help children in each group take turns using their hands and feet to create sound patterns for the other group to copy, such as “Clap-stomp, clap-stomp.” Let them invent complex rhythms, too!
- Help children form a rhythm band. Start with two groups. One group might be the Clappers and the other group the Stompers. Stand where both groups can see you. Tell them, “When I point to the Stompers, people in that group stomp one foot one time. When I point to the Clappers, people in that group clap one time.” At first, direct slowly with very simple rhythms. Then try harder patterns such as “Clap-clap-stomp-stomp-clap.” You might add a group that slaps knees or says a word such as “beep” or “pizza.” Let children try directing the band.



## Action songs bring movement and music together

- Show the children how to play active singing games such as swaying back and forth while holding hands for “London Bridge” and making a “window” with a partner’s arms for the song “Bluebird through My Window.”
- Invite children to invent expressive movements for well-known action songs such as holding and rocking back and forth for “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” or holding up the correct number of fingers while singing each verse of “Alice the Camel.”
- Make action songs a regular part of your gathering time. “Hokey Pokey,” “Head Shoulders, Knees, and Toes,” and “I’m a Little Tea Pot” are familiar favorites.

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# Out and About with Preschoolers: Visual Arts for Everyone



*It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. But is there any way to help them explore fine arts concepts while outdoors? Yes, there is! Go ahead—take visual arts outside! Think big and think of everyone when you have a chance to do outdoor visual arts activities!*

## Sidewalk art

Provide large pieces of chalk, dry or moistened with water, so children can make big drawings on sidewalks or playground surfaces. You might also set out buckets of water and paintbrushes in various sizes so children can “paint” with water. Or fill empty squeeze bottles with water and let children squeeze designs onto the sidewalk.

**Try this adaptation:** Sidewalk chalk holders are great for students who need assistance holding chalk or who have a sensitivity to the chalk’s texture.

## Murals

Anchor a large piece of butcher paper or kraft paper to the ground. Provide a variety of tempera colors. Invite children to paint an abstract mural using drip or spatter techniques. Or fasten a long sheet of paper or fabric to a fence or wall. Offer crayons, markers, or paint and ask each child to draw or paint something they see on the school grounds as part of a mural.

## Clay work

Cover work surfaces with a smooth, nonporous material such as plastic. Give children damp clay in fist-sized lumps and let them pound, pinch, roll, cut, coil, and press it. Invite them to make representations of things they see outdoors. For variety, offer nontoxic modeling clay or a large batch of PlayDoh.

**Try this adaptation:** Let children who don’t enjoy touching clay use sculpting tools or plastic silverware to make designs in their clay.

## Sculpture and 3-D design

Introduce children to the work of Andy Goldsworthy and other artists who create art in natural settings with leaves, twigs, mud, snow, dust, flowers, or rocks. Help them design and plan individual or group projects. “How will you stick the leaves together?” “What will keep your rock pile steady?” Photograph the children’s work so others can enjoy it even after nature reclaims it.

## Landscapes

Talk with the children about landscape paintings by artists from a variety of cultures. Ask, “What would you paint in landscapes we could see from our playground?” Let children take turns painting landscapes on easels set up outdoors.

**Try this adaptation:** Some students may struggle with the abstractness of a blank piece of paper. Provide outline-type drawings for students to paint.

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# Sing, Play, and Hear: Music's in the Air



*Music adds to both fun and learning in the early childhood classroom. Children enjoy listening to music, making music, and moving to music. Music is a way to communicate, express emotion, and share the rich heritage to be found in our multicultural world.*

## Let children listen to music together and by themselves.

- Share a variety of music with the group as a whole. Then offer choices at a listening center.
- Invite children to talk about the ideas and feelings the music brings to mind. Have art materials available so children can draw or paint what they hear in the music.
- Offer all kinds of music. Choose old and new children's songs, folk songs, and popular and classical music. Include music from a variety of cultures, languages, and time periods.
- Share background information so children can begin to know artists, styles, and instruments. "Here's another song by Tish Hinojosa."

## Sing a variety of songs together.

- Share songs you enjoyed singing as a child. Write the title and lyrics on a large sheet of paper to help children connect the lyrics with written words.
- Read and sing from colorful children's books, such as *Going to the Zoo* by Tom Paxton.
- Ask a librarian to suggest books or CDs of sing-along children's songs to learn along with your class.

## Provide simple instruments so preschoolers can create their own music.

- Find safe, child-friendly musical toys—such as xylophones, bells, drums, maracas, or small keyboards—at a toy store or yard sale.
- Avoid those that play a limited number of tunes with the push of a button or turn of a handle.

## Make your own musical instruments.

- Turn almost any box or container into a drum.
- Make a shaker by placing small beads, buttons, or gravel inside a covered container and taping the lid on firmly.
- Try a rubber band banjo. Stretch several different rubber bands across an open shoe box. Vary the width and tension of the bands to produce different notes.

## Move to the music and make exercise fun.

- Try marching songs or action songs, such as "Hokey-Pokey" or "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes."
- Encourage clapping hands or tapping feet to a strong rhythm.
- Provide props such as scarves or costumes and let children create their own dance movements.
- Bring music outside and have musical experiences on the playground. Encourage children to run when a song is fast and walk when it is slow, or put their hands up high when they hear high notes and low when they hear low notes.

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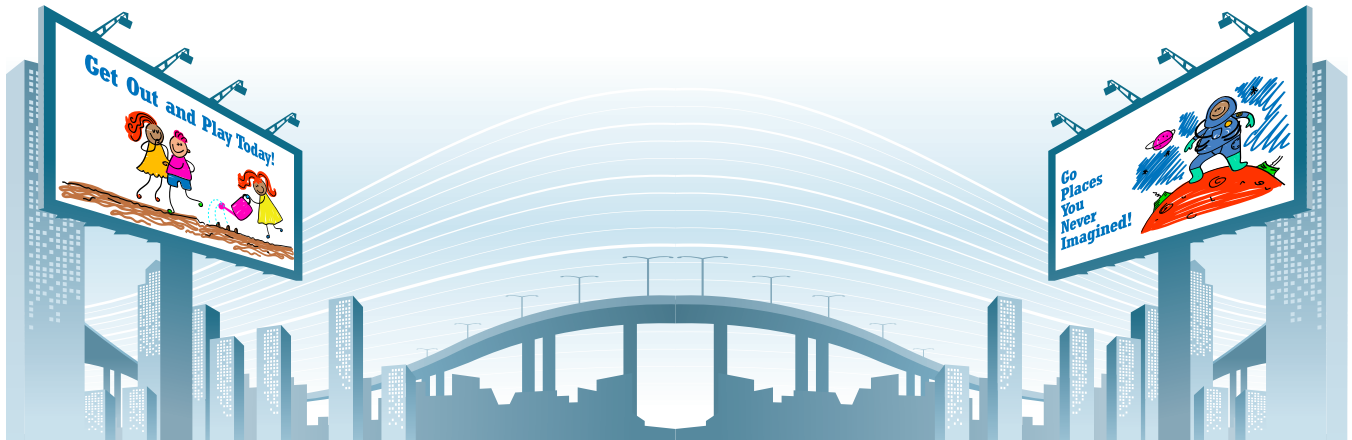


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# Art Is All Around

Keep children engaged when you have to wait



## Notice all the art around you

Take a closer look at murals, billboards, and framed prints.

Ask your child: "What's going on in that picture?"

Talk about the lines, colors, and shapes you and your child notice.



## Keep art handy

Take paper, crayons, and pencils with you. A hard drawing pad helps.



## Draw with your child

Draw what you see or remember. Talk about your finished artwork.

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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Art Works!



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children, and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait.*

**Do you want to engage a waiting child's creativity?** These activities can encourage creative expression and build fine motor skills at the same time.

-  **Seeing art:** Invite your child to talk about the art you see around you: public murals, billboards, magazine illustrations, framed prints. Ask, “What’s going on in this picture?” You can discuss the elements of design you notice—line, texture, color, shape, value, and space.
  
-  **The art of drawing:** Some families won’t leave home without paper and crayons! A small drawing pad or clipboard can be handy. So can a children’s art app on a mobile electronic device. You and your child can try many types of drawing. Use a variety of colors and drawing tools. Remember that children who are prone to motion sickness should not draw in a moving vehicle.
  - **Memory drawings:** Talk with your child about something you have done together. Each of you can then create a picture of what you recall.
  - **Fantasy drawings:** Dragons, giants, talking rocks—these are the stuff of imagination! Draw imaginary creatures or scenes, and tell stories about them.
  - **Observational drawings:** Take turns finding objects to draw—as big as a house or as small as a raisin. Draw exactly what you see and only what you see. Compare your finished drawings. Your child may notice something you missed!
  - **Cooperative drawings:** Draw a face shape, then take turns adding features: one draws the mouth, the other adds a nose, etc. Then try a house or a street scene.
  - **Vibration pictures:** In a moving vehicle, hold a pen or marker to a piece of paper—lightly, but enough to make a mark. Let your hand move slightly as the car vibrates. After a minute or two, see what sort of design you have. Then switch colors and draw again on the same paper.
  
-  **Making art:** Patterns, collages, and three-dimensional (3-D) designs can be challenging and fun.
  - **Stickers, stamps, and stencils** make it easy to create patterns or designs on paper.
  - **Crayon rubbings** of surfaces around you let your child explore texture.
  - **Your child can experiment with 3-D design**, even in a car seat. She or he can make sculptures with waxed yarn, pipe cleaners, or clean “found objects.”
  - **Forgot the art supplies?** Use your fingers to “paint” in the air or on the backs of each other’s hands.
  - **You might ask at the library for books** about origami, found-object sculptures, finger-crochet, and other art and craft activities.

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# Music and Movement

Keep children engaged when you have to wait

## Move to the beat

Tap, clap, shimmy, or sway in time to music in the car or while waiting in line. Pretend to play band instruments, such as an "air guitar."



## Sing along

Take turns choosing songs to sing together or make up songs about what you are doing.



## Listen

Investigate sounds together! Talk about musical concepts such as loud or soft and high or low pitches.



## Create sounds

Make sound effects with voices, fingers, and objects. Imitate animal noises or machinery sounds.



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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Music, Sound, and Movement



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait.*

-  **Music, sound, and movement can ease the waiting time blues!**  
Creative movement helps children focus physical energy. Music involves math and the science of sound. When children sing, they often learn new words and gain a better understanding of language. And making music is one way to create beauty and have fun with other people.
-  **Move to the beat.** Children can enjoy music from around the world. Even in a car seat, your child can:
  - tap, clap, shimmy, sway, or wave a ribbon in time to music
  - make fingers or toys march, dance, or “direct the orchestra”
  - pretend to play band instruments
  - do fingerplays such as “Eensy Weensy Spider”
  - copy movements of other family members
-  **Sing along.** It's best to do this when you will not disturb anyone else. Some parents keep a reminder list of favorite songs in a purse or backpack. Family members can:
  - take turns choosing songs to sing together
  - hum, chant, sing harmony, or “lip-sync” for variety
  - make up songs about what you are doing
  - sing along with CDs or DVDs your child chooses from the library
-  **Listen.** Investigate sounds together! Sounds may help tell a story, as in Sergei Prokofiev's symphonic fairy tale “Peter and the Wolf.” Your child's listening skills may grow when you help her understand terms like:
  - pitch: Is a sound high or low?
  - volume: Is a sound loud or quiet?
  - duration: How long does the sound last?
  - rhythm: Are there patterns to the sounds? Listen for heels clicking on a floor, the noise of the washing machine, the beat of a drum.
  - tempo: How rapidly do the sounds change?
  - mood: What feelings does the sound create—joy, excitement, fear, relaxation?
-  **Create sounds.** Again, be sure not to disturb anyone else. Family members can:
  - make sound effects with voices, fingers, objects, or instruments
  - imitate animal voices or machinery sounds
  - make up sound patterns for each other to copy (“tap-tap-clap, tap-tap-clap”)
  - listen to the rhythm of your own heartbeats and breathing
  - practice “making silence”
-  **For related Web resources, see “Things to Do While You're Waiting: Music, Sound, and Movement” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Bullying Hurts Everyone



*Bullying hurts more than just the targeted child. It also harms the children who witness it and the children who bully. Children have the right to feel safe—and adults have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for them.*

## **Bullying is more than teasing.**

Bullying behavior includes repeated, unprovoked, harmful acts and physical attacks against a child. It can also include repeated threats, hurtful talk, or deliberate isolation from the group. Children learn to bully when they see the behavior in others. They may encounter it at home, at school, in the media, or in the neighborhood. Bullying behavior is reinforced when others pay attention to it or react with fear.

## **Children who are bullied need help, not blame.**

Often there is no obvious reason why one child is singled out. Children who become victims may be seen as different in some way, may be new to the group, or may act in more passive and fearful ways than others in the group. Adults can help by teaching the child being bullied to remain calm and to say directly, “Stop that! I don’t like it!” Encourage the child to ask for adult help when needed.

## **Children who witness bullying can help.**

Bystanders often feel uncomfortable when they see another child bullied. Many do nothing to stop the bullying. They may even join in the bullying to avoid becoming targets themselves. Adults can help by persuading children to become “heroes” by standing up for others or by reporting the bullying to a parent or teacher. Research shows that most bullying incidents end when bystanders speak up for the victim.

## **Children who bully need help, too.**

Children who learn to control others through bullying often continue this behavior into adulthood. They are less likely to learn the skills needed to build and maintain positive relationships. Adults can help by teaching them acceptable ways to feel in control and to relate to others.

## **Adults can help stop the bullying.**

Adults can take responsibility for providing a safe environment for young children by using these strategies:

- Model respectful treatment of others.
- Protect the child who has been bullied when an incident is witnessed or reported.
- Do not tolerate actions or words that harm others.
- Involve students in developing a code of conduct with consequences for unacceptable treatment of other children.
- Share books with children about cooperation, empathy, and dealing with bullying.
- Use role playing to encourage empathy.
- Use cooperative work, such as the Project Approach, and noncompetitive games to promote positive relationships.

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# Children's Social Competence Checklist



*Social competence refers to a person's ability to get along with others. The checklist below was created to help teachers and caregivers assess preschool children's social competence. The intent of the checklist is not to prescribe correct social behavior but rather to help teachers observe, understand, and support children whose social skills are still forming. If a child seems to have most of the traits in the checklist, she is not likely to need special help to outgrow occasional difficulties. However, a child who shows few of the traits on the list might benefit from adult-initiated strategies to help build more satisfying relationships with others.*



## **I. Individual Traits.** The child:

- Is usually in a positive mood.
- Usually comes to the program willingly.
- Usually copes with rebuffs or other disappointments adequately.
- Shows interest in others.
- Shows the capacity to empathize.
- Displays the capacity for humor.
- Does not seem to be acutely lonely.



## **II. Social Skills.** The child usually:

- Interacts nonverbally with other children with smiles, waves, nods, etc.
- Expects a positive response when approaching others.
- Expresses wishes and preferences clearly; gives reasons for actions and positions.
- Asserts own rights and needs appropriately.
- Is not easily intimidated by bullying.
- Expresses frustrations & anger effectively, without escalating disagreements or harming others.
- Gains access to ongoing groups at play and work.
- Enters ongoing discussion on a topic; makes relevant contributions to ongoing activities.
- Takes turns fairly easily.
- Has positive relationships with one or two peers; shows the capacity to really care about them and miss them if they are absent.
- Has "give-and-take" exchanges of information, feedback, or materials with others.
- Negotiates and compromises with others appropriately.
- Is able to maintain friendship with one or more peers, even after disagreements.
- Does not draw inappropriate attention to self.
- Accepts and enjoys peers and adults who have special needs.
- Accepts and enjoys peers and adults who belong to ethnic groups other than his or her own.



## **III. Peer Relationships.** The child:

- Is usually accepted versus neglected or rejected by other children.
- Is usually respected rather than feared or avoided by other children.
- Is sometimes invited by other children to join them in play, friendship, and work.
- Is named by other children as someone they are friends with or like to play and work with.



## **IV. Adult Relationships.** The child:

- Is not excessively dependent on adults.
- Shows appropriate response to new adults, as opposed to extreme fearfulness or indiscriminate approach.

[Adapted from *Assessing Young Children's Social Competence* by Diane E. McClellan and Lilian G. Katz. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.]

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# Dealing with Distraction



*It can be hard to keep the attention of young children. Here are some suggestions to keep children engaged.*

## Plan for variety in activities.

- Do you offer only activities that are highly structured and teacher directed? Does an adult always think up the activities? If so, children may lose interest and become distracted. Build in activities that grow from the children's interests.
- Do you ask children to do the activities at the same time and in the same way? Be sure activities are appropriate for the children's ages and abilities. Allow more choices. Limit the amount of time you expect all children to do activities in a large group.
- Do children get enough time outdoors? Spending time in nature may help children focus in other settings as well.

## Arrange the learning environment.

- Do you have interesting materials for the children to use? Brainstorm with them about the different kinds of materials they might use to explore art, literacy, building, and pretend and active play. Have enough materials on hand so that children don't have to wait long for their turn.
- Do you rotate the most interesting items? You may want to keep some toys and books out of sight for a week or two and then bring them out again. Changing the items available for free play keeps children interested.
- Is your room well arranged? Create learning centers for writing, art, science, math, and dramatic play. Try to avoid creating distractions, such as reading stories next to where snacks are being prepared or doing an activity that requires concentration in an area (dramatic play) that encourages conversation.
- Do you prompt children to stay on task? Children will not always be able to do activities that are their first choice. A gentle reminder can help keep a child focused on the story you're reading, on waiting his turn, or on the game you're playing: "I know this book was not your first choice. I hope the next one will be. Please listen to this story now." or "It's Mahesh's turn to talk right now. Your turn will be next."

## Avoid frequent and abrupt transitions.

- Does your program schedule break the day into many small blocks of time? Children can better focus on a story or on other activities when they have big blocks of time and don't feel rushed.
- Do you often ask children to shift gears and make abrupt transitions? Frequent and abrupt transitions are a distraction for all of us! Let children know what to expect ahead of time. Give them jobs to do or songs to sing during transitions. These activities give them a focus and can help make transitions smoother.

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# Feelings Are Fantastic

Young children are learning to manage their feelings and behavior. They are learning the words to express their feelings and how to show feelings in appropriate ways. Here are some ways you can help them to be successful as they learn these important skills.

## Happy, sad, or mad?

Help children learn their feelings have names. Use words such as *happy*, *sad*, *angry*, *frustrated*, *jealous*, *embarrassed*, or *lonely*. For example, say, “You look like you feel sad that you don’t have a toy dinosaur like Sarah’s. People call the feeling being jealous. Is that how you feel?”

ANGRY



SAD



HAPPY



LONELY



## Show how to share feelings

Young children learn appropriate ways to share feelings from those around them. Encourage children to use words to name their feelings. Let them hear you use words to talk about your feelings. “I was so frustrated this morning when I couldn’t find my keys.”

## Describe behavior you want to see

Try to describe things children can do rather than telling them what they cannot do. For example, you can talk about using “gentle hands” when touching pets. Point out appropriate behavior. Say, “I see you are being careful not to knock things off the shelves as we walk through the store.”



## We all have feelings

Let children know that all feelings are OK to have and talk about. Remind them that it is not OK to hurt others’ bodies or feelings or to destroy property. Use what you see in books or videos to teach about emotions. “Look at that little boy’s smile! He is so happy to see his new puppy.”

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# Helping Children Develop 'Impulse Control'



*Excitement, joy, anger, frustration, and disappointment are all part of growing up. Learning how and when to show these emotions is known as impulse control. Here are some facts about impulse control:*

## **Impulse control helps children make and keep friends.**

Children who can control their excitement, anger and frustration, and who use words to express their feelings, are likely to be able to make and keep friends. And making and keeping friends can boost self-esteem and later school success.

## **Early experiences can contribute to later success with impulse control.**

*Infants need a responsive and predictable environment.* When you respond to their physical needs with love and care, they learn to expect order in their world. They also learn that their actions affect others.

*Toddlers need to feel independent and capable.* You can help them use their developing language skills to label their own and others' actions. Learning to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings with words is key to having good impulse control.

*Older preschool children learn to control their impulses by taking turns or sharing their toys.* They are increasingly able to use language to control their emotions and interact with others.

## **You can encourage the development of impulse control in your 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds in the following ways:**

*Suggest words that your child can use to say how she feels.* If your child gets mad while playing a game, encourage her to use words to show her anger, such as "That really makes me mad!" or "I don't like it when you play the game that way!"

*Make it clear that hurting others is not allowed.* When your child gets mad playing a game and pushes or hits another child, take him aside and remind him that hurting others is not allowed.

*Help your child think of new ways to solve problems.* When your child has a disagreement with another child, suggest solutions such as taking turns or sharing.

*Respond to your child's misbehavior with words.* When you tell your child the reasons behind rules and explain the consequences for misbehavior, you help her develop inner controls on her behavior.

*Model self-control when dealing with stress or frustration.* Your child learns many behaviors from observing you. When you model self-discipline and self-control in difficult situations, your child will learn to follow your example.

## **For related Web resources, see "Helping Children Develop 'Impulse Control' " at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Helping Children Handle Disappointment



*Missing a friend's birthday party, losing a game, not getting to play with blocks—young children may face many minor disappointments. Parents and teachers would like children's days to be filled with positive and successful experiences, but daily life has both ups and downs. Helping children handle disappointments can provide them with lifelong coping skills.*

## Acknowledge children's feelings, but focus on the positive.

- Encourage children to put disappointment into words: "You're crying. Are you disappointed about not going to Miguel's party?"
- If a child is sad or angry when he doesn't receive a present he wished for, acknowledge his point of view, but remain upbeat: "You seem disappointed about not getting a new basketball from Uncle Todd for your birthday. But your uncle picked out a snazzy soccer ball for you. Maybe you two can try it out at the park tomorrow. Did you know that he was on the soccer team in high school?"

## Help your child put things in perspective.

- Try not to overreact to children's small frustrations. When you help a child see that missing a chance to play in the block area is not a tragedy, for example, you help him to accept that waiting is a part of life: "The blocks will still be here in the morning. You can have a turn then."
- Show children that they are not the only ones who sometimes feel disappointed: "This kind of thing happens to everybody once in a while."
- Remind children that minor disappointments will not last forever: "Let me know when you feel better. Then we'll take a walk to the park."
- Show children how and when to express emotions about disappointments: "You're wishing Mom had called today, but the soldiers don't get to call home right now. You can show your sad, angry feelings by crying or drawing pictures. But I can't let you yell at the dog."

## Show your confidence, love, and support.

- Continue to offer affection to the child: "Would a hug help you right now?"
- Tell children that you are confident that they can handle disappointment: "It's hard to miss Miguel's party, but I bet you will think of ways to wish him a happy birthday."

## Encourage children to think of coping strategies.

- To help children manage disappointments, remind them how they coped with similar situations: "Once when Josh couldn't play, you invited Rashad to come over." "Last time Mom couldn't call, you felt better after we made her a care package."
- Point out when a child handles a disappointment well: "I know it's hard to be sick at home while your friends play outside, but you are making the best of it by drawing pictures for your friends."

## For related Web resources, see "Helping Children Handle Disappointment" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Helping Children Learn to Get Along



*“Hey, I had that first!” “Tony hit me!” Do children’s quarrels leave you frazzled? Most teachers and parents feel that they must step in to keep children from hurting each other or being unfair. Getting along with others is a skill that can be learned. Be patient as you teach conflict resolution skills that help children form friendships and work successfully with others. Model the kind and empathetic behavior you want the children to practice.*

## Find out why the children are fighting.

Most children’s fights serve some purpose. One child may be trying to get adult attention. Another may be trying to get a friend or sibling to interact with him. A child may be acting out feelings she doesn’t have the words to express.

## Identify the problem.

Ask each child what he or she thinks the problem is. Remind them of such rules as “No hitting. You may not hit anyone and no one may hit you.” Don’t spend time on finger pointing. Help those involved put their conflict into words: “It looks like Sara wants the truck right now, and so does Josh. Is that right?”

## Help them cool off.

Without taking sides, make sure that all the children involved are calm enough to talk. You can tell them, “When you feel less upset, it will be time to solve the problem.” Help them find ways to calm themselves so they will be ready to solve the problem.

## Generate alternatives.

Ask the children, “What can you do so you could both be happy?” You can record their ideas, but let them do the thinking. Usually, at least one child will make a suggestion. If the children can’t think of any ideas, consider throwing in a really odd one to get them started.

## **Evaluate alternatives and choose a plan.**



Work on empathy and fairness. Ask the children to evaluate different strategies. For example, “Josh, can Sara play with the truck first, while you play with the cement mixer? We can set the kitchen timer for 5 minutes, and then you can trade toys. Does this seem fair to you?” The children can decide which action to take.

## **Follow up and reinforce positive behavior.**



Decide when you will check with the children to see if the plan is working. Acknowledge acts of kindness and respect with a smile or a pat on the back.

Look for other ideas related to helping children resolve conflicts in these books: *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children* by Thomas Gordon (New York: Random House); *Class Meetings: Young Children Solving Problems Together (Rev. ed.)* by Emily Vance (Washington, DC: NAEYC).

## For related Web resources, see “Helping Children Learn to Get Along” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Helping Siblings Get Along



*All siblings argue now and again. But if your children have frequent, intense fights, you do not have to just stand by and let them treat each other badly. Brotherhood and sisterhood can begin at home!*

## What are some causes of sibling rivalry?

- Rivalry may occur when children believe that there's not enough of what they need or want to go around. They may feel they have to compete for parents' attention, affection, recognition, or time.
- Children may get the idea that they are in a contest when parents compare one child to another: "Sit quietly like your brother does."

## What can a parent do about sibling rivalry?

- Avoid comparing one child to another.
- Listen to the children's complaints to get clues to what the "rivals" believe is in short supply: "Dad always hugs Kendra first!"
- Let children know you understand their feelings even though you don't agree with them: "Yes, your brother needs more help getting dressed than you do, but you are just as important to me as he is."
- Spend some time alone with each child doing something he or she really enjoys: taking a walk, reading stories, playing catch—10 minutes a day for a week can do wonders.
- If one child says unkind things to you about another, remind him that "she's still one of us" no matter how annoying she is sometimes. That response reassures the child that *he* would still belong to the family even if a sibling had ill feelings toward *him*.
- Do not worry about treating all your children exactly alike. Children need comfort, help, and encouragement at different times and in different ways. When a child questions the attention you give to her sibling, reassure her that when she needs help, you will provide it.

## What can parents do about quarrels?

- Keep in mind that you don't have to get involved in every sibling argument. Children can often work things out themselves.
- If your children's quarrels bother you, calmly step in. If you tell them to stop, stay involved until the problem is resolved. Listen carefully to each child. This is an opportunity to model how to resolve conflicts.
- Avoid lecturing or nagging children about their arguments.
- Remember that children often push you to exercise your authority. By his or her behavior, a child may be saying, "Help me to be the kind of person *you want me to be!* That is the kind of person *I want to be too*—but I need your help to get there."

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# Helping the Often-Angry Child



*All children get angry on occasion and may even act aggressively when upset or frustrated. Some children, however, seem to be angry and aggressive much of the time. Conditions at home or at child care, along with a child's temperament, influence a child's level of aggression. Teachers may not be able to change these conditions, but they can help children learn how to respond to their anger.*



## **Observe to understand.**

What triggers the child's anger and aggression? Does he get upset during transitions from one activity to the next, when his mother drops him off in the morning, when he is tired or hungry, or when there is a lot of noise and commotion?



## **Minimize the triggers.**

If morning drop-off time is difficult, be available to spend a few extra minutes with the child to help ease her into the day. If transitions are hard, quietly give the child advance notice that the activity will be ending soon and explain what comes next.



## **State rules clearly, consistently, and matter-of-factly.**

Let the child know what you want her to do and don't want her to do. "I don't want you to hit. I don't want anyone to hit you either. Tell Amber you would like a turn on the tricycle, and if that doesn't work, we'll talk about other things to try."



## **Anticipate problems that are likely to arise.**

Position yourself near the child so you can provide quiet reminders about how to behave before tempers rise. If Ben often argues with Jamal over building block structures, follow Ben to the block area and whisper, "Remember to use your words with Jamal. Ask him if you can help build the tower with him."



## **Break the cycle of attention for misbehavior.**

Focus on a child's interests or abilities. If Sharon is interested in drawing or playing ball, plan time to join her in these activities a little each day before any misbehavior occurs. Comment on the child's interest and effort. "Your drawings include a lot of detail!" or "I'm impressed at how far you can throw the ball!"



## **Notice and applaud progress.**

Let the child know when he is having success. "I heard you work things out with Josh in the sandbox today. You asked him to make room for your sandcastle and he did!" An additional hug, smile, or pat on the back can reinforce the good feeling that comes with hard work and success.



**For related Web resources, see "Helping the Often-Angry Child" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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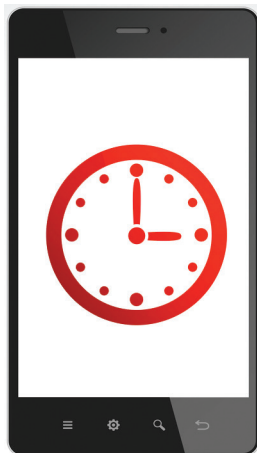
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# Keep Up the Good Work

*Sometimes it is hard to get a job done. Young children are learning to stick with tough jobs and to keep trying even when a task is hard to do. Here are some ways you can help them stay with tasks and try hard to complete them even when the job is tough.*

## Break it down

Help your child break down a big task into a smaller one. When your child is overwhelmed by a big task, you can say, "We can clean up one thing at a time. Let's clean up the blocks and then we can clean up the toy cars."



## Set a timer

Some tasks are overwhelming because your child thinks it will take a long time. Encourage your child to try a difficult task for a short time and then take a break. Say to her, "Let's try putting your clothes away for five minutes. We can go and draw pictures when the timer rings."

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## Remember successes

Tell stories about times when your child worked hard to accomplish something. Say to her, "Remember when you could not write a letter? You looked carefully at the letters in your name and practiced making those shapes. Now you can write your whole name! Soon you will write a whole sentence."

## Try it as a team

Encourage your child to work with others. Teamwork makes tasks easier. Say, "Let's see if we can work with your sister to rake all the leaves in the yard." Or, "Let's put out the spoons while your brother puts out the bowls for our cereal."



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# Kids Who Care



*Children who can understand and comfort others make friends more easily and are better at being friends than children who can't. "Feeling the feelings of others," or empathy, is an important part of children's social and emotional development. Showing empathy by caring about others' feelings is an important part of interacting effectively with others. Parents and caregivers can help young children learn caring behaviors.*

## How can parents and teachers encourage children's caring behavior?

- **Let children know that hurtful words or actions affect others.**

"Look how Jessie felt when you pushed her down. You know how it feels when somebody pushes you down. Please help her up, and let's talk about how to solve this problem."

"Bryce looks sad because you knocked down the block tower he had been building. Let's help him rebuild it."
- **Let children know what behaviors are appreciated and why.**

"I am glad you helped Martin pick up his toys. I know he was glad that you helped him. That's the way to be a good friend."

"You saw that Sophia was crying when her mom left, so you brought her a tissue and her favorite doll. That lets her know you care."
- **Model empathy.**

Children learn from seeing your kindness to others, listening to what you say about others' problems, and hearing you talk about the feelings of others. "It must have hurt Mrs. Hanson a lot to lose her pet. Let's go visit and see if we can cheer her up."
- **Provide opportunities for children to work and play together.**

Games or activities that emphasize cooperation help children think of the needs and feelings of others as they work toward a common goal. For example, you might introduce games such as cooperative musical chairs and freeze tag or activities such as drawing murals and building block cities.

## What gets in the way of children's caring behavior?

- **Some early experiences**

For example, babies who have not formed strong attachments to their parents, or who have experienced physical abuse or harsh discipline, may have trouble later on responding to the feelings of others. They may need additional practice to learn empathy.
- **Violence on TV, in the movies, online, or in video games**

Children who see a lot of violence on the screen may lose their sensitivity to seeing others get hurt. Teachers can recommend programming that does not contain violence.

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# Making and Keeping Friends



*Knowing how to make and keep friends is an important skill for young children to learn. For preschool and school-age children, friends are fun to have around. They can also be important to success in school! Here are some facts about friendships.*



## The effect of friendships on school success shows up very early

Young children who know how to form and maintain close friendships tend to:

- adjust well to school and do well in classes
- have high self-esteem
- learn important social skills, such as cooperation and problem solving



## The benefits of childhood friendships can have lifelong effects

People who learn at an early age to make and keep close friends tend to engage in fewer risky behaviors as teens and have fewer mental health problems as adults than do those who have no close childhood friends.



## Parents can help their child learn how to be a good friend

The best social skills teacher of all can be the example you set in your daily interactions with others. (Actions speak louder than words!) You help your children learn how to make and keep friends when you:

- model cooperation and kindness with other people, including neighbors, shopkeepers, and teachers
- invite friends over and find times for your child to play with others
- talk to your child about what it means to be a “host” and how to look out for another child’s needs
- help your child learn how to listen to others’ ideas
- discuss fairness with your child—how to take turns, how to share, and how to solve problems
- help your child learn words to express his feelings
- discuss the importance of being honest and loyal with friends
- discourage hurtful behaviors in your child, and offer other ways to solve problems
- talk to your child about being kind and helpful to others
- help your child recognize and respond to others’ feelings

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For more tip sheets on other topics, please go to <https://illinoisearlylearning.org> rev. 11/21



# Manners and Preschoolers



*Would you like to give your child a tool that will help him find the world a friendlier place? Try encouraging good manners! Using good manners is a way to show respect for the feelings of others and to make personal interactions pleasant.*

## How can I teach my child to be polite?

- **Set a good example.** If your child hears you saying “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me,” he will learn how to use these words. Be consistent. Manners, like bedtime or brushing his teeth, should become routine.
- **Teach in specific and positive ways.** Remind your daughter to use her “indoor” voice instead of telling her to stop yelling. Show your son how to answer the phone politely.
- **Provide gentle reminders, or practice at home.** You can make a game of greeting each other or saying “after you.” A child may find it funny when his Daddy greets him with a handshake and says, “Good morning, Joshua,” but this practice can make a good impression on the child. Practicing “company manners” at dinner with the family can help your child prepare to eat meals or snacks away from home.
- **Help your child understand what is expected in social situations.** Sometimes children are honest, but tactless. It takes time for a child to learn which words and actions are “OK” and which ones may insult or hurt others. Firm and friendly explanations from you can help.
- **Be tolerant of mistakes.** Children will get excited and interrupt, or they sometimes become shy and avoid speaking to an unfamiliar person. If you need to correct a child, do it in private to avoid making her or others feel uncomfortable.

## How can I discourage deliberate rudeness?

- **Avoid pressuring your child, particularly if he’s upset.** A forced apology may cause resentment without making the person harmed feel any better. It is usually better to discuss the incident with him later.
- **Be aware of what she sees and hears.** Many television programs and movies seem to treat rudeness as funny or clever. Television can influence children even when they don’t seem to be paying attention to the screen.
- **Seek help when needed.** A child who is consistently rude to others may be signaling for help. A lack of social acceptance can harm a child’s ability to succeed in school and find happiness in life. You may want to discuss persistent insensitivity to the feelings of others with a counselor or child psychologist.

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# Play and Self-Regulation in Preschool



*Are children in your classroom aware of their feelings, needs, and impulses? Can they calm themselves, control their behavior, and focus on tasks? Preschoolers who can do these things find it easier to take turns, make friends, and adapt to school routines. This ability is called “self-regulation.” Teachers often wonder how to help children self-regulate. The answer may be, “Let them play!”*

## Provide open-ended play time.

- Let children have long periods of time daily to plan and take part in play activities. When you ask children ahead of time to choose what they want to play, you help them focus attention and follow through on plans. “Dmitri, your plan was to play a board game. What game do you want? We have Candy Land, Guess Who, and Chutes and Ladders on our game table today.”
- Offer open-ended materials so children can plan creatively: blocks, sand, water, colorful scarves, streamers, etc. They may turn blocks into a city, a hill, or a bed. The scarves may become clouds, a waterfall, or blankets. Some children may need a little help getting started as they work with open-ended materials. Subtle prompts or choices may help. “How high will you build your block tower today?” “Would you like to start by digging in the sand or use tools to draw pictures in the sand?”
- Help children put disappointments into words so they can calm themselves and focus on putting things back together. “Your block tower fell and you feel frustrated. You could build another one. Or do you want to put away the blocks and play with something else?”

## Encourage make-believe play.

- Provide props so children can take different roles: parent, baby, rescue worker, pet, dancer, magician. A child who pretends with others learns to follow the “rules” of the role he plays. “I’m the waiter. I give you a menu, and you tell me what you want to eat. Then I tell our cook what to make and bring the food to you when it’s ready.”
- Observe to find out if children internally monitor their behavior as they play their make-believe roles. “I can’t play with Celia now. I’m being the waiter for Kaya and Will.”
- Give children a chance to set limits when a playmate doesn’t follow the rules. They will often remind each other to control impulses during make-believe play: “Don’t growl at me, waiter. Waiters don’t scare people. They take orders and deliver food.”

## Help children negotiate with each other during pretend play.

- When children disagree, encourage them to talk to each other about what they want. “Liam, you wanted to use the large blocks to build an airplane, but Carlos started to create a boat. Share your idea with him and see if you can work out a plan.”
- If plans have to be changed, remind the children that they have options. “You want the magic wand, but it’s still Emma’s turn. You can sit and wait, or you could pretend this cape is magic and wear it until Emma is done.”

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# Play Right—Don't Bite!



*Children who bite others hurt their peers and upset parents and teachers. Classmates may avoid the biters; adults may isolate them. So why do children bite? And how can we change this behavior?*

## Reasons children bite

- Infants probably bite as a way to explore objects, experiment, express excitement, or relieve teething pain.
- Toddlers are the most frequent biters. Toddlers may bite to express frustration before they have words to express their feelings. They also bite to get attention, to control a situation, or to imitate others who bite.
- Preschoolers bite as self-defense or to express anger or frustration. However, by the age of 3, most children can communicate their feelings and needs without biting. Frequent biting by a child over 3 may signal a serious behavior problem. Parents should discuss this behavior with the child's health care provider or a counselor.

## Responses to biting

- Intervene immediately to stop the biting. Clearly state: "No biting! I don't want you to bite anyone because it hurts, and I don't want anyone to bite you, either." Focus attention on the victim, not the biter. Remove the biter from the situation while giving first aid and comfort to the victim.
- Give an infant a safe teething object.
- Teach a toddler or preschooler words to use to express feelings or needs: "Jasmine, tell Luis not to take your blocks. Don't bite him. Ask me for help if you need it."
- Do not bite the child back, but keep him away from other children for as long as you feel he is upset and likely to bite again. Model the behavior you want to see in a child.

## Actions to prevent future biting

- Avoid labeling children as biters. Watch for positive behavior and reward it with your attention. "Tyler, may I join you for a few minutes? It's fun to see what you're building."
- Make sure the child's routine allows for adequate rest, food, and drink.
- Avoid overcrowding toddlers and include structured as well as unstructured activities.
- Help a child deal with stress. Teachers and parents can work together to reassure a child whose family is experiencing a major change. Encourage her to express feelings in words, through art, or through physical activity, such as punching clay or a toy.

## Communicating with parents

- Chart incidents of biting. Let parents know if their child was biting or if she was bitten. Confidentiality should be maintained so the identity of one child involved is not revealed to parents of another.
- Let parents know what steps teachers are taking to ensure the safety of all the children.
- Work with the parents of the child who bites to provide consistent responses to biting at home or at child care.
- Be sure all parents are aware of your program's policies on biting or other aggressive behavior.

## For related Web resources, see "Play Right—Don't Bite!" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Please Don't Go!

## Separation Anxiety and Children



*It is often hard for a parent or other loved one to leave a young child who cries and clings. The child is experiencing separation anxiety. Children may not understand when loved ones will be back. These situations can be upsetting to the loved ones who have to leave—as well as to the child. Here are some things to remember about separation anxiety.*

-  **A little separation anxiety is normal.** The child's behavior can be a positive sign. It shows that he recognizes and has formed important attachments with loved ones. (A child who never shows distress at a parent's leaving or never shows a preference for one caregiver over another may be a greater cause for concern.)
-  **Anxiety tends to follow a predictable pattern.** Fear of less familiar people and places often begins when a child is about 8 months old, although it can begin as early as 5 months of age. Separation anxiety usually peaks between 10 and 18 months and fades by the age of 2 years. This anxiety may become greater at any age or may return in an older child when there is a change in environment or when other changes occur, such as the birth of a new baby in the family.
-  **You can help make partings easier for your child.**
  - Read a children's book about separation.
  - Stay with her until she becomes familiar with a new place or person.
  - Tell her calmly you know she doesn't want you to leave. Reassure her you will be back.
  - Tell her Mommy or Daddy will be back after naptime or at dinnertime, even if she can't tell time. Be sure to keep your word.
  - Let her have her favorite blanket or other "lovey" for comfort. Some children like one of Mom's sweaters or another familiar possession they can keep until you return.
  - Avoid leaving your child when she is hungry, tired, or sick.
  - Never tease or scold her for her upset feelings or sneak away without telling her at all.
  - Don't bribe her not to cry.
-  **Your stress level can contribute to separation anxiety.** Your anxiety about child care arrangements or guilt about leaving may add to your child's distress. Be sure to make arrangements for child care that you feel confident about. And remember, some time spent apart can be good for you both.
-  **Sometimes, it may be more than separation anxiety.** Consider other possible sources of stress in your child's life or consider an alternative child care arrangement for
  - a child who continues to be inconsolable in a new child care or other setting for more than two weeks, or
  - a child who stops eating or sleeping well, refuses to interact with others, and has an ongoing change in behavior.

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# Positive Guidance for Young Children: Be Consistent

*Young children are learning to manage their behaviors and feelings. They may need many reminders of what appropriate behavior looks like. Clear directions from adults in a calm, firm tone of voice help children know what to do.*

## Teach expectations

Talk about how you expect children to act in a group, at meal times, and during cleanup times. Show them what you mean by modeling the desired behaviors.

## Respond consistently

When adults are consistent with consequences and responses, children will understand what has happened in the past and what they can expect in the future.



## Keep a schedule

When children are tired, hungry, or thirsty, it is more difficult for them to engage in appropriate behavior. Keep a consistent schedule so children's physical needs are met.

## Use natural consequences

Children learn through cause and effect. If your child spills crackers on the floor, have her help pick them up.

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# Positive Guidance for Young Children: Be Thoughtful

*Young children are learning to manage their behaviors and feelings. Your responses matter to children in these moments. Sometimes adults need to stop behaviors that are unsafe or extremely disruptive and help children understand how to behave appropriately. Here are some ways adults can help children:*

## Redirect behavior

Substitute a “can’t do” behavior for a “can do” behavior. If your child tends to draw on the walls, stock up on drawing paper and let her know where she can find it so she can draw when she’s interested. Encourage children to help think of “can do” behaviors to replace problematic ones.

## Wait until the child is calm

Young children who are upset or excited may have a hard time listening to adults. Use calming strategies such as taking deep breaths. Talk about the problem after the child is calm.

## Limit your response when possible

Children may act out because they want attention or to avoid a task or situation.

Consider overlooking behaviors such as whining, bad language, and tantrums when they will not harm the child or others. Focus on teaching children how to interact appropriately. This helps them to gain positive attention.

## Organize to help children succeed

Sometimes children need help understanding our expectations. For

example, if clothes and toys are often left lying about, start using baskets and low hooks for easier cleanup.



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# Positive Guidance for Young Children: Plan Ahead

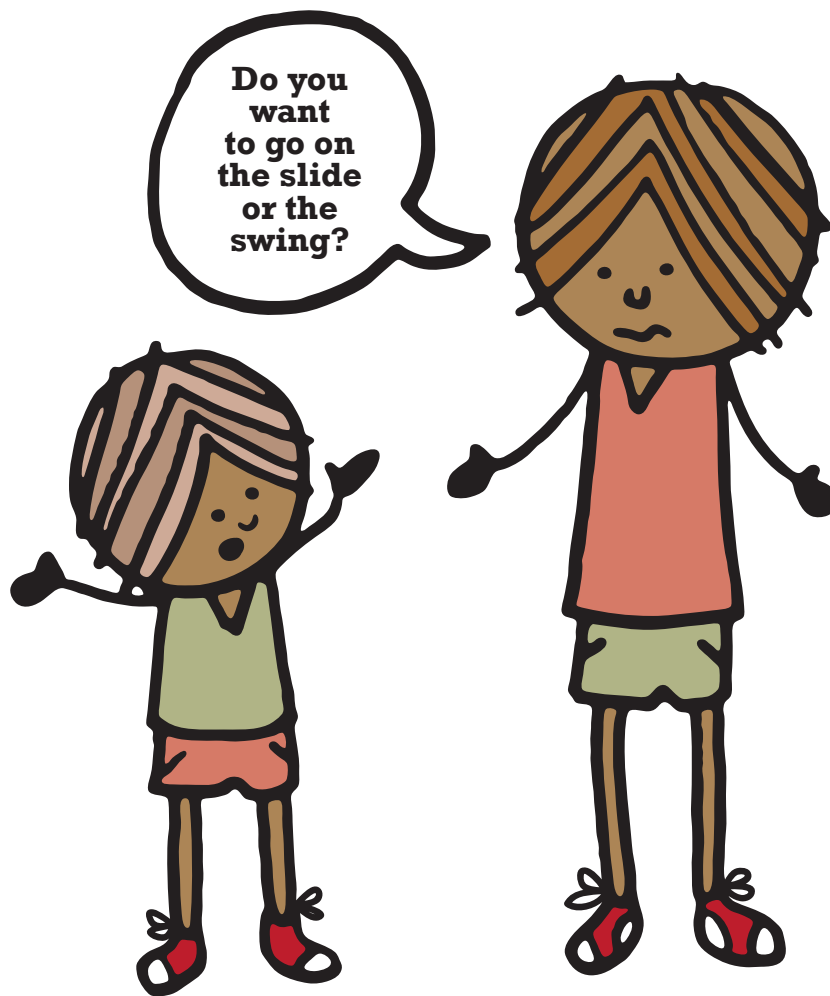
*Young children are curious and actively explore the world. This curiosity and exploration may look like inappropriate behavior when they do not follow directions from adults or touch items they should not. Plan and prevent problem behaviors using these strategies:*

## Describe what you want to see

Clearly state your expectations for their behavior and show children what you mean. Say “let’s walk” instead of “don’t run.”

## Use the “first/then” rule

Tie what you expect to what children want. For example, “First pick up the toys, then I will read you a story.”



## Provide acceptable choices

Offer options that are appropriate to the child, such as “Do you want to wear the red shirt or yellow shirt?”

## Use clear language

Avoid giving children unintentional choices. For example, questions such as “Are you ready to go?” can give

children the opportunity to say “no.”

## Set up spaces to encourage appropriate behavior

Keep items that are breakable and unsafe out of the reach of children. Put items where they should be used. For example, keep crayons on a table for drawing. Keep a basket of books near a sofa where children can sit and read.

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# Positive Guidance for Young Children: Take a Break and Calm Down

*Young children are learning to manage their behavior and feelings. At times, they may be “out of control” and need an adult to help them calm down and learn how to express their emotions in appropriate ways.*

## Take a break

Sometimes children need some time to manage their feelings. Some adults call this “time-out.” When a child engages in dangerous behaviors such as biting and hitting, a caregiver may need to remove the child from the situation to help them refocus on safe and appropriate choices.

## Stay close by

Remain near the child during a break, especially when their emotions are strong. Help the child become calm so they can rejoin the group or activity.



## Show them how to calm down

Teach strategies such as deep breathing, hugging a stuffed animal, or counting to 10.

## Make a plan

Talk about what will happen next on the schedule, after you have addressed the challenging behavior and the child has calmed down. Compliment the children on the

appropriate behaviors they display to help them learn what you expect.

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# Small Child, Big Stress?



*Do you sometimes experience stress? So does your child. Stress may be a part of life for everyone, but prolonged stress can be harmful. You can help your child learn to recognize and cope with the feelings of frustration, sadness, worry, and anger that can lead to stress or be signs of stress.*

## Notice behavior that seems unusual for your child.

Three-year-old Micah usually chatters and laughs with his parents and friends, but his mom notices he's spending more time hugging and rocking his teddy bear. His classmate Maddie usually plays happily with her toys and books, but suddenly she is clinging to her teacher more often and is easily upset. Both may be showing signs of stress.

## Help your children identify their feelings.

Tell children what you see and help them label their feelings. "Micah, your face looks sad." "Maddie, you look worried. Can I help?" Try reading books together about feelings. Ask your children's librarian for suggestions. Two to consider: *Glad Monster, Sad Monster* by Ed Emberley and *Feelings* by Aiki.

## Teach ways to cope.

Model what to do with negative feelings. "I feel sad. Let's hug and then go for a walk." "I'm frustrated no one answers my call. Let's have lunch and I'll try later." "Would you like to pack a bag with a few favorite things to carry with us when we move?" Encourage your child to share her feelings by listening and not dismissing them.

## Limit stress.

Try to anticipate events that might cause stress and prepare your child. Let her know Grandma is sick, so she will be in bed when you visit, or that she will have a new teacher at school. Reassure her that a change may feel strange at first, but that will pass. Keep daily routines as normal as possible during stressful times. If possible, avoid making additional stressful changes when your child is already adjusting to a current change.

## Be there.

Make time to talk with your child every day. Spend time together even if he doesn't seem to feel like talking. Reassure him often he is loved and will be cared for. Just having fun together can strengthen your child's coping skills.

## Talk to her child care or health care provider.

Share your concern if your child displays severe or prolonged signs of stress. A child who shows little interest in daily activities, doesn't sleep or eat normally, or continues to seem withdrawn or easily upset may need additional help.

## For related Web resources, see "Small Child, Big Stress?" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Supporting Adult-Child Relationships

*Young children thrive when the adults around them show they care. Young children learn they have value and develop a sense of self-worth through warm interactions with primary caregivers. Your children learn from your words and actions whenever they are with you.*

## Playtime is practice time

Your child practices social and communication skills during playtime by learning to share ideas, take turns, and express emotions. As you play, demonstrate kindness, thoughtfulness, and working together to solve problems.

## Set a good example

Your child learns how to treat people kindly by watching you. Show your child cooperative and kind behaviors when you interact with other adults. He notices when you say “Thank you” when a cashier hands you change or when you say “Excuse me” to the stock clerk in the grocery store when you need help finding an item.



## Build connections

Encourage your child’s connections with relatives, neighbors, child care providers, and teachers. He will turn to these safe adults for help when he has a problem. Say, “This is such a nice drawing. I think Uncle Joe would like it. Let’s send it to him.”

## Use appropriate language

Explain appropriate ways to talk to adults. Teach your child to use kind words and polite manners. Your child notices your tone of voice and body language. This includes using appropriate ways to address people such as calling the dentist “Dr. Patel” or calling a neighbor “Mrs. Jones” if that is how she prefers to be addressed.

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# Take a Bold Approach to Shyness



*Most young children are shy in some situations, such as the first day of child care or preschool. A tendency toward shyness can run in families. Some shyness in the early years is a good sign. It shows that a child knows the difference between loved ones and strangers. Shyness is a problem when it keeps children from making friends and taking part in play or other learning activities. Parents and teachers can help shy children become more comfortable in social situations.*

## Parents can lay the groundwork.

- Tell your child often how much you love him and how happy you are he is your child.
- Support your child in a new situation. Stay with him and let him watch a group before expecting him to join in. Tell him you understand that meeting new people can be hard.
- Role play with your child if he has difficulty. Practice what he could do or say in new situations.
- Let him know you are sure he can solve many problems on his own, but you are there if he needs you.
- Arrange times that he can play with one friendly child his age.
- Look for play opportunities with others that involve an activity he knows and feels confident doing. Perhaps he swims well or builds block structures easily.
- Notice and comment when your child is successful in a social situation that he might find uncomfortable.

## Teachers play a key role.

- Avoid labeling a child as shy in front of her or other children.
- Reassure her that you are there to help. Let her know that you understand that she might feel uncomfortable in a new place or without her parents there. Say, “Sometimes it takes a while to get used to new places and people.”
- Let her watch the group for a while before encouraging her to approach another child.
- Suggest phrases to use when she wants to join in: “What are you making?” or “Can I help you with that?”
- Step in to help if she seems lost or withdrawn in your classroom. For example, suggest a specific task for her to do with another child or a group that takes advantage of her interests or strengths.
- Realize even positive public attention may make her uncomfortable. Comment to her privately when she is successful in a social situation.
- Discuss your concerns with the parents of a child who continues to be withdrawn. If ongoing shyness seems to get in the way of learning or making friends, consider consulting with a social worker or child counselor.

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# Trauma-Informed Care in the Classroom

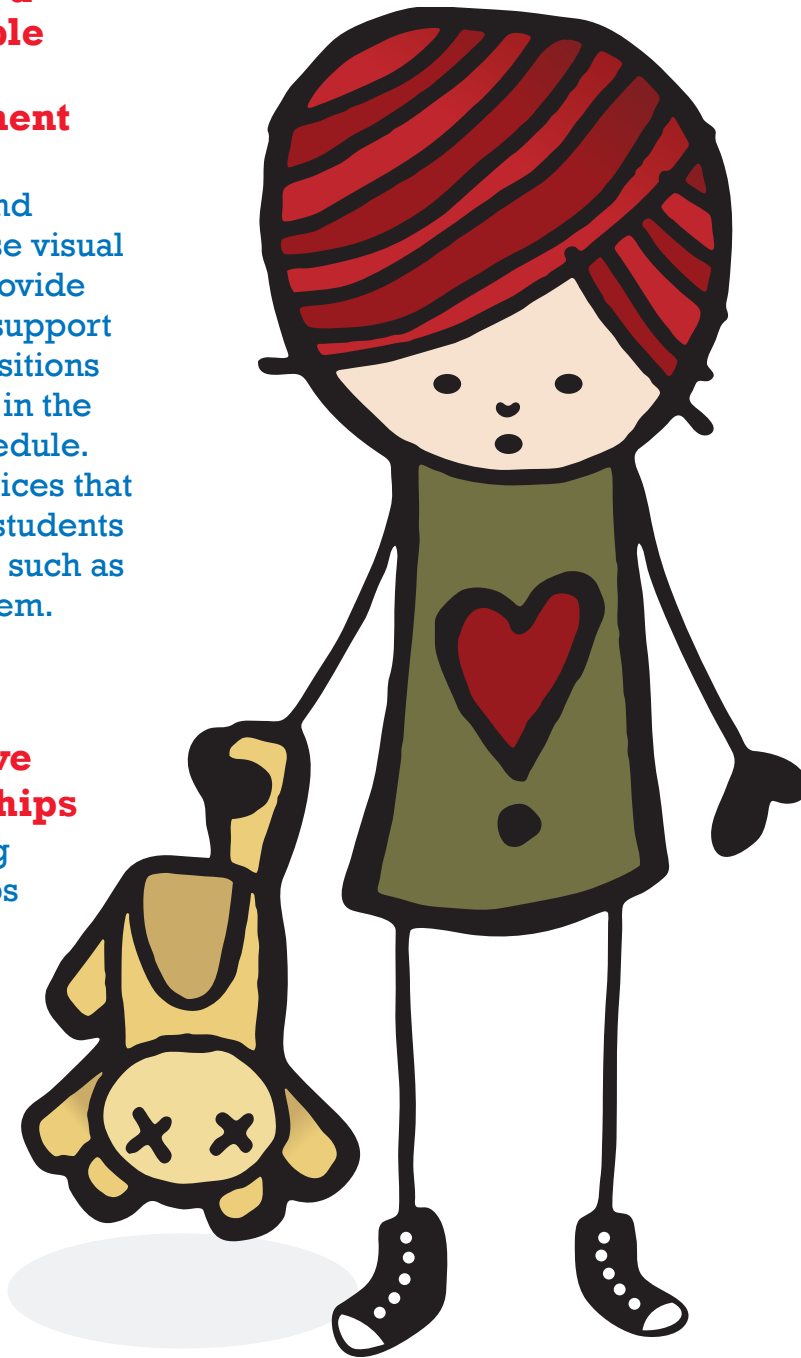
*Teachers can support students who have experienced trauma using these strategies.*

## Maintain a predictable and safe environment

Establish a schedule and routines. Use visual aids and provide additional support during transitions or changes in the typical schedule. Avoid practices that may make students feel unsafe, such as isolating them.

## Create responsive relationships

Build strong relationships with your students and their families. Learn what triggers students and what calms them down.



## Focus on social-emotional learning

Promote emotional literacy by reading books about and discussing emotions. Teach self-regulation and problem-solving skills and provide opportunities for practicing those skills.

## Collaborate with other professionals

Ask the school social worker or psychologist for help as you support students who have experienced trauma. Teach other professionals in your classroom how to provide trauma-informed care.

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# Understanding Trauma and Young Children



*Trauma is an event or a series of events that have a negative effect on a child. There are a number of ways parents, teachers, and caregivers can support children who have or may still be experiencing trauma.*



## Exposure to trauma is common

Potentially traumatic experiences can include, but are not limited to, abuse and neglect, natural disasters, and exposure to violence in the community. Up to 50 percent of preschool-aged children in the United States have experienced a potentially traumatic event. Children with disabilities are more likely to experience trauma.



## Trauma impacts learning

Experiencing trauma can impact a child's brain. They may feel unsafe or be constantly in fight-or-flight mode, making it hard to learn. In the classroom, it may seem as if children are being defiant or hyperactive. They may have difficulty paying attention. They may struggle with executive functioning skills such as planning, focusing, and remembering. In reality, these behaviors could be a response to trauma.



## Trauma-informed care in the classroom

Trauma-informed care is based on an understanding of the effects of trauma and includes efforts to lessen those effects on children. This can be done through classroom culture, policies, and practices. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has identified four main components of trauma-informed care:

- Realizing the impact of trauma;
- Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma;
- Using knowledge about trauma when creating policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Resisting future trauma



## Supporting children who have experienced trauma

Teachers and schools play an important role in supporting children who have experienced trauma. Children who have experienced trauma may struggle with uncertainty and not knowing what's going to happen next. Because of this, the classroom should be a safe and predictable place for all children. Here are some suggestions for teachers:

- Maintain a consistent schedule and routines
- Use visual aids to help children better understand the schedule and expectations
- Provide warnings before a transition or a change in the typical schedule
- Avoid practices that may make children feel unsafe, such as isolating them

It's also important to build secure relationships with children based on trust and care. This can be hard for children who have experienced trauma because they may have a hard time trusting adults. Finally, focus on social-emotional learning in the classroom. Teach lessons on identifying feelings and on how to calm down when you're upset.

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# When Children Mourn



*Death is a part of life that affects even very young children. The emotional pain of a child who has lost a loved one makes it tempting to avoid the subject or to try to distract the child. Though you cannot shield children from grief, you can help guide and comfort them.*

-  **Preschoolers have a limited understanding of death.**  
Most children under age 5 think of death as temporary. After being told Grandmother is dead, they may ask, “But when will I see her again? Where has she gone?” Children may believe that their behavior caused the person’s death. This limited understanding of death can lead to anger and feelings of abandonment, particularly if they have lost a parent or caregiver. Be sure to use concrete words when talking about death and avoid telling them the person is asleep because it may cause the child to fear going to sleep.
-  **Preschoolers react to the grief of those around them.**  
Crying is common when young children see sadness in others. They may also try to comfort adults who are upset. Talking about memories or looking at pictures can help both adults and children process their grief.
-  **Be prepared for the ups and downs of grief.**  
Because preschoolers live in the present, they seem to overcome sadness quickly. However, the grief can return as they come to realize the person is not coming back. Regression to less-mature behavior, such as toileting accidents, temper tantrums, or clinging to a comfort object, is common at times like these.
-  **Adults can help.**  
You can reassure grieving children by telling them that they are loved and that they are not responsible for the death. They will need to hear this over and over as they grow. Parents can share their beliefs about what happens after death. If a parent has died, be sure the child knows who will take care of him. Let him know that it is all right for him to laugh and play and feel happy again. As much as possible, maintain the child’s routines: mealtimes, bedtimes, and preschool schedule.
-  **Read children’s books that deal gently with death.**  
Your local children’s librarian may have suggestions of age-appropriate books to read to your child.
-  **Some children need more help.**  
Consider counseling for a child who mourns over an extended period. Be concerned if the child shows little interest in daily activities, doesn’t sleep or eat normally, continues to show regressive behavior, loses interest in friends or play, talks of joining the deceased, or refuses to attend her usual child care program or preschool.
-  **For related Web resources, see “When Children Mourn” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Work and Play Together

Children need to be able to work and play with other children who may have different ideas, experiences, or characteristics. Making and keeping friends are important skills for children to learn. Here are some ways you can help your child learn to get along with others.

## Set a good example

Your child learns how to treat people kindly by watching you. Show your child cooperative and kind behaviors when you interact with other people.



## Talk about what kind friends do

Explain taking turns and sharing. Stay close by to help children with sharing and taking turns. Provide encouragement for these types of behavior.

## Provide opportunities to play

Your child can learn friendship skills by playing with cousins, neighbors, classmates, and siblings. Encourage playtime activities in which children work together. Children learn as they pretend, build, and talk together.



## Teach them to talk it through

Help your child talk through problems with other children. Encourage her to share her feelings and to listen to other people's feelings. Explain that the way she feels about a problem may be different from the way another person may feel.

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# Choosing Child Care for Infants & Toddlers

*Most parents have mixed feelings about having their infants or toddlers in child care. Those first few years of life are critical for growth, development, and learning. Babies are also forming emotional attachments. Parents usually consider cost, availability, and convenience. But the quality of the care matters most. This checklist can help parents choose the best care for their child.*



## Consider your child's personality.

- Would your child enjoy the diverse activities and people in a child care center?
- Would your child be happier in a calm family environment?

## Observe the program in action.

- Is the setting warm and nurturing?
- Are care providers sensitive and responsive to a child's needs and signals?
- Do most children look happy and interested in what they are doing?
- Are any babies or toddlers watching television? (They should not be.)
- Are activities developmentally appropriate and intellectually stimulating?

## Look at the environment.

- Are there safe places for infants and spaces for toddlers who are crawling and walking?
- Are the toys and learning materials age appropriate?
- Does the space feel cluttered or crowded?
- Is there a safe place for outdoor activities?

## Be aware of health and safety issues.

- Is the state license for the facility displayed for you to see?
- Does the facility look and smell clean, with easy access to a sink for hand washing?
- Are there obvious hazards, such as open electrical sockets?
- Are small toys used by older children kept away from children under 3?
- Are toys washed and disinfected regularly?
- Are care providers trained in basic first aid, infant CPR, and accident prevention?
- Are bottles or food items stored safely? Are infants held during feeding? Are toddlers supervised during meals?
- What are the policies about caring for sick children and putting infants to sleep on their backs?

## Meet with the person who will care for your child.

- Do infants and toddlers have one primary caregiver? Can this person be expected to work there for a long time?
- Is a caregiver responsible for no more than three or four infants or toddlers?
- Has the caregiver had training or education in child development and care?
- How does she or he handle problems such as crying or conflicts?

## Discuss your involvement as a parent.

- Will there be time for you to talk to the provider when you drop a child off and pick her up?
- Is a record of her day provided, including activities, naps, feedings, and concerns?
- May you visit at any time?
- Is parent involvement encouraged?

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# Conference Time!

## Talking to Your Child's Teacher or Caregiver



*Many parents feel nervous about parent-teacher conferences or other talks with their children's teachers or caregivers. Here are some parent-tested hints to help you have good meetings with the people at your child's program.*

-  **Get to know teachers and other school people long before conferences.**
  - Keep in mind that most teachers like to meet parents as well as other family members.
  - Be sure to tell the staff how to reach you: "My spouse has the night shift, so use my cell phone number during the day." "I can come to school Thursday mornings."
  - Find out if the program has a list of activities for parents. Maybe you can do home learning activities or volunteer to help in a classroom from time to time.
  - Find out when the program has parent-teacher conferences. Then watch for the notes or e-mails inviting you to sign up for a time to meet with the teacher.
  
-  **Make and keep your parent-teacher conference appointment.**
  - Reply quickly when you get the note from school inviting you to conferences.
  - Find out ahead of time if it's okay to bring children to the conferences. Some programs provide free child care for parents who are attending conferences.
  - If you are running late to your conference, call to let the teacher know.
  
-  **Be ready for a two-way conversation.**
  - Expect the teacher to tell you many things about your child, and to show you samples of work that your child has done in the program.
  - Expect the teacher to also ask for your ideas, suggestions, and concerns.
  
-  **Ask some questions yourself. Here are some suggestions.**
  - *What does my child do that surprises you?* This question can help you find out what the teachers expect of your child and what they notice about him.
  - *What is my child reluctant to do?* This question may start an important discussion about your child's interests and dislikes.
  - *What are some things you would like to see my child do?* Even if your child is having a positive school experience, this question may help you and the teacher to think of something new your child could try.
  - *What can I do at home to support what you do in your program?* This question shows your family's concern for your child's education. The teacher may have some good ideas for fun, educational home activities.
  
-  **Stay calm if the teacher feels that your child has some difficulties.**
  - Keep in mind that most teachers would like to hear your ideas about what may be going on. The teacher may also ask you to suggest some ways to help your child.
  - Don't feel that you are being blamed for any problem. Instead, let the teacher know you want to work with the staff to help things go well for your child.

*(Parts of this Tip Sheet were adapted from the ERIC Digest "Parent Teacher Conferences: Suggestions for Parents" by Ann-Marie Clark, available at <http://ecap.crc.uiuc.edu/eecearchive/digests/1999/clark99.html>.)*

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# The Curious Child



*“Where did Navy Pier come from?” “Why do we have to wear seat belts?”*

*Do you know a child who is full of questions? Young children are naturally curious. They believe parents, caregivers, and teachers know a lot about the world. Asking questions and listening to answers are vital to their learning. The way you respond can affect what and how a child learns.*

Do you ...

-  **... reject questions?** “Stop asking. Be quiet. Don’t bother me.” Responses like these may tell a child that curiosity is unimportant or annoying. If you are too busy, or uncomfortable about a question, you might say, “Let’s talk about it later. Right now my mind is on something else.”
-  **... deflect questions?** Answers like “Because I said so” give the child no information. It may be true that he must sometimes do something “because Daddy said.” But too many responses like this can squelch his curiosity and creativity.
-  **... give answers?** A short explanation accepts her question and acknowledges your ability to answer. “We wear seat belts because it’s safer and the law says to.” It’s also all right to tell her, “I don’t know!”
-  **... invite the child to find answers?** Your response can encourage higher-order thinking. Depending on the question and the child’s age, you might:
  - Suggest ways to look for answers (reference books, the Internet, an expert, an experiment). “I wonder about Navy Pier, too. Let’s look it up in \_\_\_.”
  - Invite her to brainstorm with you. “I don’t know the answer. Let’s write down some possibilities.” When you brainstorm, don’t throw away any ideas. (That’s the next step.)
  - Ask her to evaluate the ideas you brainstormed together. “Now we’ve got some ideas. Which ones do you think are good possibilities, and why?” When you have decided together which ideas to investigate, ask, “What can we do to find out?”
  - Investigate with her. Create a simple plan together, and decide what each of you will do to find the answers. You might look in an encyclopedia together or ask an expert. The two of you could set up an experiment, make a model, or take a survey. You can help provide what she needs. Set a time to share what you learned.

It’s important to let children do most of the thinking, even if they pursue “wrong” answers. You can guide them to helpful resources, and they can eventually find out what they want to know. Meanwhile, they are learning important research skills.

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# Dealing with Parental Guilt



*Feeling guilty once in a while comes with being a parent. Sometimes guilty feelings lead to learning experiences that make you a better parent. Other times, guilty feelings result in unhealthy parenting practices. Here are some common “guilt trips” along with some tips for using the experiences to become a more effective parent.*

## **Guilt trip: I don’t spend enough time with my child.**

- Change what you can. Make the most of the time you do have with your child. Schedule meal times, game times, reading together, and other important family times first. Other activities—children’s sports, art, or music classes—can be fit into the time that’s left.
- Limit the use of television, computers, and video games at home.
- Keep in mind that taking time for your own emotional and physical health—exercising or getting together with friends—helps you be a better parent.

## **Guilt trip: I lose my temper too often with my child.**

- Be sure your expectations are reasonable. Very young children are not good at waiting (e.g., they struggle to ignore candy in the checkout line in a food store).
- Set limits simply, calmly, and firmly. Point out what you want your child to do.
- Be sure your interactions with your child are more positive than negative.

## **Guilt trip: I can’t give my child as much as other children have.**

- Remember that your child’s happiness is not determined by expensive toys. Your child’s well-being is largely determined by relationships with important people—family members, close friends, and teachers.
- Help your child deepen his relationships with others by scheduling time with family and friends. These relationships will enrich your child far more than anything you can buy.

## **Guilt trip: I worry about doing the wrong thing.**

- Keep in mind that none of us went to school to learn how to parent. It is natural to worry about decisions we make as parents when our children are young.
- Consult others you trust when you are uncertain what action to take with your child.
- Act on your best judgment. Remember that parents need to set reasonable limits so children learn how to get along in the world.

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# Encouraging Words



Encouragement can help children feel good about themselves and develop self-confidence. Praise can be overdone and cause children to be overly dependent on adult approval. Helpful words show appreciation and excitement without sounding like empty praise. Encouraging words invite children to recognize that they are responsible for their efforts. Here are some tips on encouraging your child.

## Notice specific good acts and comment on them.

- *Tell your child you love her and appreciate her efforts.* Provide her with encouragement about specific actions and skills. Instead of saying, “What a good girl you are,” try saying, “You put your book back on the shelf.” She will see her action as helpful.
- *Pay attention to the things that your child gets right.* For example, if he usually pushes to the front of the line but remembers to wait this time, you might say, “I’m glad you remembered to wait to go down the slide when you saw Jason get to the ladder first,” along with a smile or a hug.
- *Use words to help your child become aware of her own approach to problems.* “I noticed Maria wanted to play a different game than you did, so you suggested playing her choice and then playing yours. You looked like you were having fun together.”

## Notice your child’s effort and give feedback.

- *Support your child’s good intentions.* Rather than saying, “What a beautiful card! You’re a great artist!” try saying, “Daddy will really like the get well card you made.”
- *Invite your child to talk about her efforts.* “You spent a lot of time working on Daddy’s card. Would you tell me about it?”
- *Give nonverbal feedback.* A smile, a wink, or a high-five tells your child that you noticed his efforts.

## Avoid compliments that insult your child or others.

- *Use supportive and encouraging statements.* Saying, “You actually remembered to put your coat away for once” is not encouraging. Say, “Thank you for putting your coat away.”
- *Avoid insulting others while encouraging a child.* Saying, “You are a much better helper than your brother” may cause competition and resentment. Say, “How kind of you to carry grandma’s bag for her.”

## Encouragement is nonjudgmental.

- *Encouraging words point out specific facts but are not evaluative.* “You used a lot of blue paint to cover the sky in your painting.”
- *Encouraging words build on a child’s inner drive to learn.* Your child learns that his self-motivation leads to new skills. Say, “Watching you practice zipping your coat tells me you are excited to learn how to zip.”

Children and adults feel good when statements are sincerely spoken: “I love you.” “I enjoy your silly jokes.” “I’m so glad you’re my child.”

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# Five Tips on Choosing a Preschool



*Cost and convenience are important when you choose a preschool for your child. But other factors can also make a program a “good fit” for your family. These tips can help you find a high-quality preschool program.*



## Ask about the teachers.

- What education and training do they have to work with this age group?
- Is the staff stable, or does it change often? Low staff turnover usually helps children feel more secure.
- How many children are there for each teacher? Two staff members should be assigned to a classroom of 20 preschoolers.
- Do the teachers understand and respect the needs of each child? They should be welcoming, friendly, and aware of children’s differing strengths, interests, needs, cultures, and heritage languages.



## Ask about the program.

- Does it offer a variety of ways for children to play and learn, with a balance between individual and group activities?
- Is there time for active play, both outdoors and indoors? Children should not have to sit and listen to the teacher for a long time.



## Look at the classroom.

- Do all indoor and outdoor areas seem safe? Is the noise level generally comfortable?
- Does the room look inviting, with separate spaces for looking at books, playing, and participating in group activities? You should see building blocks, toys, puzzles, games, art supplies, print materials, and items for pretend play.
- Are children’s work and family photos carefully displayed on walls and bulletin boards?
- Is there a comfortable space where a child can calm down away from the crowd?



## Observe the children.

- Do most of the children seem happy and absorbed in their activities most of the time?
- Do teachers apply classroom rules fairly and consistently? Teachers should clearly tell children what behavior they expect.



## Find out how families can be involved.

- Do teachers discuss children’s progress with families informally and at scheduled times?
- Are family members welcome to visit the classroom, or to volunteer?



For other Web resources, see “Five Tips on Choosing a Preschool” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Freedom to Grow



*Have you ever seen a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis? It's tempting to help it break free, but the struggle to get out strengthens the butterfly's wings. Parents want to help their children and keep them safe, but too much help can result in a child unable to spread his wings and fly.*

## Consider the child's age and stage of development.

Toddlers need close supervision, but most preschoolers can direct their own actions for short periods of time as long as they are in a safe environment. You don't expect toddlers to dress themselves, but many 4-year-olds can do so with little help. Try observing others of your child's age or read reliable resources on what can be expected of a child their age.

## Keep in mind the difference between danger and minor risk.

Consider what your child wants to do. There's an obvious difference between letting her play in a swimming pool, where she could drown, and letting her play in a mud puddle where she would get wet and dirty. Young children need close supervision when there is danger, but they also need to be allowed to get messy and play actively.

## Give him opportunities to learn to interact with other people.

You may need to coach your 2-year-old to respond to a question from an adult or find a toy for a friend to play with. Try letting your 4-year-old speak for himself and find ways to play with a friend on his own. A parent or teacher can step in when help might be needed.

## Let her learn to play with a new toy or do an art project on her own.

A child may not play with a toy or a game the way the maker of it intended. As long as it's causing no damage, let her try it her way. She may paint trees pink and the sun blue, but let the artwork be her own.

## Consider allowing your child to fail and try again.

Just as your baby probably fell over many times in learning to walk, he may need several tries to dress himself, put a puzzle together, or help you set the table. He may have to search for the toy or book he forgot to put away. Be sensitive to when he needs time to do it himself and times he does need help.

## Stay calm over minor mishaps, physical or emotional.

Let your child know that you care, but that small hurts are a part of life. Take care of the scrape or kiss the bump and encourage her to go back to playing. Help her find ways to cope when her friend wants to play with another child or teases her, but try not to overreact.

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# Fuss Management: Comforting the Irritable Child



*You're out in public with your toddler or preschooler when the whining starts. Don't panic! When you take a calm, problem-solving approach, you help your child learn to calm himself when he is irritable.*

## Look for what's making your child irritable, and try a "quick fix."

- **She's uncomfortable.**

She may be hungry, thirsty, tired, cold, hot, or need a bathroom. You might help her adjust clothing or diapers, seat belts, or straps. Feel her hands, feet, and face to see if she needs a jacket on or off. Offer a snack and some water, or stop for a full meal. Make a bathroom stop. Change wet or dirty diapers as soon as possible.

- **He's tired or coming down with an illness.**

He may sleep if you can help him get comfortable. If not, say, "I know you're tired. You'll be able to sleep soon." Hug him, sing to him, or tell a story.

- **She's overwhelmed by crowds, new places, or wanting things she can't have.**

Find a quiet place to help her "collect herself." Reassure her: "There's a lot going on here, but we're safe and we'll be done before lunch." Talk about things she enjoys: "You want those toys, and you don't like to hear me say No. But we can talk about what you like about them." A little positive attention can lighten her mood.

- **He's worried because you seem stressed.**

If you're tense, try to relax. Tell your child how you feel: "This place can be too much for me, too. I'm glad we'll be home soon." You might quietly sing songs you both enjoy. Make silly faces together or talk in funny voices.

- **She's bored.**

Try giving her some jobs: "Please help me find a box of your cereal." "Are your muscles strong enough to carry this for a minute? Let's try." If she must stay in a car seat or stroller, draw pictures in the air with her or direct her attention to what's going on around you. Hand her a book or a toy. Talk with her about fun things to do later.

## Keep in mind that your child does not enjoy fussing.

- Remind yourself that he prefers to have a good time with you. He just doesn't know how to do that at the moment.
- Speak to him in a friendly voice. Count to 10 first, if you must!

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# Fuss Management: Planning Ahead to Prevent Tantrums



*There's no sure cure for young children's public temper tantrums. But some simple steps can reduce the chances that your toddler or preschooler will "pitch a fit" when you run errands together.*



## Go on "practice" outings and errands with your child.

- Have pretend outings at home to help your child know what you expect of her. Play "riding the bus," "getting groceries," "having a check-up."
- Go on short, simple outings as practice for longer trips. Introduce basic ideas: "Look, don't touch." "Stay next to me." "Notice what's around us." Such practice trips can be especially helpful to very active or impulsive children.
- Remind your child, "I'm helping you learn how to run errands."



## Plan errands and other outings with your child's needs in mind.

- Sometimes a child should not go with you. Let him stay with a trusted caregiver, if you can, when he is ill, his meals or naps will be disrupted, or he is likely to feel overwhelmed at the place you are going to.
- Pack wisely. You may need
  - healthy snacks and drinks
  - comfort items—a blanket, books, or small toys (avoid items that easily get away, such as balls)
  - a list of songs your child enjoys
  - learning activity kits (see the Tip Sheets in the "Things to Do While You're Waiting" series for ideas)
  - a change of clothes in case of spills or accidents
- Tell your child what to expect. Be brief but clear: "We have two things to do—get groceries and mail the bills. We'll be home for lunch." "After your eye exam, I'll take you to child care."
- Let your child make choices: "Will you ride in the cart, or walk by me?" "Do you want to sing a song or hear the radio?" "What do you want to see first—seals or elephants?"



## Prepare yourself.

- Be ready to divide your time between "taking care of business" and interacting with your children. A few minutes of positive attention can go a long way.
- Some experts suggest that parents not reward children for good behavior on outings because they believe that having a pleasant time is its own reward and that rewards can lead to frustration. Decide your "reward policy" and be ready to stick to it!
- Ask the pediatrician about motion sickness if your child often complains of stomach upset, headache, or unusual tiredness when traveling.

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# Get Them to School Every Day

Preschool is the ideal time to stress the importance of consistent on-time attendance and encourage strong attendance habits



## Be enthusiastic!

Talk often to children about why school is important.



## Be consistent

Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.



## Be prepared

Lay out clothes and pack lunches and backpacks the night before.



## Be flexible

Make a plan for getting to school in case something comes up.

Adapted from Attendance Works ([www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org))

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# Getting Ready for Kindergarten



*Is kindergarten right around the corner for your child? Let him know you're happy for him and confident he will do well. Here are some things to think about as the school year approaches.*



## What are the health requirements for a child to begin school in Illinois?

- A physical exam by a health care provider. The provider should give you a signed form to take to school.
- A dental exam performed by a licensed dentist.
- An eye exam performed by an optometrist or medical doctor.
- All required immunizations. Start early so your child is ready for that first day. Talk to your health care provider or call the Illinois Public Health Department at (217) 782-4977 if you're not sure what immunizations he needs.



## What will the teacher expect my child to be able to do?

- Hold and use a pencil, crayons, and scissors.
- Say his full name and how he gets to and from school.
- Handle self-care tasks such as hanging up her coat, going to the toilet, and washing her hands.
- Get along with most children and adults and respect the property and rights of others.
- Work alone and with others.
- Sit and listen for about 15 minutes.
- Remember and carry out two or three directions; finish a task she starts.
- Follow simple rules and be willing to take turns.



## What are some ways I can help prepare my child?

- Help him learn about the world around him. Take him on interesting trips—to the library or grocery store, on a bus ride, or to a museum or park—and talk with him about what he sees. Encourage his curiosity and help him find answers to his questions.
- Read to her and let her know that words can be written as well as spoken.
- Teach him the names of colors and shapes.
- Help him see and hear how objects and sounds may be alike or different.



## How can I find out what my local school expects of my child?

- Take advantage of any kindergarten screening or school visits your school may offer.
- Call the school office and ask for information on what is expected of children and parents.



## What if my child needs special help to be ready for kindergarten?

- Check with your local school district office to find out about developmental screening and programs.
- Call (800) 851-6197 or visit [www.childfind-idea-il.us](http://www.childfind-idea-il.us) to learn more about services for children who have special needs.

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# Going to Kindergarten?

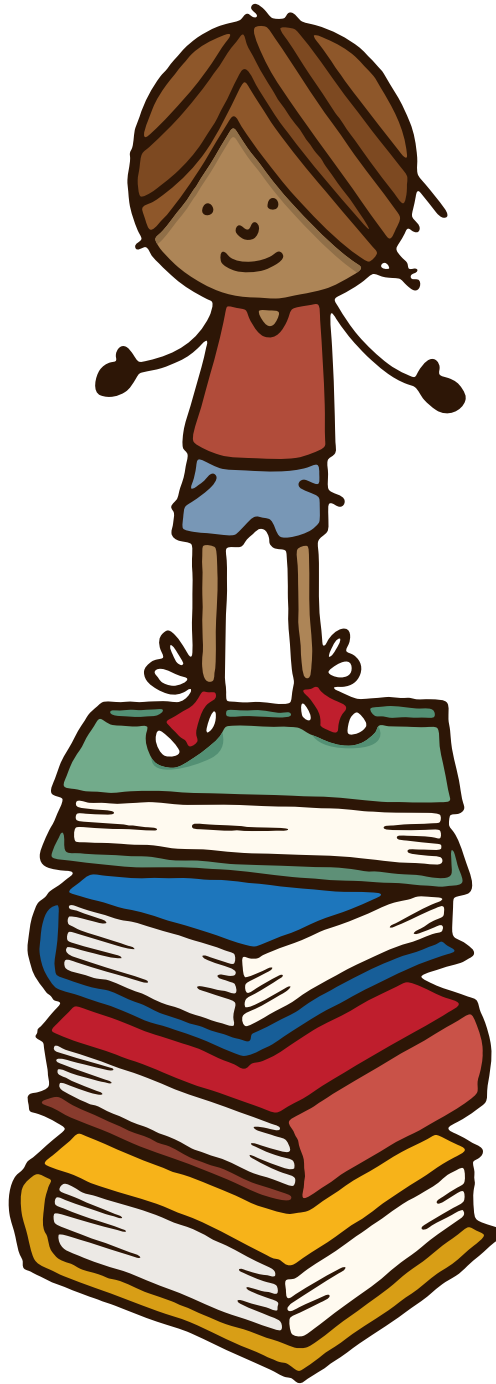
*Getting required health checks, practicing key skills, and visiting your new school can help your child make a smooth transition.*

## Time for a checkup

- Children entering kindergarten must have a physical exam, dental exam, and eye exam.
- Immunizations are required for kindergarten entry. Talk to your health care provider or call the Illinois Public Health Department at (217) 782-4977 if you aren't sure which immunizations are required.

## Visit your new school

- Call the school office if you have questions about what to expect.
- Attend special visiting days your school may offer for parents and children, including kindergarten screenings.



## Practice kindergarten skills

- Explore pencils, crayons, and child-size scissors.
- Practice saying full name and how you get to and from school.
- Hang up a coat, go to the toilet, and wash hands without help.
- Follow simple rules and take turns.

## What if my child needs special help?

Some children need extra support. Call your local school district office to find out about developmental screenings and other services.

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# Helping Your Child Learn in Two Languages

*Children who know more than one language often benefit in school and later in life. Also, many parents and grandparents find that talking to older children about important life matters is easier if the children retain their home language skills. Here are some ways that parents have helped young children keep their home language while learning English in school.*



## Be aware of skills and habits of mind that are important in any language.

- Keep in mind that your preschooler can build good speaking and listening skills and habits when he listens and talks to people who are fluent in any language. In school, he will learn from teachers and peers who know English well. At home, you are the language expert!
- Talk with your child in your home language every day so she sees you using words and gestures with ease. Express feelings and complex ideas. Tell jokes and funny stories. Let your child see you reading, making lists, and writing notes so she learns how people communicate through print.
- Help your preschooler count, estimate, compare, measure, and solve problems in your home language so he understands that math concepts are the same in any language.
- Nurture your child's curiosity about the world around her. Use your home language to help her ask questions, describe things she observes, and make predictions. Being able to do those things will help her in school.

## Make your home language the foundation for literacy.

- Help your preschooler learn the alphabet and read signs in your home language. That way, he can begin to understand that letters and symbols have meaning.
- Tell stories or read aloud to your child in your home language. Record yourself reading aloud, so your child can listen independently.
- Teach your child songs and musical games in your home language.
- Make books with your child. Your child can dictate stories to you. You might also create fantasy tales or books of true-life family stories. Try making a bilingual dictionary together. Illustrate the books with drawings or magazine cutouts.

## Stay in touch with preschool staff.

- Let your preschooler's teachers know that you support your child's education at home by reading, writing, and talking with her in the language you know best.
- If you have time, offer to help out in your child's classroom. You might even try teaching the other children some words and phrases in your home language.

## Keep in mind that having a bilingual family is not always easy!

- Look for support groups for bilingual families in your area. Arrange playgroups or outings with other families who speak your home language.
- Help your child to understand that knowing two languages well will be useful to him, even if he now feels some peer pressure to speak only English.
- Treat language learning as a puzzle your family is working on together.

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# Keeping Track of Important Information

Children and families who experience homelessness have rights to schooling and benefits from public assistance programs. Facing homelessness can be a stressful experience. Having appropriate documentation can help you access services and benefits. Here are some ways you can stay organized during this stressful time:

## Reach Out to Your School District for Help

Children experiencing homelessness can enroll in school without documentation. Your school district's homeless liaison is available to help you enroll your children in school and access public benefits. They will also help you locate the records that are needed.



## Gather Important Documents

Keep important documents in an envelope, folder, or zip-top bag. These include birth, death, marriage and divorce certificates; medical records, including immunization records; and education records. Families experiencing homelessness can often obtain these documents without a fee at government offices. If you have a cell phone, take photos for a backup copy.

## Choose a Key Contact Person

Talk to a friend, family member, or other support person you trust about your housing situation. Make sure this person always knows how to contact you. Ask them to hold a second copy of the important documents in a safe location.

For more information, visit <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/toolkits/experiencing-homelessness/>

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12/19

# Learning and Fun on Family Field Trips



*What is a family field trip? When you and your child travel into the wide world with learning as your goal, you are on a field trip! Your destination can be as close as the front porch or as distant as a museum in another town. What are the secrets of successful family field trips?*

## Plan with care.

*Where will you go?* Illinois and neighboring states are packed with interesting places to visit. But keep in mind that to a young child, even the back yard or the neighborhood can offer many discoveries and new experiences.

*What will you see, do, and find out?* Any trip can be a rich learning experience if you and your child go with questions to answer, problems to solve, or a list of “things to look for.” You and your child can observe, sketch, write, photograph, record audio, count, measure, or take notes about the place you visit.

*How will you get there?* Walking and biking are good ways to get physical exercise as part of the field trip. (Be sure to wear protective gear!) Traveling by bus, boat, train, or trolley can add to the learning experience.

*What will you want to consider in scheduling the trip?* Trips with young children may need to include mealtime and naptime. Plan ahead so your child can get both. It’s a good idea to set a “rain date” with your child in case of bad weather. You might also want to avoid peak visiting times at large public places.

*What will you take?* Maps, drinks and snacks, diapers (if needed), wipes, a change of clothes, books, paper and drawing materials, and change for parking meters are basic field trip equipment. Your trip might also call for special items such as cameras, binoculars, audio recorders, or plastic storage bags for collecting specimens or storing wet clothes. Family members can carry backpacks or “fanny packs” so their hands can be free.

*How will you assure your child’s safety on the trip?* Parking lots, trails, and large crowds call for special safety precautions. Talk with your child ahead of time about how to stay safe. Be specific and firm so that your child knows exactly what she needs to do.


## Have a good time.

*Don’t try to do too much.* You can see and do more another time!

*If you have to wait,* try playing games or looking at books with your child.

## Follow up.

*After the trip, make time to talk with your child about the experience.* Encourage her to tell you the story of the trip, and write it down while she watches you. Keep a scrapbook or collection box of specimens, photos, or other reminders of the trip. Your child might enjoy dramatic play with items from your field trip.

 For related Web resources, see “Learning and Fun on Family Field Trips” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

 For a copy of the annual Illinois Travel Guide, visit <https://www.enjoyillinois.com/travel-illinois>

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# Making the Holidays Memorable and Meaningful



*Whether you are celebrating Hanukkah, Christmas, or Kwanzaa, the holidays can be busy and stressful. Children's eyes and ears are filled with messages that say, "Buy me!" We all want the holidays to be fun. But we want holidays to mean more to our children than receiving lots of gifts. Here are some ways to focus on the meaning of every holiday season.*

-  **Strengthen family ties.**  
Plan times to be together as a family. Choose a game night, a pizza and movie night, or a night for reading stories aloud. Avoid filling your calendar with lots of activities that pull parents and children in different directions.
-  **Encourage gifts from the heart.**  
Help children think about the needs of others. Visit an elderly friend or relative who is alone, make cookies for a neighbor, or bring gifts to a women's shelter. Volunteer at an organization that works with people in your community who have limited resources. (Note: Choose a volunteer activity that is appropriate for young children.)
-  **Create a peaceful home atmosphere.**  
Reduce the noise and clatter of the season. Plan calm family activities such as family dinners, evening tea times, or story reading. Reduce noise and distractions by turning off the television, electronic games, and phone apps.
-  **Remember family rituals or traditions.**  
Take part in—or start—some traditions that all family members can enjoy. Make holiday cookies or homemade greeting cards, sing holiday songs or play music, re-read favorite storybooks out loud, start a scrapbook or family diary, or light special candles at dinner or bedtime.
-  **Resist buying more.**  
Advertisers hope to convince *you* that a perfect family holiday means buying more and to convince *children* that more gifts will make them happier! Limit children's exposure to commercials, and help them learn to question advertisers' claims. When possible, avoid taking preschoolers shopping during the holidays.
-  **Focus on people, not things.**  
A good rule of thumb during the holiday season is to spend half the usual amount of money but twice the usual amount of time with your children. Make people, not things, your priority. Focus on activities that bring your family together and that draw children's attention to the needs of others. These efforts will help reduce the madness and enhance the memories and meanings of the holidays.
-  **For related Web resources, see "Making the Holidays Memorable and Meaningful" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# No More Diapers: Getting Started



*Learning to use the toilet is a big step for a child. When your child seems ready, start slowly, and be patient.*

-  **Get the right equipment.** Decide on a stand-alone potty chair or a toddler seat that fits on your regular toilet. To use a regular toilet, your child will probably need a stepstool. (A child needs to be able to reach the seat and to be able to have feet on a surface for leverage.)
-  **Help your child identify the right place and time.** Place the potty chair where she can easily reach it, and explain what you want. When she urinates or has a bowel movement in her diaper, clean it up calmly and let her know that she can do that in the potty now. You may want to put the bowel movement from her diaper into the potty and comment on this being the place for it. If the sound of the flush seems to frighten her, wait until she is out of the bathroom. Encourage her to sit on the potty chair when she may need to use it. (For many children, this is after sleeping or eating.)
-  **Teach additional skills gradually.** Once he is using the toilet some of the time, teach him to wipe, flush, take care of his clothing, and wash his hands. Many children need help with wiping after a bowel movement until they are 4 years old or older. Now may be a time to try training pants or “big kid” underwear. Many children are not ready to give up diapers at night for several months after learning to use the toilet during the day. When he can stay dry for several hours during the day, try sending him to bed without diapers.
-  **Work with your child care provider.** Your child care provider can help in encouraging toilet use. Try to use the same words and routines for toilet use that your provider uses. At first, your child may go at home but not at child care, or just the opposite. If she only wants to go with your help, gradually encourage her to be more independent.
-  **Be prepared for setbacks.** Illness or a stressful change in his life may cause your child to regress. And it’s not unusual for some children to become so engrossed in their play or in learning something new that they forget or don’t want to take the time to use the toilet. Try gentle reminders or regular breaks. Let his doctor know if your child becomes constipated or has painful bowel movements or other problems.
-  **Praise your child for any successes.** If she tells you after soiling or wetting a diaper, that’s progress. If she urinates on the way to the toilet, that’s also progress. Remember that she’s trying, so it’s important to treat accidents matter-of-factly and keep encouraging her. If she becomes discouraged, consider waiting a few weeks or months and then trying again. Avoid letting toilet training become a power struggle—or a major source of stress for you both.

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For more tip sheets on other topics, please go to <https://illinoisearlylearning.org> rev. 11/21



# No More Diapers: Is Your Child Ready?



*“No more diapers!” Sounds great, but how do you get ready for toilet learning? Here are some tips.*

## **Be sure you are ready!**

Helping your child learn to use the toilet takes time and patience. Have a potty chair, a child-sized seat that fits the toilet, and a sturdy stepstool on hand. Training can take three months or more. Children with disabilities or developmental delays may need extra time and practice.

## **Get your child interested!**

- Let your child get to know their potty chair or portable toilet seat. Your child may want to try sitting on it fully clothed.
- Check out children’s books about using the potty and read them with your child.
- Let your child observe you or other children using the toilet, if you are comfortable with that.
- Show your child how the toilet works. Let them flush the toilet.
- Never leave a toddler alone in a bathroom.

## **Teach the right words.**

Use the terms you want your child to use. You might say in a friendly voice, “I’m changing your diaper because you peed in it.” “You pooped in your diaper, so I’m putting on a clean one.” Use terms that other people will understand.

## **Watch for signs that your child is ready.**

Most children learn to use the toilet between 2 and 3 years of age. Girls show signs of readiness an average of three months before boys. Your child may be ready to start toilet training if they show any of the following signs:

- Knows the diaper is wet or dirty and wants a clean one
- Has bowel movements at regular times
- Stays dry for two hours at a time
- Uses facial expressions, sounds, or words to show they are ready to urinate or have a bowel movement
- Understands the terms you use for bladder and bowel functions
- Follows simple directions and likes to put things in the right place

## **Be aware of signs that your child is not ready.**

You may need to wait a little longer if they simply don’t want to sit on the toilet or if they are going through any of the following:

- An illness
- A phase of irritability or power struggles with you
- Major life changes such as the birth of a new baby or moving to a new home

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# Observing Your Child in Preschool



*Parents often are invited to observe their children in a preschool classroom. Sometimes, a teacher wants a parent to observe because a child is having some difficulty. Some programs let parents visit and watch their children any time. Many parents wonder how to get the most out of watching their children in the classroom. Here are parent-tested hints for observing children in preschool.*

## **Talk to the teacher about when to observe your child.**

- Set a time to observe that works for you and the teacher. Remember that if you don't make an appointment, the class might be gone on a walk or field trip when you get there.
- Ask if there is something the teacher especially wants you to see, and decide together how much time to spend observing.
- Find out if you will be inside the room or if there is a special observation area.

## **Let your child know that you will be at school.**

- You might say, "I want to know more about what happens at your school, so I will be there today to watch for a short time."
- Remind your child that you won't be playing with her when you observe, since you want to see what she usually does at school.

## **Make a list of questions ahead of time.**

- You might want to use some questions other parents often ask: "What does my child do that most other children do? What does he do differently from the others? Who are my child's usual playmates? What are some things she does alone? What does my child do to deal with conflict? Are there times of the day when he seems very comfortable or happy? When does he seem less comfortable?"
- Take your list with you so you can take notes in answer to the questions. Be ready to jot down other ideas or questions you have while observing.

## **Stay focused on your child while you observe!**

- Remind yourself to pay attention to what your child is doing—or you may become distracted by other things going on in the classroom.
- Remember that your child is probably excited that you're there. You may need to encourage him to keep doing what he usually does.
- Say goodbye to your child when you leave.

## **Follow up after your observation.**

- Keep in mind that the teacher will probably be too busy to meet with you right away. Arrange to talk later in person or on the phone. The notes you took will come in handy when you and the teacher talk.
- Invite your child to talk with you about some of the things you noticed.

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# Old Home, New Home, Our Home



*Many families move into a new home at one time or another. Planning a move can be both exciting and sad, causing stress for you and your children. Your attitude will greatly affect the attitudes of your children. Reassure them that they are not the cause for your stress and look for ways to make the move a positive one.*

## Before the move

- Model an optimistic attitude about the change. Try to stay positive even if the move is not a choice but a necessity because of financial reasons or an unwanted job transfer.
- Talk with your children about the new home. Answer their questions and encourage them to discuss any concerns. If possible, visit the new home and neighborhood ahead of the move. If it's too far, show them pictures in a book or online.
- Reassure toddlers and preschoolers the family will be together in the new home, if true.
- Read children's books about moving and play a pretend game of moving to a new home.

## Making the move

- Encourage toddlers and preschoolers to help pack some belongings. Be sure they understand that their toys and clothes will be moved to the new home.
- Keep your child's eating and sleeping routine as consistent as possible. Be sure they can hold on to their favorite blanket or toy.
- Let your child's age, personality, and safety help you decide whether to have them with you on moving day or have them stay with a friend or relative. Some children will find it exciting while others will be upset by the confusion. Some may experience less fear by staying with the parent on moving day.

## After the move

- Make the new home feel more welcoming by setting up your child's space as soon as possible. Familiar meals, books, and music can help them feel at home.
- Delay other changes, such as toilet learning or moving a child from a crib to a bed, until they feel at home in the new setting.
- Encourage your child to share their feelings. They may not understand until after the move that they won't be going back to their old school or neighborhood or friends.
- Help your child connect to the new community by meeting new neighbors. Take advantage of community resources such as library story times.
- If your child is in preschool, talk with the teacher about ways to ease their entry into the class.
- It can take many months for children and adults to adjust to a move. Children may need even more time to adjust if the move follows an upsetting event such as a divorce or death in the family. The first two weeks are usually the most stressful.
- Be patient if your child is more clingy than usual. Their caution around strangers can be a sign of their attachment to their family. Some behavior typical of children younger than their age is common.
- Be sure to reassure your child often that you love them and will be there to take care of them in their new home.

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# Pets and Young Children



*Deciding whether to get a pet? Already have a pet? Loving and caring for a pet enriches the lives of many children. Consider safety as well as benefits when deciding if it's time for a pet in your family. Remember owning a pet can be a long-term commitment.*

## How can I keep my child safe and healthy around pets?

**Choose pets wisely.** If you don't already have a pet, take care to choose from species that are likely to be good with your child and have been temperament-tested for children. Have the pet checked for diseases by a veterinarian before bringing it home. Consider any family allergy problems. Discuss allergy concerns about pets with your child's health care provider.

**Always supervise interactions.** Teach your child not to go near any animal unless you say they may do so. Never leave a young child alone with an animal. Even a gentle pet can harm an infant. Toddlers often hit, poke, or grab animals, which can provoke an attack or harm a small pet. Teach your child to play gently with pets. Be sure your child stays away from pets when they are in their crate, eating, caring for their own babies, or sleeping. Your pet needs a safe area in your home to experience calm and be away from children.

**Encourage good hygiene.** Keep your child away from the litter box. Your child should only be near the animal food bowl if they are helping to fill it. Have them wash their hands after playing with a pet. Treat any animal bite or scratch immediately. Check with your child's pediatrician if any bite or scratch breaks the skin.

## How can my child benefit from growing up with pets?

**Self-esteem and social skills.** Having positive feelings for and experiences with pets can help children feel good about themselves. Children often enjoy talking to an animal. Loving a pet can also help children learn to love and trust others.

**Physical activity.** All pets need exercise. Playing safely and appropriately with pets is a fun way to help make physical activity a part of your child's lifestyle.

**Responsibility and respect.** Learning to take good care of pets can teach children to express concern, empathy, and responsibility for other living things. Parents can use pet care to model and teach respect for all living things. Over the pet's life cycle, parents have opportunities to teach lessons about birth, illness, and death.

**Parent involvement.** Parents and children can share time together as they play with and care for their pets.

## How can my child help with pet care?

A young child can help in small ways but can't be responsible for all of a pet's care. They may be able to feed the dog if you premeasure the food, for example. They can walk with you and the dog, but they shouldn't walk the dog alone. Give your child safe, small tasks, and be sure to supervise them.

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# Play With Your Toddler – Indoors

Turn off the screens! Get moving with your toddler!



Help him roll a ball to knock over plastic bottles.



March in place or dance to music with her.



Let him splash and play in the tub.



Help him stack boxes and cans or pots and pans.



Put toys or books in a pillowcase for her to carry.



Drape a sheet over a table to make a cave or playhouse for her to crawl through.



**Set a good example.  
Let your child see you being active!**

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# Real Work: Preschoolers Can Help



*Doing simple chores helps preschoolers feel responsible and useful at home and in child care.*



## When children do real work, they gain...

- *“Know-how.”* Putting things in order and making things clean are basic “life skills.”
- *A sense of competence.* Preschoolers like to feel that their contributions matter.
- *A sense of cooperation.* Doing chores together allows children to experience the rewards of working as a team.



**Take time for training.** Preschool children need step-by-step directions for new tasks, and chances to practice. They may need friendly reminders about familiar tasks, too. Remember that such guidance is an investment in the future. Pictures of children performing tasks may also be helpful.



## Assign chores wisely.

- Let children choose from a list of tasks. Job charts or chore lists can help them remember their jobs.
- Keep instructions and tasks simple. “Put everything away” is an intimidating order. Instead, you might say, “Please put these books on the shelf. Then come tell me when you’re done.” It also helps to have a set time of day to finish tasks.
- It’s best to postpone her chores if she is hungry, thirsty, tired, or ill.
- *Tasks for preschool children should not involve hot water, heavy equipment, animal or human waste, or toxic chemicals!*



**Start small.** Jobs for preschoolers can include self-care tasks (brushing teeth, getting dressed, etc.), pet care tasks, garden tasks, sorting clothes or mail, and helping make shopping lists. Preschoolers can also help clear the table, find items in the store, and help return books to the library.



**Offer the right tools.** A spray bottle of water and small cleaning rags or sponges can help with wiping down surfaces. You can use old clean socks for dusting. Brooms and garden tools should be child-size.



## Encourage with words and fun.

- Have fun while you work together: “Let’s pretend we’re helpful robots.”
- Focus on effort: “How did you keep the baby laughing while I cooked?”
- Focus on finishing: “Want to relax with a book after we put the groceries away?”
- Give positive feedback when you inspect a child’s work. If something could be better, wait until next time to give more detailed instructions.



**Your example matters.** If you complain about your chores, children may begin to complain, too. Help them see the satisfaction of a job well done. “Shaggy’s coat will look so silky after you brush her!” Express good feelings: “I like to work with you!”

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# Rights of Families Experiencing Homelessness

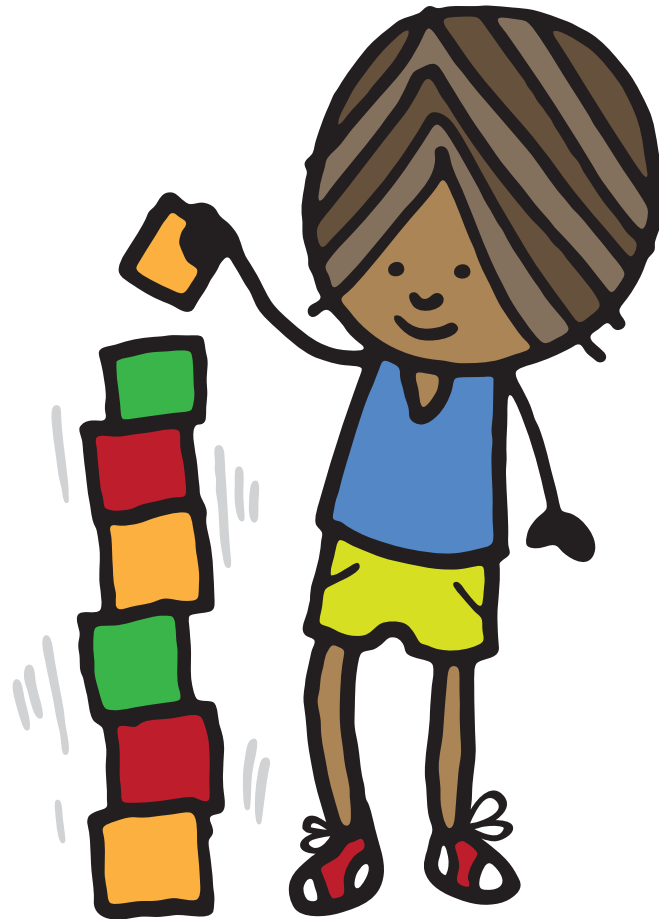
*A young child's development and learning are supported by consistent relationships and stable routines. Children and families experiencing homelessness have attendance, enrollment, and transportation rights that allow them to maintain a stable school placement for the remainder of the school year. Every Illinois school district has a designated homeless liaison who can help you understand these rights:*

## You can enroll anytime

Children can enroll, attend classes, and participate in school activities immediately, even without records or other documentation.

## You can attend a school nearby

Children can attend the public school closest to where the family lives if it is in the best interest of the child.



## You can stay in your school

Children can stay in their school of origin, or the school in which they were last enrolled, if it is in the best interest of the child.

## You can get free transportation

Children can receive transportation to and from school until the end of the year, even if this requires crossing district boundaries.

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## Your school district has resources for you

School districts should provide information on free meals, school supplies, and medical, dental, and other health-related services.

For more information, visit <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/toolkits/experiencing-homelessness/>



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# Say What You Mean! Talking Straight to Children



*Sometimes we want to make things go smoothly with our preschoolers—so smoothly that we shy away from telling them clearly what we really mean.*

## **Keep things simple.**

Children don't have to like everything that we ask of them. You won't hurt your child by saying what behavior you want, if you are calm, brief, friendly, and straightforward. Do you want your preschooler to stop jumping out of her chair at meal times? Say something like "I want you to sit still" instead of "You need to sit still." After all, she may not really "need" to sit still right at that moment! But you want her to finish breakfast quietly so she can be ready for the next activity of the day.

## **Express your understanding of how hard it might be for your child to do what you want.**

When you insist on behaviors such as sitting still or not touching things, it can help to let your child know that you understand that what you are asking is hard. You can use a friendly but firm tone: "I know you would rather run around." "I can see why it might be fun to touch all Grandma's little flower pots. But they break very easily, so I don't want you to do that."

## **State clearly what behavior you want and then move on.**

Once you've said what you want in a pleasant, clear, and firm tone, change the subject. Later, when the crisis has passed, you might explain in detail why the behavior you asked for was so important. But young children are best served by short and direct indications of what behavior their close adults want. They often "tune out" long explanations.

## **It is never necessary to be nasty or mean, but it is necessary to be firm.**

During their preschool years, most children want to be the kind of people we want them to be, but they often need help learning how to do it. We don't have to be critical, sarcastic, or angry when we insist on the behavior we want. But we do have to be firm and clear. Resist the temptation to promise rewards if the child follows your requests; she should comply because you are responsible for her well-being.

## **For related Web resources, see "Say What You Mean! Talking Straight to Children" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Starting Kindergarten? Help Make It a Good Experience!



*Starting kindergarten can be an anxious or an exciting experience for children. They enter an unfamiliar environment and spend time with strangers, but they also make new friends, meet new teachers, and learn new skills. Getting off to a good start is important! If kindergarten is a good experience, children tend to continue to do well in school. If kindergarten is a painful experience, children often have trouble in later years.*

-  **Talk about the kindergarten program *before* the first day of school.**  
Talk with your child about kindergarten before the big day. Find out what she thinks kindergarten will be like. Be prepared to answer her questions: What will the start of the day be like? What will the end of the day be like? Where will I eat lunch and play?
-  **Visit the kindergarten classroom in the spring.**  
If possible, visit the classroom during the school term before she starts. Talk with the teacher and walk around inside the school. Visit the playground, the lunchroom, and the bathrooms. Seeing these places and people can help to ease some concerns your child might have.
-  **Let your child know it's OK to feel anxious.**  
If your child is hesitant about starting kindergarten, let her know that you (or an older brother or sister or friend) felt the same way. Reassure her that she will get used to it very soon.
-  **Be sure your child is well rested and well fed.**  
Kindergarten is usually more tiring for children than preschool was. Your child will be better able to meet the demands of kindergarten if he is well rested and has had a good breakfast. When children start school, regular bedtimes and mealtimes are more important than ever!
-  **Help your child develop a sense of responsibility.**  
During the school years, you will want your child to begin taking responsibility for getting herself and her personal belongings to school on time. You will want her to complete her schoolwork and classroom jobs. You will also want her to let you know when she brings home important notes from school. As much as possible, let your child perform these important tasks for herself, starting in kindergarten. Doing so will help her feel capable and learn to be responsible.
-  **Take kindergarten seriously.**  
Showing interest in your child's kindergarten experience lets him know that school is valuable. Ask him who he played with, what books he read, and what activities he took part in. Read the notes that come home from the teacher and school. Attend parent-teacher meetings and as many other school events as your schedule will allow. Your interest in your child's kindergarten experience sends an important message: **School is important!**
-  **For related Web resources, see "Starting Kindergarten? Help Make It a Good Experience!" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Talking to Your Child's Teacher

*Do you wonder how to build a good relationship with your child's teacher? Here are some words to help you connect.*

## **“Here’s how to get in touch with me”**

This is important if your schedule changes often or you can't always take calls.

## **“I want to ask you something. When could we touch base?”**

Right before and after school are often hectic times for teachers. Set another time to talk.



## **“I appreciate it when you \_\_\_\_\_”**

Teachers like to hear when something works well!

## **“Our family is going through a change. Can I tell you more about it?”**

Family situations might make your child extra tired, worried, or happy. Teachers want to respect your privacy and support your child.

**Children benefit when their families have good connections with their teachers!**

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# Tech Time for Infants and Toddlers

*Because we use technology in many ways every day, infants and toddlers often have early interactions with electronic media. Here are some ways families and caregivers can find a healthy balance with technology and electronic media in their lives.*

## Use technology together

Talk and interact while using technology. Conversations help your child understand what she sees and how technology works. Talk about the content to help your child understand what she sees.

## Be a good role model

Your child is watching your technology use, which can often interfere with daily routines. Put down your device and give your child your full attention.

Use electronic media away from meal and sleep spaces.

## Choose wisely

Choose age-appropriate programming. Infants and younger toddlers (under 18 months) can participate in interactive video chatting with relatives, but they do not benefit from programming or toys that claim to improve children's intelligence. Older toddlers (18–36 months) may benefit from some simple, child-directed programming with support from adults.



## Balance your time

Infants and toddlers need hands-on practice with real objects. They benefit most from their interactions with people through play and conversations. Use technology

to complement other activities rather than relying solely on technology to entertain, teach, or otherwise occupy your child's time.

## Remember safety

Young children are attracted to blinking lights and screens. Childproof as needed, especially heavy electronic items such as big screen TVs, which are tip-over hazards.

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# Tech Time for Young Children

*We use technology in many ways during everyday routines, and young children don't want to be left out. Here are some ways families and caregivers can find a healthy balance with technology and electronic media in their daily lives.*

## Use technology together

Talk and interact while using technology. Conversations help your child understand what she sees and how technology works. Talk about what you see to help your child understand it.



## Choose wisely

Young children have trouble telling the difference between reality and fantasy. Choose age-appropriate, nonviolent media for young children.

## Be a good role model

Your child is watching your technology use, which can often interfere with sleep and meal times. Find a healthy balance between when you use technology and when you take a break from it.

## Encourage learning

Choose educational games and programming that help children learn. Show them that technology can also help them find important, useful information.

## Balance your time

Young children need hands-on play with real objects. They benefit most from their interactions with people through play and conversations. Use technology to enrich and build upon other experiences. Develop a family plan for media and decide ahead of time when and what to watch.

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# Things to Do While You're Waiting: Learning Activity Kits



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Homemade learning activity kits can engage a child who hates to wait.*

-  **All of these kits** slip easily into a purse, glove compartment, backpack, or diaper bag. The kits are for ages **3 and up**. Cost depends on what parents include. Every kit needs:
  - a zipper pouch or resealable plastic bag big enough to hold everything
  - smaller bags to organize the parts of the kit
  - pencils or pens
  - a memo tablet for notes, counting, games, lists, drawings (**NOTE:** To make your own tablets: Cut pieces of blank scrap paper the same size. Staple them together across the top. Add a piece of stiff cardboard to the kit to support the tablet while in use.)
  
-  **A math kit** lets your child play with numbers and problem solving. You might include:
  - a lightweight tape measure
  - an assortment of items to count and sort—coins, beans, buttons, coupons, checkers, game pieces, playing cards, dice, dreidels, etc.
  - a list of favorite fingerplays and action rhymes that involve numbers
  - puzzles made from cut-up postcards or magazine photos glued to thin cardboard
  
-  **An art and literacy kit** encourages creative expression. A child can practice making letters, write and illustrate a book, cut out paper dolls, or play games like Tic-Tac-Toe. You might include:
  - gel pens, washable fine-point markers, or crayons (*Don't leave crayons in a hot car.*)
  - transparent tape or washi tape
  - stickers, stencils, or stamps
  - colorful paper (such as bright magazine pages) for folding or cutting
  - scissors—safe but not frustrating to use
  
-  **A science kit** encourages children to look at the wider world. You might include:
  - a small, inexpensive magnifier
  - paper and a marker or pencil for sketching specimens
  - pipe cleaners
  - sandwich bags for collecting specimens
  - an assortment of items to study—keys, pebbles, seeds, nuts and bolts, etc. (**NOTE:** You can change the assortment from time to time.)
  
-  **A music and sound kit** helps you and your child investigate sound. You might include:
  - small plastic containers with seeds or buttons inside for shaking
  - a variety of rubber bands
  - small scarves or 24-inch ribbons to wave
  - a paper towel roll (for a mini-drum or a “voice changer”)
  - a list of favorite songs and poems
  
-  **For related Web resources, see “Things to Do While You're Waiting: Learning Activity Kits” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Time to Play, Time to Dream: Unscheduling Your Child



*Is your child forgetful, crabby, or constantly tired? He may be “overscheduled.” Child care. Music lessons. Art class. Peewee sports. Play dates. Custody arrangements. Would you be surprised to find your child’s day is as hectic as your own? People who study young children say that youngsters need time for unstructured activity—what adults sometimes call “free time” or “down time.”*

## Why is free time good for children?

**Health.** A child’s body and brain need relief from demands and expectations. Rest and recreation help keep a child healthy and ready to learn!

**Independence.** Unstructured time lets a child make choices. A child who is used to an intense schedule may feel a bit lost if she has to find something to do on her own. But she needs to experience making her own decisions. Allowing her some free time helps her learn to occupy and entertain herself.

**Play and learning.** Children and adults need time to reflect on what they learn. A child can play in ways that let him connect new information with what he already knows. Play can also help him master stressful situations that interfere with learning. Daydreaming may be a way to figure out how to solve a problem.

**Active play and self-regulation.** Active play helps a child have a healthy, fit body. During free play, she can run, jump, climb, throw, and dance until she is tired. Then she can pause, have a drink of water, and play quietly in the sandbox with a friend. She will learn to pace herself during unstructured active play.

## What can I do to create more free time?

**Allow more family “down-time.”** If you’re overscheduled, your child may be too!

**Think about your goals.** Does your 3-year-old really need violin lessons, swimming class, and play group after child care? Or can something wait until he’s older?

**Check in with your child.** Ask if he feels his days are too full or if he wants more time to play or relax.

## What can I do with my children when they’re home?

**Encourage creativity.** Even empty boxes or a mud puddle can inspire your child. Cook, put puzzles together, or make models. She will enjoy feeling competent and being close to you.

**Provide plenty of outdoor experiences.** Walk, shoot baskets, garden, skate, ski, go to the playground, or just find things to do in the back yard.

**Show your child how to play games.** Card games, board games, and physical games encourage friendly interaction and build family relationships.

**Make arrangements** for your child to have unstructured play with other children.

**Stroll or bike** to museums, construction sites, or other interesting places together.

**Make time** to daydream, talk, listen, cuddle, and be “lazy” together.

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# Using Words to Discipline Children



*Here are some words to use when you want to change your child's behavior without yelling, spanking, or being angry.*

-  **Show that you understand why he wants to do what you don't want him to do.** "I know that you want to stay on the playground longer, but..." or "I know that you want me to buy candy for you, but..." You can say no to an action without shaming the child for his reasons.
-  **Give a brief reason why you can't do what she wants you to do.** Be honest, but let her know you are fair and in charge. "It will be time for dinner soon, and I need to be home to get it ready." "Candy may hurt your teeth."
-  **Offer a solution or an alternative.** Even if you believe she knows better, you can remind her. Try saying, "Sand is not to be thrown. Try letting it trickle through your fingers, or put it into the cup," or "Don't hit people. Tell me in words if you're angry, or hit your punching toy."
-  **Remind her that there are other choices.** You can say, "Would you like to pick out a pack of sugarless gum or an apple instead?" or "We can't stay now, but we can come back tomorrow." Be consistent in following through on these choices.
-  **Let your child know that you believe in his ability to do the right thing.** Speak respectfully (in tone and word) to your child. Consider saying, "I know how you like to help," instead of saying, "Don't bother me." Instead of saying, "You always forget to wait your turn," try saying, "I know you'll remember to wait your turn next time."
-  **Set firm limits and rules children can understand.** Use a firm, kind voice, and keep directions short. You may need to repeat rules and directions until your child remembers for himself. "You may not watch that television program. You may turn it off, or I will do it." "When you put your shoes on, we will go outside." "Yes, I know you're eager to go, but the car will not start until you are in your car seat."
-  **Share as many happy times together as possible.** Let him know you enjoy being with him. Laugh, play, hug, and cuddle with your child. Compliment good efforts even if the result isn't perfect. Talk with and read to her. Doing these things lets children know that they are important to you and encourages them to want to please you.

It takes time, readiness, and practice for children to learn to follow rules just as it does for them to learn physical skills, such as walking, or social skills, such as sharing. Learn more about typical behavior for your child's age. Try to let them know that you are the leader and that you are there to help them grow.

*Adapted from Positive Discipline. (1990). ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Available at <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED327271>*

-  **For related Web resources, see "Using Words to Discipline Children" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# What Makes a Good Toy?



*Stores today are full of toys with “eye appeal” for children and adults. This can make it hard to tell if a toy is worth buying. After all, a child can turn almost anything into a toy! Here are some questions to keep in mind when you make decisions about toys for preschool children.*

## Is the toy safe?

A toy should be sturdy and suited to the child’s age. Check the package for the toy maker’s age recommendations.

- **Toys with small parts** may be safe for preschoolers, but not for babies or toddlers.
- **Broken toys** with sharp edges should be repaired or thrown out.
- Toys should be easy to clean and sanitize to keep germs from spreading.
- **Shooting toys** like BB guns are not safe for children of any age.
- **Toys linked to violent TV shows and movies** can lead some children to imitate aggressive behavior they see in the media.
- **Batteries in toys contain dangerous materials.** Toys that need batteries can be hazardous to your budget, too.

## Does the toy engage the child’s imagination and creativity?

- **Children use everyday objects as toys.** They have lots of ideas for how to make them fun! Saucepans and lids, pinecones, pillows, spools, bowls, keys, and empty boxes can easily become part of a child’s play. He can even make his own toys with art materials such as clay, fabric, cardboard, clean plastic bottles, washable paint, markers, and beads.
- **Some toys have a variety of uses.** Building blocks, dolls, animal figures, dress-up props, sand and water toys, toy cars and trucks, and simple construction sets are open-ended toys. They can be used to build models, act out stories, and do experiments.

## Does the toy support children’s development?

A good toy can help promote:

- **motor skills:** wooden stringing beads, lacing cards, riding toys, skates, beanbags, balls of all sizes, climbing structures, other sports equipment
- **scientific reasoning and exploration:** magnetic toys, construction sets, toys that work in sand or water, homemade play dough
- **number concepts and problem-solving strategies:** unit blocks, pattern blocks, gear toys, pegboards, puzzles
- **musical awareness:** shakers, sand blocks, tambourines, finger cymbals, bongo drums, and other rhythm instruments
- **preliteracy experiences:** magnetic letters, interactive books, chalkboards, rubber stamps, alphabet blocks
- **socioemotional development:** toy telephones and cash registers, puppets, dollhouses, any toy that encourages children’s “give and take”

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# When the Teacher Calls...



*No parent wants to hear that his or her child has trouble learning or getting along in school. But if your child's teacher contacts you about a problem, keep in mind that the teacher probably wants your help because you know your child better than anyone else. Here are suggestions that have helped parents talk to teachers when children have trouble at preschool.*

## Stay calm. Focus on what your child needs.

- Ask for details. Exactly what causes the teacher to feel concerned about your child?
- Ask yourself, "What does my child do at home that is like what the teacher describes? What doesn't fit?" "Can my child do what the teacher expects?"
- Arrange a time to observe your child in the classroom so you can see what the teacher is talking about.
- Set a time to talk to the teacher in person.

## Have some questions ready for the meeting with the teacher.

- What could be behind my child's behavior? Do the problems happen during a certain part of the day? Does my child seem to understand what he should and should not do in preschool? Does he need a screening for vision, hearing, or speech? Might something at home be upsetting him (divorce, new sibling, new house)?
- What would the teacher like my child to do instead? What specific things does the teacher expect of all children?
- What has the teacher tried so far to help my child with this problem? You might be able to suggest some other ideas.
- What does the teacher think my child's strengths are? You and the teacher may find ways to build on what your child does well.

## With the teacher, decide what to try at home and preschool to help your child.

- Set some goals together. What would you and the teacher like to see your child doing in two weeks? A month? Six months?
- Suggest things you think the teacher could do at preschool to help your child reach those goals. Teachers often are glad to hear a parent's ideas.
- Listen to the teacher's suggestions for things you might do at home to help your child reach the goals you've agreed on. Have a doctor check your child for allergies or other health problems. Ask if the program has resources that you and the teacher can use if your child needs some extra help.

## Arrange to follow up.

- Set a time to talk with the teacher again after 2–3 weeks of trying the ideas you have agreed on.
- Keep in mind that it may take time to make the changes that can help your child get along better in preschool. Stay in contact with the teacher about your child's progress.

*Parts of this Tip Sheet were adapted from the 1999 ERIC Digest "Parent-Teacher Conferences: Suggestions for Parents" by Ann-Marie Clark, available at <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED433965>*

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# Young Children Need to Play!



*It has been said that play is children's work. Children work hard at their play because they can make it up themselves. The best part about children's play is that it helps children learn a great deal while they have fun. Here are some things to keep in mind about play.*

 **“Play” can be any spontaneous activity that is fun.**

If children organize a ball game, a dramatic play, or a game of hide-and-seek, they are meeting their needs for spontaneous play. When parents enroll their children in little leagues or sign them up for dance lessons, children have a different kind of fun. Children benefit most from a balance of adult-initiated activities and activities that they initiate themselves.

 **Play can be an effective and enjoyable way for children to develop skills:**

- **Language skills** when they play name games, sing songs, and recite jump rope rhymes.
- **Thinking skills** when they construct a block tower, follow directions to a game, and figure out pieces to a puzzle.
- **Small muscle skills** when they string beads, make clay figures, and cut with scissors.
- **Large muscle skills** when they play ball, roller skate, and run relay races.
- **Creative skills** when they make up stories, put on a puppet show, and play with dress-up clothes.
- **Social skills** when they team up to play ball games, discuss rules for a card game, and decide who will play what part in a role-play.

 **It is important to remove barriers to children's opportunities to play, such as:**

**Too many structured activities.** When children's lives are overscheduled with activities, sports, and lessons, they do not have time to themselves and time for unstructured play.

**Too much screen time.** When children watch too much television, their play often mimics what they see on TV (or on the video or computer screen). TV watching, video games, and playing mobile apps also rob children of valuable time to play.

 **If a child says, “I’m bored,” she may need more unstructured time for play.**

Parents often hear children complain about boredom when activities are not scheduled for them. Children need “down time” and time to be alone. These are the occasions when children's imagination and creativity take hold. These are the times when children experience the full benefits of play.

 **For related Web resources, see “Young Children Need to Play!” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

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# Your Child's First Day in Preschool



*A child's first day at child care or preschool can be challenging—for both child and parents! Here are some tips for easing those first-day blues from parents who've lived through the experience.*

## **Make an appointment to visit the program with your child before she starts.**

- Help your child list things she wants to find out about the program. For example, she might want to know the teachers' names, where the restroom is, and whether the class takes naps. Take the list along on your visit.
- Arrange to meet staff members and children so your child will know a few people by name.
- Ask what the staff does to help families prepare for a child's first days. Do teachers make home visits? Are family members welcome to stay in the classroom with the child during the first week or two? Can children bring comfort items (such as teddy bears or family photographs) to keep close at hand?
- After the visit, talk with your child about what you found out. For example, did he find the restroom? Did he learn the teachers' names?

## **Plan ahead for a smooth first day.**

- Several days before your child begins the new program, start a “countdown” with him by marking the days off on a calendar. Invite him to help you collect his school supplies. Let him decide what to wear and what to take for lunch.
- Make sure your child knows how she will get to and from the program—for example, in the car with you or another relative, in a car pool, or on a yellow bus.

## **Create healthy habits for saying goodbye.**

- Begin with simple departure rituals that are meaningful in your family. Your child may want you to hug her and remind her that she will be home again at the end of the day. Or she might want some other interaction with you—sharing a joke or deciding together which activity she will try first, for example.
- If your child feels distressed when you leave, let him know that you understand that he might miss his family while he is at school, but you are sure those feelings will pass, and he will feel better after a time.
- If you bring your child into the classroom, NEVER leave without letting her know you are going, even if you know that she will be upset when you go. Tell staff members that you must leave; they can comfort her and get her interested in an activity.

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# ZZZs, Please! Bedtime for Preschoolers



*Getting enough sleep is important for your child's mental and physical development. A sleepy child is more irritable, more accident prone, and less able to pay attention than a well-rested child. Children vary, but most preschoolers need to sleep about 10 to 12 hours a day. Although there isn't one sure way to raise a good sleeper, the key is to try from early on to establish healthy bedtime habits. Here are some strategies to try.*



## How can I help my child develop good sleeping habits?

- Set fixed times for going to bed, waking up, and taking naps.
- Set aside some quiet time during the day for a nap. Explain that you want your child to start out in bed, but that it's OK to play in the bedroom quietly if he can't sleep.
- Stick to a regular bedtime, alerting your child both 30 minutes and 10 minutes beforehand.
- Include a winding-down period a half hour or so before bedtime. Offer a small, healthy snack. (Remember tooth brushing afterward!) Avoid stimulating games or television. Develop a relaxing bedtime routine that ends in the room where he sleeps.
- Let your child choose which pajamas to wear, which soft toy to take to bed, etc.
- Put him to sleep in the same quiet, cozy, sleep environment every night.
- Use the bed for sleeping only. Keep televisions and computers out of the bedroom.
- Play soft, soothing music if it helps your child relax.
- Tuck your child into bed for a feeling of affection and security.
- Kiss him goodnight and leave the room.



## What if my child has difficulty falling asleep or gets up during the night?

- Keep things quiet at bedtime to ease the transition. If your child can hear talking, laughing, or sounds from a computer or TV, it's easy to see how she might feel left out.
- Let her have a night-light or leave a door slightly open if she dislikes the dark.
- Encourage your child to fall asleep alone. Lying down with a child until she falls asleep can be a hard habit to change. If your child gets up, reassure her that she is safe and return her to her bed.



## What can I do if my child isn't tired at bedtime?

- Increase active, outdoor play (though not within three hours of bedtime).
- Scale back daytime naps.
- Wake her earlier in the morning.

Bedtime battles can test a parent's resolve. If your child is pushing the limits, state your expectations clearly but calmly and stick to the routine. Eventually, your consistency should pay off in a good night's sleep for everyone. If it doesn't and you're worried about your child's sleeping patterns, talk with your doctor.

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# The Project Approach for Preschoolers



*Preschoolers like to investigate! They enjoy learning about the world around them. The Project Approach involves children in studies of things nearby that interest them and are worth knowing more about. Teachers can use the Project Approach to meet most of the Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks. Projects are like good stories. They have three parts: a beginning, middle, and end. Here's a summary of the three phases of project work.*

## Phase 1—Getting Started

- Children choose what to investigate, with some guidance from the teacher.
- The children discuss what they already know about the topic. The teacher helps children record their ideas.
- With help from the teacher, the children list questions that they want to answer during their study.
- Children talk about what answers they might find to their questions. The teacher lists their predictions.

## Phase 2—Collecting Information about the Topic

- The teacher helps the children plan trips to places where they can do fieldwork and helps them find people to interview who can answer their questions.
- With adult help, the children use books and computers to find information.
- During class meetings, children report what they find in their fieldwork. The teacher encourages them to ask questions and make comments about each other's findings.
- The children might make drawings, take pictures, write words and labels, create graphs of things they measured and counted, and construct models. As they learn more, they can revise what they have made.

## Phase 3—Concluding the Project

- Children discuss the evidence they have found that helps them answer their questions. The teacher helps them compare what they have learned with what they knew before the project began.
- Children decide how to show what they did and what they found out to parents and peers who were not there.
- Children create displays to share the story of the project with others. Displays might include their drawings, notes, stories, taped conversations, photographs, models, graphs, and videotapes. Children can also act out what they have learned.
- The children might invite parents and other guests to a presentation about their project. The teacher can help the young investigators decide how to tell the story of what they did and what they found out.

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# The Project Approach: Anticipating What Children Might Learn



*While the overarching goal of project work is to support young children in finding answers to their questions about the topic, it also can be helpful to ask yourself what you would like the whole group—as well as individual children—to gain from the project. Many teachers have found the following strategies useful when planning a project.*

-  **Consider what you want all the children in the class to understand better.**
  - For example, a tree project will likely provide opportunities for children to observe, investigate, describe, and categorize living things. So one of your goals could be to have children name differences between trees and animals.
  - Consider opportunities to deepen children’s understanding across the curriculum. Does the topic afford opportunities for movement, cooperative work, finding information in books, role play, or comparing sizes and shapes? For example, in a project on trees, children might decide to work together to construct a tree, use books to learn about different types of trees, pretend to be creatures that live in a tree, and compare the sizes and shapes of leaves.
  - Create opportunities for children to begin to evaluate their own work for clarity and completeness.
  
-  **Think about what you want individual children to understand better.**
  - Keep in mind the levels of ability and knowledge within your group. For example, some 3-year-olds might remember three parts of a tree, while the 5-year-olds can identify many parts.
  - Think of ways to challenge children who quickly grasp new information. For example, children who can label parts of trees may be ready to compare tree needles and leaves.
  - Note ways to connect the project to the interests of specific children. For example, two children who know a lot about birds could lead a group looking for nests in trees.
  
-  **Plan ways to help children develop specific skills through project work.**
  - Create opportunities for the class to work on representation skills. For example, different groups can work on turning their field drawings into three-dimensional models of trees.
  - Look for ways to address a child’s specially designed goals through project work. For example, making field sketches of trees might help two or three children work on improving their pencil grip.
  
-  **Consider how the project might support children’s social competence and enhance their curiosity as learners.**
  - Plan some ways to invite a shy child into class discussions.
  - Plan group activities that give all children chances to discuss their ideas and help each other with tasks.
  - Plan opportunities for children to follow up on things they are curious about.
  - Find ways to help children think about what might interest others about the project and develop ways to inform them.
  - Build in activities that help children express appreciation for others’ work and ideas.

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# The Project Approach: Children Taking Surveys



*Surveys are popular sources of information for adults. Young children can also use simple surveys. They can ask others for predictions related to a project or ask about others' opinions, experiences, and work. Here are some teacher-tested suggestions for helping preschoolers conduct surveys.*

## **Demonstrate ways to construct and take surveys.**

- Let the children watch you making a survey form with a question that has two possible answers (“Yes/No”; “Agree/Disagree”). During a project on a dentist’s office, for example, you might pose the question, “Have you been to a dentist?” Attach your survey to a clipboard and go to the children one by one to ask the question. Show how to choose a column and make the check mark for a response.
- When you have surveyed all the children, report the findings to the class. Show them how to compare the two response columns. “You counted eight checks in the ‘Yes’ column and four in the ‘No’ column. That means eight people said they have been to a dentist and four said they have not.”

## **Help children to take their own surveys.**

- Encourage them to work in pairs, or groups of three or four.
- Talk with them about what they want to find out, and help them decide how to phrase the survey question. With experience, they may be able to create surveys with more than two possible responses.
- Help them decide whom to survey. Will the survey be for classmates, families, or someone else?
- Add blank two-column survey forms to the writing area. The teacher can help the children write their question and the children can illustrate their survey by drawing pictures of the two options (e.g., “Do you like ice cream or pizza?”).

## **Let children take surveys during any phase of project work.**

- In Phase 1, help children focus surveys on people’s opinions and experiences. Their questions might include, “Do you like the flavor of the toothpaste at the dentist?” “Did you ever lose a tooth?”
- Encourage children to use surveys in Phase 2 to gather predictions related to the investigation, or to enhance fieldwork. They might ask questions such as, “Do you think we will see toothbrushes when we visit the dentist?” On the site visit, they might get permission to ask patients, “Is the dentist chair comfortable?”
- In Phase 3, let children survey classmates to choose ways the class might represent project findings. “Do you think we should make a model of the dentist’s chair or a mural of the office?” Phase 3 questions might also be reflective. “Do you think you might want to be a dentist someday?”

## **Make surveys a regular part of classroom life.**

- Create survey templates to keep on hand and have clipboards and pencils available. (Make inexpensive clipboards using stiff cardboard and paper clips.)
- Set aside time during class meetings for children to report on their survey findings.

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# The Project Approach: Helping Children Ask Questions



*The main purpose of a project is to find answers to questions about the topic the children are investigating, but teachers often find that preschool-age children have trouble formulating questions. Here are some ways to help children develop and express their own questions during each phase of project work.*

## In Phase 1 of project work, engage children's curiosity about the topic.

- During large group, ask questions such as “What are some things you want to find out about the doctor’s office?” or “What do you wonder about the doctor’s office?”
- Invite children to respond to classmates’ ideas. Listen carefully—especially to disagreements or confusion. Then restate their comments as questions. “Trey says he went to the doctor and didn’t get a shot. But Rob says his doctor always gives shots. So, one question could be, ‘Just when does a doctor give shots?’”
- Write out what children ask so they see their questions in print.
- Help the children group similar questions together so they can form an overarching big question.

## During Phase 2, let children formulate questions related to fieldwork.

- Invite children to express questions by drawing. For example, before a doctor comes to visit, you could say, “Tomorrow, Dr. Patel will be here to talk about how she takes care of children in her office. Please make a drawing to show what you would like to find out from her.” One child might draw a stethoscope to show they want to learn about hearing a heartbeat, while another might draw a computer to indicate their interest in how the doctor keeps track of information. Be sure and write their question on the back of their drawing so you can help them remember it.
- Help children put their wonderings into words before, during, and after fieldwork. For example, before a site visit to a health clinic, you might ask Sara, “When we go to the clinic, what do you want the nurse to show us?” If she says, “I want to see how they fix bones that break,” you can then reframe her statement: “So your question is, ‘How do you fix broken bones?’”
- Ask your own questions. You could say, “I’ve always wanted to know what doctors mean by the word ‘fractured.’ So my question for the doctor will be, ‘What is a fractured bone?’”

## During Phase 3, let children plan ways to show others what they asked and what they found out.

- Ask children to think about questions that other people might have about the project. “What are some things Mr. Jay’s class might want to know about the doctor’s office?” That process can help them decide what to include in displays.
- Help the children make charts that match the questions to the answers they found. Invite the class to decide how to display the charts.

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# The Project Approach: Helping Preschoolers Represent What They Learn



*During each phase of a class project, preschool children can represent their ideas about and understanding of a topic in many ways.*

-  **Phase 1: Children can represent what they already know or recall about the topic they will be studying.**
  - Invite children to draw on paper or a tablet, paint, or tell about experiences and ideas related to the topic. During Phase 1 of a corn project, Josh might draw his family's cornfield. Ellie might make a painting of corn chips.
  - Help children label and display their work from Phase 1.
  
-  **Phase 2: As the study progresses, children can represent their findings.**
  - Help children think about how best to express ideas so that others can understand what they did and what they found out.
  - Show children how to depict what they counted, measured, and compared by making graphs, charts, and diagrams.
  - Invite each child to make three successive drawings of an object related to the project. This may take several days. Label these *Drawing 1*, *Drawing 2*, *Drawing 3*. Invite children to examine and comment on classmates' drawings. "Rajesh says that Nicki's third leaf drawing shows more veins than her first drawing. Nicki, what made you decide to make more veins?"
  - Make time for children to dictate reports about what they found out during fieldwork, for display on a bulletin board or in a book illustrated with their drawings.
  - Let children select, organize, label, and display photos and drawings that show how they did their Phase 2 research.
  - Provide supplies (clay, wood, wire, fabric, assorted boxes) so children can make models, dioramas, collages, and murals to represent their ideas and findings.
  - Help the children explore problems they face as they represent what they did and learned. For example, what are some ways they might fasten parts together? What would make it easier to cut thick cardboard?
  
-  **Phase 3: Children can use many media to represent what they found out.**
  - Put props related to the project in the block area and dramatic play area so that children can re-create a place they visited (farm, restaurant, store, etc.).
  - Model by reading poetry and teaching songs and fingerplays related to the topic. Encourage children to create poems about what they studied.
  - Let children use musical instruments to re-create sounds they heard during fieldwork (for instance, the sounds of a construction site or a farm).
  - Invite children to tell the story of the project in a book, play, puppet show, video, or slide show.
  - Help children decide which aspects of their work will most interest people who come to see the story of the project. Help them display their work for guests to see.

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# The Project Approach: Including Every Child

*The Project Approach can benefit all children, including those with special needs. Simple adaptations enable a child with disabilities to join in the work on projects.*



## Notice what interests each child.

- Does Jake's attention deficit disorder sometimes send him off-task? Find out if something in particular attracts him. Maybe the things that catch his attention can be included in the project.
- Does Sophie tend to withdraw or avoid participating in what the class is doing? Help her get involved in studying a topic of her own choice. Then see if other children are interested in it, too.

## Give children chances to have a range of learning experiences.

- Do the individualized goals for Ty include using verbal responses and requests? He can work on those goals when he helps to plan a project or makes up a question to ask a guest expert or someone at home.
- Does Malik rely on touch because he has a visual impairment? Include him in a small group studying textures of objects related to the project. Encourage the other group members to try Malik's ways of studying and describing things.
- Are some children unsure how to communicate with a classmate who has a hearing impairment? Teach them some basic signs and show them other ways to interact.

## Adapt project tasks to children's special needs.

- When you plan a site visit or field trip, find out how accessible the place is for children with physical disabilities. Ask for parent volunteers who can help children on ramps, stairs, or elevators.
- If Marta's wheelchair can't get around easily during a site visit, invite her to photograph classmates from where she sits. Later, Marta can talk with the other children about what they were doing in the pictures she took.
- Does Winona have speech or language delays? She can make drawings or models to show what she observes. Have her use signs or a picture system, or let her dictate a few words about her work each day.
- Does José have trouble holding a paintbrush? Add foam to the handle to help him grip it. Give him a sponge or roller for painting large areas of a class mural.

## Arrange active roles for children with disabilities.

- Set up the room so that a child in a wheelchair is at eye level with peers during discussions.
- Schedule activities so that children who work more slowly than others can take part. Does Leah need extra time to tell others what she has learned? Let her be the first in the group to talk while her classmates' attention is still fresh. Or help her practice what she wants to say ahead of time.
- Make sure that children with disabilities have opportunities to be in leadership roles. Take hints from the positive ways in which the other children include a classmate with special needs.

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# The Project Approach: Phase 1—Choosing a Topic to Investigate



*Teachers can use the Project Approach to meet most of the Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks. Projects are like good stories. They have three parts: a beginning, middle, and end. The first phase begins with choosing what to investigate, and usually lasts about two weeks. Here are some tips to help teachers make the final decision about what a project topic will be. (See also *The Project Approach: Phase 1—Getting Started*.)*



## Consider what makes a good project topic.

- Children can safely study the topic firsthand.
- The class has easy access to local resources about the topic. “Animals in the Park” is better suited to Illinois preschoolers than is “The Rain Forest.”
- Experts are available to talk with the class about the topic.
- The topic is sensitive to local culture but general enough to be culturally appropriate (“Holiday Meals of Our Families” rather than “Our Christmas Dinner”).
- The project will encourage children to develop an interest worthy of their time and energy.
- The topic is the right size. “The Insects in Our Garden” is a more suitable topic for preschoolers than “Monarch Butterflies” or “Insects of the World.”



## Use children’s interests as a source of project topics.

- The number of interests among a group of preschoolers can be very large! Look for topics that have wide appeal among the children. It helps to keep a list of things that the children talk about with each other.
- Keep in mind that not all of children’s interests are equally worth following up. For example, a study of cartoon characters will not be a worthwhile project.
- You can help the children to develop new interests. You might share things that seem likely to appeal to them: “Look at this huge bug on the swing!” Or ask them to think about ordinary things in new ways: “What kinds of things go on in the supermarket?”



## Make good use of school time.

- State or local curriculum standards can give you some good ideas for project topics.
- Focus on topics that the children may not be able to study outside of the school day, such as insects or the school bus.
- Choose topics at the beginning of the year that are familiar to most of the children in the group (“The Shoes We Wear” or “Our Bags and Backpacks”).
- As children become familiar with project work, they can study topics that reflect and support the diversity of their backgrounds and experiences (“The Breads We Eat”).



## For related Web resources, see “The Project Approach: Phase 1—Choosing a Topic to Investigate” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# The Project Approach: Phase 1—Getting Started



*Teachers can use the Project Approach to meet most of the Illinois Early Learning and Development benchmarks. Projects are like good stories. They have three parts: a beginning, middle, and end. Phase 1 usually lasts about two weeks, including selection of a topic. Here are some tips to help with getting the project started. (See also *The Project Approach: Phase 1—Choosing a Topic to Investigate.*)*



## Find out what the children already know about the topic.

- Be sure the children are clear about what they will be investigating.
- Bring some items related to the project topic (such as objects, photos, or books), and invite the children to bring similar items from home. Let children handle the items, and invite them to talk about their own experiences related to the objects.
- Invite children to draw or paint pictures that depict their memories or ideas related to what they are studying.
- Read some nonfiction books that contain information about the topic.
- Use class meetings to involve the children in discussions of their own experiences and ideas related to the topic. During these discussions, create a topic web on chart paper to record and organize the children's ideas.



## Make a list of questions the children would like to answer during their research.

- Ask the children what they want to find out about the topic. Instead of saying, “Do you have any questions?” ask them questions such as “When the nurse visits our class, what do you want her to show you?” Or “What do you want her to talk about (or explain)?”
- Rephrase children's statements. A child might say, “I want her to show how she fixes bones when they break.” Then you can say, “So your question is ‘How do you fix broken bones?’”
- Write the children's questions on chart paper. Or you might ask them to use drawings to depict their questions. You can add your own questions to the list, too.
- Ask children to predict the answers to their questions. List children's predictions and their reasons for them alongside the questions. The class will revisit this list during Phase 3 of the project.



## Talk with the children about how to begin their research.

- Help them think about where they can go to do fieldwork.
- Talk with them about whom to invite to class to help them get information.

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# The Project Approach: Phase 2—Doing Fieldwork



*Most of the Illinois Early Learning Benchmarks can be met when young children are involved in project work. Projects are like good stories. They have a beginning, middle, and end. The middle phase is for fieldwork and finding answers to children's questions. It can last from three weeks to several months. Here are some ways to help children do fieldwork. (See also *The Project Approach: Phase 2—Getting Ready for Fieldwork*.)*

## Visit sites where children can do fieldwork.

- Before a site visit, help children plan what they might draw, photograph, collect, or record. Invite them to decide who will ask specific questions. Ask for volunteers for each task. (“Who will draw the dashboard? Who will record the bus starting up?”)
- Give children clipboards, paper, and pencils to make observational drawings during site visits. They can also take bags for collecting things.
- On the site visit, take along a list of who agreed to do which tasks. Gently remind children of their responsibilities as needed.

## Encourage children to collect information outside of class.

- Children can gather information on some topics from their families. For example, they can take questionnaires to family members to find out how many have had broken bones. They might also draw or photograph family items related to the project.
- Children can also bring in objects from their families related to the topic. Help them make labels, and display the objects together on a countertop or table.

## Invite guest experts.

- Let the children practice asking their questions before the expert comes to visit. If necessary, gently remind them to ask their questions during the visit.
- After the visit, invite the children to talk about what the visitor told them and showed them. Write their main points down on chart paper, and post the list in the classroom.

## Help children discuss each other's work.

- If a small group of children is going on a site visit, encourage them to ask those who are not going, “What do you want us to find out for you?”
- When children return from fieldwork, let them report what they found to the whole class. They can share their drawings, digital photos, or things they have collected. Encourage the children who did not go on the trip to ask questions of those who did.

## Monitor progress.

- As a project proceeds, help the children check their original topic web and their original list of questions and predictions (See *The Project Approach: Phase 1—Getting Started*). Keep track of questions the class has answered and list new ideas or questions that have come up.

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# The Project Approach: Phase 2—Getting Ready for Fieldwork



*Most of the Illinois Early Learning Benchmarks can be met when young children are involved in project work. Projects are like good stories. They have a beginning, middle, and end. The middle phase is for fieldwork and finding answers to children's questions. It can last from three weeks to several months. Here are some ways to help children prepare to do fieldwork. (See also *The Project Approach: Phase 2—Doing Fieldwork*).*

## Divide the class into small interest groups.

- Invite the children to sign up for small groups (4 or 5 children) to focus on specific questions related to the project topic. “You can sign up to find out about these questions: Who works in our school? What is the lunchroom like? What is the parking lot like?” If a child has a hard time choosing a group, suggest which one to join. “Since you like cars, you could join the parking lot study group.”
- Help group members talk about where to get answers to their questions.
- Have children in each group explain their plan to the other groups and ask them for suggestions.

## Plan where to look for information.

- Discuss possible “guest experts,” and help children write invitations to them.
- Identify places (sites) nearby to do fieldwork on their topic (supermarket, hospital, farm). Visit the locations beforehand without the children. Talk to those in charge about what you want the children to see and learn. Be sure that a child who uses a wheelchair or walker can have full access to the site.
- Keep in mind that some site visits need not involve the whole class. For example, the small group studying the parking lot could go there without all their classmates.
- Enlist parent volunteers to go with small groups during fieldwork.

## Encourage children to find answers to their questions in various ways.

- Help children make a questionnaire to give to family and neighbors. Show them how to form Yes/No questions. “Did you ever break a bone?” “Did it hurt?”
- Help children develop interview questions to ask guest experts and people at the site. “What does a supermarket manager do?” “Are you afraid of the dentist?” “How do you change bike tires?” They can make drawings to depict what they want to know, or you can list their questions.
- Take a small group to a library and ask a librarian to help the children find information.
- Help them find information on the Internet.

## Provide the materials children will need for fieldwork.

- Be sure children know how to make observational drawings.
- Show children how to use cameras, counters, timers, recorders, and other equipment for their investigations.

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# The Project Approach: Phase 3—Concluding the Project



*Most of the Illinois Early Learning Benchmarks can be met when young children are involved in project work. Projects are like good stories. They have a beginning, middle, and end. Projects can last from a week to several months, depending on the topic, the children's interest, and the resources available. Here are some tips to use during the last phase of a project to help enrich what the children have learned.*

## Develop a plan for concluding the study.

- Revisit the topic web and original list of questions with the children (see The Project Approach: Phase 1—Getting Started). Which of their questions have and have not been answered? If the children have addressed most of the questions, suggest that it might be time to finish the project.
- Suggest possible closing activities: “You could invite other classes to see your displays. You could plan an Open House so your families can see your work. You could put on a play that shows what you learned.”

## Invite children to discuss their research findings.

- Involve the children in talking about the predictions they made in Phase 1 about the possible answers to their questions: “Jamal, you predicted that you would find out that workers get paid with coins. How did that turn out? Oh, you found out they get paid with checks instead.”
- Ask the small groups to decide what parts of their study they think should be represented in a classroom display.
- Invite some children to pick the photographs taken during the study that best tell the story of the project. Involve the children in deciding how to display them.
- Encourage children to apply what they have learned to their dramatic play. For instance, they might turn the block area into a place they studied (restaurant, beauty parlor, pet shop).

## Organize a culminating event.

- Engage the children in preparing for a final event in which they deepen their awareness of what they have learned and invite others to share in it. This event is a main part of the final phase of project work.
- Help children make invitations for their families and other classes to attend the event.
- When children prepare displays and presentations about their work, ask them to think about what their visitors would find most interesting.
- Make time for children to dictate information about the project. Give each child and each group time to draw, paint, or complete models that show what they have learned.
- Help the children decide how to share responsibility for presenting the story of the project and for explaining the displays to guests. Keep in mind that the children may need to rehearse before the presentation.

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# Collaborating with Interpreters and Families

*Communicating with families is key in sharing information between home and your school or center. Some families need an interpreter to best understand you. This tip sheet will give educators and other caregivers some tips in working with interpreters.*



## Do you need an interpreter?

- First, determine whether a family needs an interpreter. Your program may require an intake or parent information form when a child begins attending. This form may provide information about a family's home language.
- Some families who speak another language at home may be bilingual or multilingual and proficient in English. Ask the family what they need.

## Finding an interpreter

- Your school district or center may have access to interpreter services, so begin your search there. If the child is receiving early intervention (birth to age 3) services, you may have access to interpreters through the Illinois early intervention system. Additionally, there may be agencies in your community that provide interpretation services.
- Some interpreters may be able to support programs and families virtually through a video or phone call; check with them about possibilities. Searching for and finding interpretation services can also help additional families you might work with in the future.
- If there are no other options, you may need to use a family member or family friend to interpret, although this is not ideal. Do not use a child, such as a fellow student or an older sibling, as an interpreter.

## Planning for meetings with families

- Schedule meetings at times that work for everyone. Plan for any meetings to take twice as long when you talk through an interpreter.
- Give any relevant information to the interpreter before the meeting, especially if you are going to use specific educational terms such as speech development, motor skills, developmental screening, etc.

## Communicating effectively through the interpreter

- During the meeting, sit across from the family so you can see and speak to them easily without turning. Ideally the interpreter would sit next to and slightly behind the parent. This setup would be different when working with American Sign Language interpreters.
- Speak directly to the family and make eye contact with them, not the interpreter. Use your natural speech and language and positive body language. Say a few sentences and then pause so the interpreter has a chance to interpret.

## Keeping the family informed

- Take some time to summarize the meeting points and the next steps. Make sure to confirm your next meeting date together with the family and the interpreter.
- Provide the family with a written meeting reminder in the family's home language. Ask the interpreter to help write the reminder. As you wrap up, remember to thank the family and let them know that you enjoy working with their child.

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# Connecting with Parents: “But He Doesn’t Do That at Home!”



*Linda bites her classmates. Nate’s rude talk upsets everybody. But the parents seem stunned when you tell them you would like to find ways to help their child get along better at school. “That doesn’t sound like our child!” they exclaim. “We’ve never seen that behavior!” If this sounds familiar, here are some suggestions that may help when parents say, “He doesn’t do that at home!”*



## Trust what the parent says. Maybe the child only acts that way at school!

- Keep in mind that a child new to a group setting is dealing with the stress of unfamiliar people, places, and schedules.
- Remember that even children familiar with your program may still be working out how to interact with people outside their families.
- Accept that the parents are puzzled. Ask them to help you figure out possible causes for the challenging behaviors.



## Observe the child carefully, and keep a written record of what you see.

- Be specific: Exactly what does Nate do? What does he say? Note when and with whom incidents occur and what else is going on in the room at the time.
- Share this record with the child’s parents. Ask for their perspectives on it.
- Be sure to focus on positive behavior as well as difficulties!



## Invite the parents to observe the child in the classroom.

- Give them chances to see the behavior that is causing concern. Then ask what they think about it. You may want to offer them the IEL Tip Sheet “Observing Your Child in Preschool.”
- If visits are not possible, ask parents’ permission to video record parts of the child’s day so they can see him or her in action.
- Keep in mind that parents are more likely to be helpful when they see that the child’s behavior gets in the way of friendships or learning experiences.



## Stay in touch with the family.

- Let parents know that you value their views of their child. Show that you welcome their input in helping the child adapt to school. Avoid the impression that you think the child is “hopeless.”
- Make a plan with the parents for dealing with the challenging behavior. Ask for their suggestions again. Let them know what your goals are: “We want Linda to know that she can show feelings without biting. When the biting stops, other children won’t run away when she tries to play with them.”
- Let them know that you will keep them posted on the child’s progress. Find out if they prefer a phone call, a note, or an email message. Then be sure to follow through.
- Keep in mind how uncomfortable parents might be about the child’s behavior. Make sure they know you don’t blame them for what the child does.



For related Web resources, see “Connecting with Parents: ‘But He Doesn’t Do That at Home!’” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Cooperation in the Preschool Classroom: Class Discussions



*Class discussions can teach children respect for others, communication skills, how to interact with peers and adults, and how to vote.*



## What is a class discussion?

A class discussion is different from the usual circle time. It is a meeting that brings children together to discuss ideas, solve problems, organize the day, plan activities, or celebrate what goes well.



## What do children gain from class discussions?

They learn to

- listen and respond to others. “Dan agrees with Tia’s idea. Who has anything to add?” “Lilly suggested serving cupcakes at the party, but Sophia recommends cookies. How should we decide?”
- ask questions and share information. “Jamal wants to report what he learned about snow. Then you can ask him about it.” “We all agreed that since our new tablets are so popular, turns will be limited to 15 minutes so everyone gets a chance to use one this week.”
- set expectations together. “All of you voted to make ‘Hands to yourself!’ a class rule.”
- think about time. “After the meeting, we usually go outside.”
- solve problems and make decisions together. “Jada, you wanted snack time to be earlier.” Jada might then reply, “Yes, I want us to vote.”
- plan what to study and how to share knowledge. “What are some ways you could show what you learned about eggs?”
- build relationships and gain a sense of community. “You had a very long talk, and you made a plan that works!”



## What is the adult’s role?

The adult facilitates class discussions by

- including them in the daily schedule. Even on a busy day, try to fit in a shorter class discussion.
- stating the purpose of class discussions. “It’s time to choose songs for our Open House.” (Note: If you have meetings only to handle problems, children may start to dislike them.)
- helping children remember to “speak up,” take turns, stay on topic, and listen to others.
- encouraging children to give each other suggestions.
- keeping track of children’s ideas or questions on an easel or whiteboard.



## What’s a good schedule for class discussions?

- You can start the first day the children are together. You might have one to start the day and one to “wrap it up.”
- Early in the year, a five-minute class discussion may be long enough. Several short ones may be better than a long one that makes children restless. As children get used to them and see their benefits, these discussions may last 15 minutes or more.

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# Ease Those First-Day Blues!



*Separations, sadness, fears, and tears—a young child’s first day in your program can be challenging for children and adults! These strategies can help teachers and caregivers make it easier for children and parents to get through those first-day blues.*

## Help families prepare.

- Make home visits before the first day—that way the child and the parent see a familiar face when they arrive.
- Send welcoming notes or e-mails with pictures of staff. Children like to get mail, and the photos help them recognize their teachers on the first day.
- Schedule an open house for children and parents outside of regular program hours.
- Offer families a list of strategies that may help children deal with being in a new place away from parents.
- Involve children in making a book about your classroom to share with new families. Include pictures of staff members, parts of the room, and children engaged in every-day activities.

## Help children “ease in.”

- Shorten the first day so child and parent go through a full day’s schedule in just a few hours.
- Invite parents to stay in the room for extended periods the first week, gradually reducing their time each day.
- Show every child where to find bathrooms, cubbies, coat hooks, cots, soap, paper towels, and facial tissues.
- Let children know that you understand that they might wish their parents were there. Assure them that they are safe with you and that you believe they will soon find something they like to do.
- Teach cooperative games so children can enjoy each other right away.
- Sing songs that use children’s names (for example, “Willaby Wallaby” or “Pawpaw Patch”) to help classmates get to know each other.

## Welcome the child who starts after the year has begun.

- Ask the group to discuss ways that they might help “new children” adjust to being in your program. Even if the year has just begun, the other children are veterans compared with “the new one!”
- Assign a caring “partner” to help a new child find his way around.

## For related Web resources, see “Ease Those First-Day Blues!” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Encouraging Child-to-Child Conversation



*Most preschool and kindergarten classes include regular whole group meetings. Often called circle or group time, these meetings may include listening to stories, singing, fingerplays, and other teacher-led activities. Group meetings are also good times to encourage children to talk directly to each other about what matters to them. Child-to-child conversations during group meetings can help meet several Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks (1.A.ECc, 1.B.ECb, 1.B.ECd, 31.A.ECb).*

## At the beginning of the week, have children “check in” with each other during the group meeting.

- Invite children to report to the group about things they recently saw or did that they think might interest classmates.
- Invite the listening children to respond. To get started, you can say things like, “Sara, I know you’ve been to the park Josh is talking about. Ask Josh if he saw some of the things you noticed when you went there.”
- You might also say things like, “Josh, you told us about animals you saw at the park. Ask Corina about animals that she saw last weekend when she visited her grandfather.”
- Encourage children to talk about things they have in common. For example, if Noah saw a movie on Sunday, and other children also saw it, invite them to share their views about it.

## Make group meeting a time to explore differences of opinion.

- Find opportunities to have children present their points of view. For example, you might say, “Noah says he likes to shop with his family. Joo-Yun, I know you don’t feel that way. Would you please explain to Noah how you feel about going shopping?”
- Encourage children to share and exchange views with each other, instead of reporting and responding mainly to you.

## Have children ask for and give information during group meetings.

- Ask some of the children to talk about what they plan to do during the morning. Invite the other children to comment: “Ava and Jaime want to finish making their ambulance, but they need wheels. Who has a suggestion for them?”
- When children come back after being absent, invite other children to tell them about events that they missed and decisions that the class made.
- If a child was absent during a special event, invite him to ask the other children to tell him about the event.
- Keep in mind that your role is that of discussion leader. Find out if the children who asked questions are satisfied with the responses or if they want to ask their classmates anything else.

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# Engaging Every Child



*Preschool teachers know that children develop and learn at different rates and in different ways. To engage every child, teachers pay attention to how individual children engage with the classroom environment. They also present information in multiple ways, and they offer many opportunities for children to express what they know and can do. This six-step cycle can help you meet the needs of individual children—and of all children.*

## Step 1: Observe and listen to the child.

- What does he do well? What interests him? How does he interact with others?
- What does he try to do that is hard for him? How does he handle challenges, frustration, distractions?
- What does he say about his classroom experiences?

## Step 2: Reflect on what you have observed about the child.

- What did you notice about her approaches to learning and her learning style?
- What simple activities might help her gain specific skills, handle a routine, or expand her knowledge of a topic? Why is it important to make adaptations for her now?
- Does she have an individualized service plan related to special needs? If so, how do your ideas about her needs, interests, and abilities fit with those of her family or the professionals who work with her?

## Step 3: Plan simple ways to help the child learn more about a topic, engage in an activity, or manage a specific routine.

- How will your plans be implemented? What materials, experiences, or space will you provide?
- What do you anticipate that the child will gain from these activities?
- If he has a service plan, how will these experiences address his learning goals? (You will need to discuss this with his family and/or any professionals involved with him.)
- What might interfere with this plan?

## Step 4: Carry out the individualized plan, while noticing the child's response.

- How does she engage with the planned activity? Does she seem interested? Bored? Frustrated?
- What does she say about the activity?

## Step 5: Reflect on what you observed.

- What seemed to go well for the child? What do you think he gained?
- Were you surprised by anything that happened? What challenges arose?
- What might make a good “next step” for the child? More time with the same activity? A new activity that builds upon what he did?

## Step 6: Modify the plan based on observation and reflection—and continue the cycle!

*Information for this Tip Sheet was adapted from three different sources. For links to these sources and related Web resources on engaging every child, visit <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/engaging/>*

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# Games for *All* Young Children



*Games help make movement fun. Play and laughter can help develop friendship while encouraging physical fitness. Consider each child's abilities, and encourage all children to play by adapting games for children with disabilities and developmental delays.*

## **Play beach ball games.**

Beach ball play can be a fun way to encourage control skills such as hitting, kicking, rolling, and catching. Demonstrate hitting the beach ball with different parts of your body. Emphasize safety. Keep beach balls away from the mouth and stay within a safe space.

## **Set up a maze indoors or out.**

Try using large mats folded to stand on end or chairs with sheets draped over the back to form walls. Have one starting point but several exits. Make the path wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and the walls sturdy enough for a child with visual impairment to feel their way. Place pictures or tactile objects on the walls and give children a picture checklist that they can mark as they find the pictures.

## **Provide a target for throwing.**

Paint a target on the sheet, tie or sew bells onto it, and hang it in a safe place. Let children throw balls or safe beanbags at the target. Encourage children to make the bells ring. Let one child give verbal directions in throwing to a classmate who has visual impairments. Allow a child with poor motor control to get very close to the target.

## **Try the “freeze” game!**

Have each child move their arms and legs and head in time to music. When the music stops, all children freeze in their positions for a few seconds. Play this game with eyes closed, then ask them to open their eyes to see the funny poses.

## **Lead the children in dancing games**

Teach children simple dance moves such as twisting, twirling, spinning, stomping, clapping, or flapping their arms like a chicken. Play music and call out dance moves for students to do. Hold up visual cue cards of the moves for children who may respond better to nonverbal directions. Let children take turns calling out the moves.

## **Play parachute games.**

Have children sit in a circle around a parachute. Ask them to hold on to the edge to complete tasks such as shaking light balls in the middle of the parachute or making waves. Provide an easy-to-grip handle or wrist strap for children who have trouble gripping with their hands. If some children use wheelchairs, play parachute games with other children sitting in their chairs as well to create an even surface.

## **Have fun with rhythmic ribbons!**

Children can wave colorful ribbons in time to music and form patterns with different colors. Use a soft elastic or rubber band to secure a ribbon to the wrist or ankle of a child who lacks motor control.

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# Helping Preschoolers Learn in Two Languages

*Does your preschool class include children who speak languages other than English at home? Young dual language learners benefit from maintaining their home language while they are learning English. Here are some ways that teachers who are not fluent in their preschoolers' home languages can help.*



## It is important for children to maintain their home languages as they learn English.

- Learning in both languages helps keep a child moving forward in many developmental areas.
- Keeping a child's home language helps preserve family ties.
- Knowing more than one language is an asset.

## Make the classroom a place where *all* children feel valued.

- Never allow teasing or isolation that could make a child feel unsafe or unwelcome.
- Put posters and pictures on walls related to all the children's cultures. Make sure those images reflect accurate, modern examples of each culture.
- Provide some books and games in the home languages of all children.
- Label objects in the classroom using children's home languages as well as English. Children can participate by placing the label on the correct item.
- Create a picture chart showing basic needs—eating, drinking water, and entering the bathroom—along with appropriate words in English. Children can point to a picture to communicate their needs, then repeat the words that the teacher uses.

## Plan ways to bring the children's home languages and cultures into the classroom.

- Learn at least a few words in each of the home languages that you expect to have in your classroom. Learn to say hello in each language and make a habit of greeting children and families in their home language.
- Ask your local library for help or look for free translation apps.
- Play music from each child's culture and home language.
- Ask parent classroom volunteers to read some books in each child's home language.
- Invite children to teach words and phrases from their home languages to the class.
- Encourage children to share objects or games from their home cultures.

## Help children to understand and use both English and their home languages.

- Create routines that help children anticipate what will happen next even when they don't understand all that is said.
- Use visual aids to illustrate words used in class.
- Reinforce English words they are learning with ongoing activities over several days.
- Promote child-to-child conversations.
- Encourage children to talk to their families about what they do at school. Sending home a picture of the child doing a classroom activity may help spark conversations.

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# Inclusion in Preschool Classrooms



Many preschool programs include young children with special needs in their classrooms. The goal of inclusion is to help all children learn to the best of their abilities. Here are some questions that parents often ask about inclusion.

## What does inclusion mean?

Inclusion means teaching all children together, regardless of ability level. Inclusive programs celebrate children's similarities as well as their different abilities and cultures. In inclusive classrooms, children with special needs take part in the general education curriculum based on their ages and grades. They are not put into a separate classroom, but rather the curriculum and the room are adapted to meet children's needs.

## What does an inclusion team do?

The inclusion team plans ways to provide access, participation, and supports so all children can learn as independently as possible. People on an inclusion team are expected to have good communication skills. They are flexible and creative about meeting all children's needs. An inclusion team consists of people from inside and outside the school who work together to support children with special needs:

- *General education teachers* teach the curriculum to all students.
- *Special education teachers* help general education teachers plan how to embed individual children's goals and objectives into classroom routines and activities.
- *Classroom assistants* work with the teachers and therapists to support children's full participation in classroom activities.
- *Related service providers* may be speech therapists, occupational therapists, or physical therapists. They help the classroom staff decide how to work with children who have special needs. They also help children develop skills and abilities needed to function well in the classroom, home, and community.
- *Parents* provide important information about their children's progress and needs. They also support their child's learning activities at home and in the community.
- *Administrative staff members* lead school programs. They also make sure that classroom staff members have the resources they need to work successfully with all children.

## How does inclusion work?

A child's inclusion team meets regularly to plan how to make the curriculum, physical space, and special services fit together smoothly. The teacher makes changes based on input from the team. An inclusive preschool classroom might have

- wider aisles so children with physical challenges can move around easily,
- picture schedules so children with language delays can follow the daily routine,
- adaptive crayons and scissors that are made for children with fine-motor delays,
- technology to ensure each child's full participation in program routines and activities, and/or
- specialized equipment for children with hearing and/or vision challenges.

## For related Web resources, see "Inclusion in Preschool Classrooms" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

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# Let's Talk About ... Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



*Diversity. Equity. Inclusion. This tip sheet discusses these essential concepts and what they can mean in early childhood settings.*

## What is diversity?

Diversity is differences within a group. The children and families in a program may differ from each other in many ways. They may have a range of income levels, family structures, and racial or ethnic identities. They may have disabilities. They may speak languages other than English at home. They may have a variety of home cultures and religions.

Such diversity is a fact of life in the wider world. But some groups, such as people with disabilities or racial or ethnic minorities, have a history of being denied access to a good education. That exclusion is usually a result of bias.

Biased thinking favors a group of people over others. Biases are built on mistaken ideas about human differences. They lead us to expect bad things, or good things, based on those differences.

Often, we are unaware of our biases. We may even think we don't have any. But research has found that is unlikely. Anyone can hold biases that keep them from knowing and respecting other people. Even young children can develop biases that get in the way of good relationships with others.

We can learn to recognize our biases and limit their effects on our work with children and families. And we can help young children value and learn from the diversity in their classroom and their community.

## What is equity?

Equity is related to fairness. It doesn't mean "treat everyone exactly alike." It means the adults focus on helping every child thrive—including those who need some sort of specialized support or attention. They understand and work with each child's specific needs and strengths so ALL children can make use of what the classroom offers.

## What is inclusion?

Inclusion is an approach to education that goes beyond just accepting differences. It can be a way of creating equity. Inclusive programs focus on helping every child—and every family—feel welcome, respected, and valued. Inclusion affirms the right to full access to education for groups who have historically been excluded.

Inclusion is an ongoing process. It calls for teachers to value diversity and make adjustments that empower children and their families to be fully involved in learning activities.

Diverse preschool programs can, and should, be welcoming places for all children and their families. That works best when teachers strive to reduce the effects of bias and are committed to equity and inclusive practices that empower every child and family.

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# Let's Talk About ... Race, Ethnicity, and Young Children



*Racial and ethnic diversity are facts of life in many early childhood classrooms. Mistaken ideas about these concepts can affect how early childhood professionals work with children and families. This tip sheet can help teachers better understand these concepts.*

## Understanding vocabulary

Race and ethnicity are often treated as if they are the same, but they are not.

- Current definitions of “race” refer to hereditary physical traits such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Race does not determine anyone’s personality or culture. “Black,” “white,” and “biracial” are commonly used racial categories.
- “Ethnicity” refers to aspects of a group’s culture, such as shared values and attitudes, home language, and celebrations, clothing styles, or food. It is often connected to the part of the world a person’s ancestors are from.

Culturally responsive educators connect with all families and children in diverse programs by learning about families’ customs, experiences, and perspectives. They bring that knowledge to the curriculum to benefit all children.

## Working with children

Make sure classroom materials feature a range of racial and ethnic groups.

- Provide dolls and play figures with a variety of skin tones, eye colors, and hair colors, textures, and styles.
- Share books from diversity-focused children’s literature award lists such as the Coretta Scott King Award, the Pura Belpre Award, and the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association Literature Award.

Help all the children get to know one another.

- Support project work that addresses diversity, such as exploring the types of bread eaten by families in the program.
- Pair children up to sketch each other. Help them choose markers, crayons, or paints to match skin and hair colors.

Keep in mind that even very young children may notice differences in skin color and other “markers” of race or ethnicity. They also notice how adults react to those differences.

- Gently but firmly correct any mistaken ideas or biases children express. “No, we can’t wash off our skin color. Everybody’s skin is the right color for them.”
- Show respect and care for all the children by talking and playing with each of them.

## Working with families

- Find out how families identify their race or ethnicity. “Song-Ae’s family is Korean American. Lola’s dad is Ojibwe.”
- Invite families to share parts of their ethnic heritage, such as active games, lullabies, crafts, or children’s stories.
- Let all families know that you welcome and value families and children of any race or ethnicity.

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# Let's Talk About ... Young Children and Family Structures



*Families in an early childhood program may have a “mother, father, and children” structure. However, it’s also common to see single-parent families, foster families, adoptive families, and families with two moms or two dads. Some families face lack of support, stereotyping, and bias from the larger society. Working with family diversity calls for acceptance, sensitivity, and respect.*

## Working with children

Keep in mind that a young child's family is central to their identity. Children need to know that their teachers value their families.

- Find a term for children's important adults that doesn't assume a “Mom + Dad” family structure. “At the art table, you can make a card for one of your grown-ups.”
- Gently but firmly correct mistaken ideas or biases children express. “Yes, Garrett has two moms. The world has many kinds of families. Two moms plus children is one kind of family.”

Make sure classroom materials feature a range of family structures, including those not represented in your program.

- Provide play figures and dolls that a child could organize into any type of family. Affirm children's pretend play that reflects their family structures.
- Display photos and art showing different family structures. Include photos of children in your class and accurately describe family members. “Jenny, you and both your dads are laughing a lot in this picture!”
- Provide stories and information books that depict single parents, grandparents, foster and/or adoptive parents, and families with same-sex parents.

## Working with families

Learn about families and the challenges they might face because of their family structure.

- If a parent or caregiver lets you know they need information or support, suggest where they might find it. For example, your local Pride organization may have events for LGBTQ families. Your park district might offer activities for grandparents and grandchildren.
- Find out what, if anything, a family would like for you to say about them. “Greg lives with his grandparents. He calls them Gran and Grampa.”
- Keep in mind that changes in a family's structure may be the result of trauma, such as divorce, abuse, or loss of a parent.
- Be aware that some families may face bias, discrimination, or threats in the community and may not want to reveal much.

Remember, an early childhood program should affirm and support every child's bond with the people who care for and love them. Let all families know that your program is a welcoming, safe place that respects the children's family structures.

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# Let's Talk About ... Young Children and Religious Diversity



*Families in early childhood programs may have a range of religious backgrounds or nonreligious belief systems. Preschoolers won't grasp all of a religion's core concepts, but they can begin to see that families around them have different beliefs.*

## Working with children

Having a religion (or no religion) may be central to a family's identity. Rituals and holidays may be key parts of a child's family life. Every child needs for you respect and value their family's beliefs.

Ask family members to share with the class some of their religion's traditions.

- Make clear that they don't have to "preach" or to explain an entire belief system. Celebrations and foods are often interesting to young children. For example, Elham's mother might tell how their family observes Ramadan and offer a taste of the sweet dates they use to break their fast.
- With advice from families, find children's stories and information books to share that accurately depict their religions or belief systems.
- Learn and teach appropriate holiday greetings. For example, a Hindu child might enjoy hearing "Have a fun and colorful Diwali!" from classmates during that festival.

Explain simply what "religion" or "belief" means. For example, groups of people all around the world are guided by big ideas about how the world works, how to treat people and other living things, and how to celebrate important times.

Consider ways a family's religion might affect a child in school.

- Ask about food-related traditions. For example, Jewish and Muslim families will not want their children to eat foods that contain pork. Plan cooking projects around ingredients that all students can eat.
- Rethink classroom activities grounded in a religion. For example, Easter craft projects could make a child feel excluded if their family doesn't observe Easter.
- If a family believes they should not observe birthdays or holidays, ask if the child can learn about others' holidays, as long as they don't participate in a party or celebration.

Gently but firmly correct children's mistaken ideas. "Not all families celebrate Christmas. Many families have other holidays that matter to them. Some families do not have holidays."

## Working with families

- Ask families if they have "multicalendar lives." For example, Eunice's family may attend Catholic Mass, but they may also travel to a pueblo in New Mexico for traditional feast days.
- Be aware that some families may face bias, discrimination, or danger in the community because of their religions, so they may be reluctant to reveal much about their religious practices.

Let all families know that your program values and protects religious diversity and views it as an opportunity for all children to learn more about the world.

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# Let's Talk About ... Young Children with Disabilities and Their Families



*Any preschool classroom may include children with disabilities. Some disabilities are apparent, while others are less noticeable. Preschoolers may have disabilities that haven't yet been detected or diagnosed. Young children can be very accepting of classmates' diverse abilities, but they may have questions. Teachers can support all the children as they learn to become friends.*



## Working with children

Talk about the diverse abilities of children in your classroom.

- Be well-informed. Explain clearly, in words preschoolers understand. Emphasize what the child with a disability CAN do. Does the child use special equipment? Name it accurately and describe how it helps. "Ben's hearing aids make our voices louder and clear so he can understand us."
- Be alert for mistaken ideas. Some preschoolers think a person who doesn't walk or see just isn't trying. They may think, "Their mom forgot to teach them how." Some worry they might "catch" the disability, as if it were a cold. They may think they can play with the special equipment. Gently correct mistakes right away. "Sophia's wheelchair isn't a riding toy to share. It's how she gets around the room."

Promote friendships among all the children.

- Lead conversations with the whole class about shared interests. "OK everyone, let's make a list together of things we like to do. It's nice to do things with friends"
- Adjust game rules so a child with a disability can play with classmates. For example, play "I hear" rather than "I spy" to include children with visual disabilities.
- Smile, laugh, and play with a child who has a disability. Besides helping the child feel welcome and valued, you let their classmates see that they can do the same.
- Find ways to let children know when a child's disability involves discomfort with some interactions. For example, a child with autism may prefer a thumbs-up to a hug or high five.

Be sure classroom materials depict people with diverse abilities, including disabilities not represented in your classroom.

- Explore the library for books and videos featuring people with disabilities.
- Invest in dolls and play figures that come with crutches and other disability aids.



## Working with families

Ask what a child's family wants others to know about the disability.

- Do they want to talk to the class, or let the child explain? Or do they want you to do it?
- Keep in mind that some disabilities have involved trauma to the child or family. This may affect what they want to say about it.

Let all families know that disability is a natural part of the human experience and that your classroom is a safe, inclusive space for all children.

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# Let's Talk About ... Young Dual Language Learners and Their Families



*Does your preschool include dual language learners (DLLs)? That is, are there children under age 5 learning a second language while they continue to develop in their home language? Often, preschool teachers who speak just one language may be serving several children who speak other languages. That can be an opportunity to help all the children learn more about languages.*

## Working with children

Model respect for language diversity.

- Explain that languages are what people use to talk to each other. People in different parts of the world may use different sounds and words when they talk, sing, or write.
- Explain that knowing how to speak more than one language can be good for our brains and help us learn more about the world.
- Help children learn the names of the home languages spoken by families in the program.
- Share songs or short recordings in each language. If you have no DLLs, share examples of Spanish and other languages.

Support home language learning for the DLLs in your class.

- Learn and use some words and phrases in their home languages. You could start with, “Hello,” “Goodbye”, “I’m glad to see you,” “Thank you,” “Let’s play,” “I’m sorry,” and “Time for lunch.” Help all the children learn them, too.
- Create multilingual labels for items in your classroom.
- Have books in the home languages of the children in your program. Encourage families to borrow them.

## Working with families

- Find out all you can about resources for immigrants in your area. Families of DLLs have a wide range of immigration experiences. Some have had traumatic journeys. We cannot expect them to tell us about their trauma, but we can show them where they might find help.
- Learning English can be a long and complex process. Parents need information about their children, now, in words they understand. Have schedules, invitations, and newsletters translated into the families’ home languages. Use interpreters during conferences with families of DLLs.
- Encourage families of DLLs to keep using their home language with their children.
- Ask the families to suggest some children’s songs or action games the class can learn. If they are willing, help family members record themselves singing songs or reading books aloud in their home language for their children to listen to and share with classmates.

Let all parents know that you will be talking with the class about different languages. Tell them you will teach a few useful words in languages other than English. Remember, research shows that knowing more than one language can be an advantage for any child.

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# Make Room for Blocks!



*Countless toys talk or beep or flash. But don't forget to make time and room for blocks! Blocks are open-ended play materials that stimulate the imagination. They support learning in language, math, science, and art. Unlike toys that children quickly outgrow, blocks continue to be valuable learning tools for children as their play becomes more complex.*

## Children go through stages of block play.

- At first, children may carry blocks around and stack them randomly. Next come simple structures, such as towers and rows. Children move on to making bridges, enclosures, and buildings.
- Eventually, children use structures in dramatic play. You might see them use wooden blocks to build a pretend stove to prepare a dinner or use large cardboard blocks to build a car that they drive to work.

## Block play encourages physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

- Stacking and fitting blocks together builds hand strength and hand-eye coordination.
- Working in groups with blocks helps develop social skills.
- Creating designs allows self-expression and a feeling of control.
- Talking about shapes and structures builds a child's vocabulary.
- Working with blocks in sets helps develop number concepts and spatial sense.
- Planning and building help develop problem-solving skills.

## Teachers can plan for block play.

- Look for unit blocks—those based on proportions such as 1:2:4.
- Make sure blocks are sturdy, well made, and plentiful. Include a variety of shapes.
- Include ramps, wheels, and pulleys to explore physics concepts.
- Create a block area away from other classroom traffic and large enough for several children.
- Work with children on simple rules: “Blocks should not be thrown.” “Blocks should be put back in the appropriate containers.”
- Store blocks on child-sized shelves to encourage independent use and clean up.

## Teachers can help children extend their block play.

- Introduce new words, such as arch. Discuss place words, such as over, under, right, and left.
- Place paper and drawing tools where children can make signs for their buildings. Help children record their block work in sketches, in photographs, or on graphs.
- If children want to build a particular structure, such as a fire station, provide a photograph for them to use as a reference.
- Provide props for pretend play, such as empty food containers, costumes, or a steering wheel.
- Teach number concepts with blocks. Have children use sets of blocks, compare blocks, and divide blocks equally between them. Store blocks of similar shape together. Let children measure with rulers or string.
- Provide toy animals and plants so structures can become animal homes. Provide books on animal habitats for research.

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# Outdoor Play: Weather or Not



*Teachers know the many ways children benefit from outdoor play. But when should the weather keep them indoors? Consider the health of the children, the severity of the weather, and the air quality. Young children are more vulnerable than adults to extreme heat, cold, and pollution. They sweat less and have less body mass. Here are some tips for keeping children safe in all types of weather.*

-  **Summer is a great time to play outside, but keep an eye on the heat index.**  
Teachers can check the heat index at the National Weather Service on hot, humid days. An index at or above 90 degrees is a significant risk. This may signal the need to keep children indoors. In any hot weather, active children need to be reminded to drink enough water. Clothing should be lightweight and light colored. The fabric should let sweat evaporate. There also should be shady places in the play area.
-  **Teachers should discuss with parents the sun protection their child needs.**  
Children outside between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. need the most sun protection. Many children will need sun-protective clothing, such as hats. Their sunscreen should have a protection value of SPF 15 or higher for both UVB rays and UVA rays. Teachers should confirm that children are wearing sunscreen when they arrive at school or childcare. Teachers must follow school health guidelines if reapplying sunscreen throughout the day.
-  **Very cold weather can pose dangers to young children.**  
Consider the wind chill as well as the temperature. A 10 mph wind with a 30-degree temperature causes a significant wind chill factor. Teachers can check the wind chill with a local forecast or using a reliable weather app. Dampness makes a child feel colder. Children should dress for very cold weather with layers of loose-fitting clothing along with a coat and warm socks. Rain or snow call for water repellent coats and boots. Hands should be covered with gloves or mittens. It is a good idea for teachers to keep extra mittens, socks, and boots on hand. Children can become chilled following an activity that causes them to sweat. Teachers should check on children frequently—at least every 15 minutes. Look for warm, normal skin color. Children shivering or uncomfortable need to be warmed. Hypothermia and frostbite are medical emergencies that can be prevented.
-  **Air pollution may be a concern.**  
Teachers should be aware of local problems with ozone level or air pollution. Air pollution can occur in both urban and rural areas. News reports may mention local levels. Teachers can check out the Air Quality Index online.
-  **Some children are more sensitive than others to temperature and air quality.**  
Children with health issues, such as asthma, are often able to play outdoors safely. Teachers need a plan for them. Parents can develop this plan with the child's health care providers and share the plan with the teacher.

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# Predicting: Helping Preschoolers Look Ahead



*When we make predictions, we form ideas about the future based on what we've already seen or done. Preschool children are beginning to notice patterns, sequences, and connections that help them guess what to expect from the world around them. Prediction skills are important in literacy, math, science, and social development. Here are ways to encourage a child's disposition to make predictions.*



## Model different ways to make predictions.

Use words such as *predict*, *guess*, *expect*: "Today you voted to have muffins for snack, so you're *expecting* to eat muffins. However, we have only one tablespoon of sugar. I *predict* that won't be enough sugar for the muffin recipe and that we will need to make a substitution in our recipe. Luckily, we have plenty of honey and we can use that."



## Help children make connections to earlier experiences.

Try asking them questions with phrases such as "remember when" or "think back": "Can you think back to what the muffins were like when we forgot to use apple sauce instead of sugar? Do you remember if you thought they looked good and tasted good?"



## Help children imagine possibilities.

Ask "what if" questions: "What might happen if we use honey in the muffins today?" "Do you think they will taste sweeter or less sweet than when we used sugar?" "Do you think they will taste the same or different than when we used applesauce?"



## Invite children to explain their predictions.

Ask a follow-up question when a child makes a prediction: "Mike, you predict the muffins will feel sticky when we use honey. What makes you think so?" "Winona, you think the muffins will be smaller when we use honey than when we used applesauce. Tell us how you made that prediction."



## Encourage children to comment on each other's ideas.

Summarize and restate their ideas as needed: "Winona is guessing that using honey will make the batter sweet enough to taste good. Jaya, what do you think about that?"



## Help children to decide what to try and to make a plan.

Help them vote or reach a consensus: "The cooks voted to experiment with using honey in the muffin batter today. Rashad says we should have a taste test!"



## Emphasize "testing" and "checking" instead of being right.

When children revisit their predictions, use words such as *surprise* and *expected*: "Was anyone surprised when they tasted the muffins?" "Joo-Yun says she expected flat, sticky muffins. But she checked them out, and they look and taste like regular muffins."

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# Supporting Children with Limited Verbal Skills

*These strategies are helpful to all children but are particularly helpful for those with limited verbal skills.*

## Support communication

Provide an outlet for young children to express their wants and needs in these areas:

- Demonstrating feelings/emotions
- Requesting
- Rejecting/refusing

Providing an outlet for expression helps prevent challenging behavior.



## Build routines

Help children understand daily expectations and happenings. Routines provide predictability and a sense of security.

Knowing what to expect helps children make appropriate decisions.

## Offer visual supports

Children with limited verbal skills need other ways to communicate. Communication strategies include:

- Pictures
- Communication boards
- Communication devices
- Sign language

Alternate forms of communication allow children to express their ideas by pointing to images and using gestures.



## Provide schedules

Visual schedules help children make sense of their day. Post them in common spaces and use them to:

- Promote awareness of activities and routines
- Alert children to upcoming changes

Knowing what to expect reduces anxiety and allows children to prepare for upcoming events.

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# Tearless Transitions



*Transitions are the times when children change from one activity to another. Young children sometimes react to transitions by engaging in challenging behaviors. Consistent classroom routines may help, but young children can still find transitions difficult. Good planning helps teachers smooth the way.*



## Decrease the number of transitions.

The resulting longer blocks of uninterrupted time ...

- Allow children to explore activities in depth and stay engaged.
- Encourage children to interact with each other.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to interact with individual children.



## Reduce waiting time.

- Suggest that children who have finished a task help another child or move on to another activity. For example, children can choose a book to look at if they finish what they are doing before a planned transition.
- Have a flexible snack time, within limits. The snack can be available for children to serve themselves during this time. Not all children need to stop to eat at the same time.



## Alert children to upcoming transitions.

- Provide verbal notice a few minutes before children will need to stop what they are doing. Some children will need a personal reminder.
- Consider using nonverbal cues to prepare children for transitions. Display a picture of the next activity or use music as a signal to help children prepare for a change in activity. Special songs may mean, “Time to get ready to go outside” or “Time to clean up.”



## Make necessary transitions fun.

- Use games and songs when you need to have children come together. Try clapping in rhythm or starting a song and having the children join in.
- Teach children to pretend to be statues when they hear a signal, such as a bell. This simple game can make it easy to give instructions to the whole group.
- Notice and comment to children when transitions go smoothly. “Isaac, I saw how neatly you put away your art supplies and came to listen to our story.”



## Make cleaning up a regular habit.

- Help children store unfinished work.
- Model and teach children clean-up skills, with adults gradually doing less over time.
- Use pictures to show the steps to take to clean up an area.
- Create simple labels for shelves and cabinets to help children put away toys and supplies in the right place.

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# What Is Developmental Screening?



Developmental screening? Comprehensive assessment? Ongoing assessment? Parents often wonder what these terms mean. All are processes for gathering information about an infant, toddler, or preschooler. The first step in gathering information about a child is to complete a developmental screening.

## Why do we need to be clear about the difference between developmental screening and comprehensive assessment?

- Parents want and need to have clear information about any evaluations of their child as well as clear expectations about what the results may mean for their child and family.
- It is important for parents to know that a developmental screening is just one step toward determining whether their child may have a developmental delay and does not mean their child will receive special services without their permission.
- It is important for parents to know that only a comprehensive assessment will determine the extent of any developmental delays as well as develop possible interventions with the full participation of the parents.

## What happens during a developmental screening?

Developmental screening is a brief, simple process used to answer the questions “Is this child’s development typical for his age level?” and “Does this child need to be seen again for a comprehensive assessment?” Developmental screenings:

- Can take place only if a child’s parent or guardian gives written consent.
- Can help identify potential health problems or developmental or social-emotional delays, but it does not provide a diagnosis.
- Involve parents answering interview questions or filling out a written survey about their child’s development.
- May occur in a variety of places, such as a doctor’s office, the child’s home, a child care center, or preschool program.
- May be done by either professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, speech/language pathologists, developmental therapists) or others who have received training in how to complete a developmental screening.
- Should be sensitive to the family and child’s cultural and linguistic background.
- Cover just a few items in each developmental area (cognition, fine and gross motor, speech and language, and social-emotional). The items are based on typical developmental milestones for the child’s age level. For example, a fine-motor screening task for a 3-year-old may include holding a crayon and drawing a line on paper.
- Usually check the child’s vision and hearing.

## When is a child referred for a comprehensive assessment?

If a child’s developmental screening results indicate that he may have a delay in one or more areas of development, parents are notified that their child may need a comprehensive assessment to find out more about his individual needs.

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