

Early Childhood Parents®

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make the difference!



Four ways to maintain routines during breaks from preschool

Winter break is around the corner for many preschool students. Unfortunately, this break often disturbs routines—and many children struggle to readjust when school resumes.

Here are four ways to keep things more or less on track so everyone in your family will have an easier time when your child heads back to school next month:

1. **Follow routines** when possible. There will be days when your child eats or sleeps at unusual times, but these are usually part of an event that you can plan for. The rest of the time, enforce a consistent eating and sleeping schedule.
2. **Keep an eye on screen time.** Don't allow your child spend endless

hours on recreational screen activities. Follow the same limits you set during the school year. Encourage alternative activities.

3. **Stick to your rules!** The holidays are not a time to abandon discipline and respect. In fact, the many changes that take place this season are even more of a reason to keep discipline unchanged.
4. **Talk about preschool.** Some children think the school year has also come to an end when they hear adults talking about the calendar year ending. So say things like, "Won't it be fun to tell your teacher about your trip to Grandma's when you go back to preschool?"

Create a special learning space for your child



Preschoolers love small, comfy places. Why not combine this love with a bit of learning, too?

During the winter break, consider creating a special learning spot for your child.

To get started:

- **Find a cozy space** in your home. It could be in the corner of your child's room, in an open closet or even in part of the kitchen.
- **Bring in pillows.** Add books, paper, crayons and other school supplies. Let your child select a favorite doll or stuffed animal as a learning buddy.
- **Spend some time** in this spot with your child. Call it "learning time." You could read and draw together. Or make and use flash cards. Your child could also practice writing letters.
- **Encourage your child** to spend time in the learning spot without you. While there, your preschooler could look through books or pretend to teach the learning buddy something new.

The holidays are a wonderful time to promote kindness



Kindness is a valuable character trait to instill in your preschooler.

Children who are caring and think of others are more likely to get along with their teachers and classmates—which contributes to a positive learning environment.

To promote kindness:

- **Be a good role model.** Let your child see you being kind to others. You could offer to help carry someone else's groceries, or let someone in a hurry get ahead of you in line.
- **Encourage your child** to make presents for friends and family members, such as a piece of home-made art or a coupon for a hug.
- **Encourage your child** to set aside some gently used clothing and

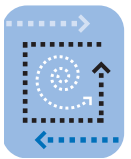
toys to donate to a child in need. Together, take bags of clothes or toys to a charitable organization.

- **Bake cookies together** and take them to your local fire station or police department.
- **Encourage gratitude.** Remind your child to say *thank you* for gifts. Write notes of thanks together.
- **Notice when your child** performs a good deed or says something nice. Say, "That was so kind of you."

"You cannot do kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Help your child understand the concepts of *beginning* and *end*



An understanding of the concepts of *beginning* and *end* is an early step in learning to manage time—a skill every student needs. It will also help your preschooler navigate transitions more easily.

There are unlimited ways to help your preschooler learn and master these concepts. Here are just a few:

- **Talk about them** in your daily life. Remind your child what happens at the beginning and end of a meal or a bath. Story time is another great opportunity—all stories have a beginning and an end.
- **Ask questions.** When you get in the car and buckle up, ask your child if

you are at the beginning or end of your car trip. When you arrive at your destination, ask again.

- **Play games.** Many children's board games have pathways that the game pieces must travel. Point out the beginning and end to these pathways.
- **Create simple mazes** on a piece of paper. Guide your child's hand and demonstrate how the pencil travels from the beginning of the maze all the way to the end. As your child grows, you can develop these concepts further and build thinking skills by introducing more complicated mazes.

Source: B. Daniel, *The Playful Child*, School Specialty Publishing.

Are you helping your child handle transitions?



Transitioning from one activity to another is a regular part of school. However, many young children have a difficult

time with this process.

Are you making transitions easier for your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child notice before a change occurs? "In five minutes, we're going to leave."
- ___ **2. Do you tell** your child what will happen before and after events? "We'll get ready and go to the store. After that, we'll read a book."
- ___ **3. Do you offer** your child a role in transitions? "We're leaving now. Will you please shut the door?"
- ___ **4. Do you use** objects to help your child move from one activity to another? "Let's take this book home to show Daddy."
- ___ **5. Do you follow** goodbye rituals? "Wave to Grandma. Then we'll go."

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are doing a good job helping your child make transitions. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

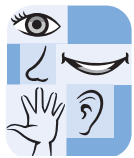
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Teach your child about senses with taste and smell experiments



Without realizing it, many of us confuse our senses of taste and smell. They're so closely connected that sometimes we don't notice which sense we're using.

To help your child learn more about these senses:

- **Try to identify foods** by how they taste and smell. Have family members close their eyes and hold their nose. Place a small amount of fruit, such as orange, grapefruit or lime, on each of their tongues. Can they tell what it is? Now have them smell the food with their eyes still closed. It might be easier for family members to identify the fruit this way.
- **Make foods** with and without salt. You might be surprised to learn that

a little salt can make sweet foods taste sweeter. That's why it's in so many desserts. Make a cup of hot chocolate with milk, cocoa powder and sugar. Then make another cup the same way, adding a pinch of salt. Which tastes sweeter?

- **Keep track of things** you and your child smell for a day. It's fun to see how many you can recognize by smell, such as flowers, clean laundry and food items. Help your child think of words that describe the smells.
- **Share a fun fact** with your child: Different parts of the tongue taste certain things better. The tip is extra sensitive to sweet things. The middle senses salty and sour best. And the back is sensitive to bitter tastes.

Take advantage of the winter months with learning activities



December ushers in the official beginning of winter. Here are a few seasonal activities you can do together

to help your preschooler learn about colors, numbers, science, nature and more.

With your child:

- **Enjoy a winter picnic.** Bundle up and head outdoors with a thermos of hot soup. Talk about what you and your child see in nature in the winter. Or, spread a blanket inside and serve a healthy lunch on it. You can even turn your picnic into a reading party!
- **Have fun with cookie cutters.** Ask your child to trace around each cookie cutter with a pencil.

Look at the shapes they make. Then place the cutters in a paper bag and see if your child can bring out the cookie cutter that matches each shape just by feel.

- **Listen to the sounds of winter.** Take a walk and talk about what you hear. Perhaps you hear boots crunching on snow, rain splashing or wind whistling.
- **Be winter detectives.** Help your child identify the signs of winter in a cold climate, such as freezing weather, less daylight, bare trees, people wearing warm clothing and smoke rising from chimneys.
- **Count pairs.** Gather several pairs of mittens or gloves. Or, cut pairs of mittens out of different colors of paper. Mix them up. Have your child sort them back into pairs.

Q: I am overwhelmed by all the expensive and fancy educational toys I see in the stores. Will my child's learning suffer because I can't afford to fill our home with such toys?

Questions & Answers

A: Not at all. Education experts have long maintained that the best toys for children are the simplest ones.

Why? Because children have to use their thinking skills to decide how they will play with them.

The best toys:

- **Spark creative play.** Toy animals, dolls and toy cars are examples. Your child can play with them by making up stories and pretending. The toys don't have to be expensive. Children can turn something as simple as a cardboard box into hours of creative fun.
 - **Can be shared.** It's fine for kids to play alone sometimes. But they also need to play with other people to build social skills. A simple toy, such as a ball, can be used both ways.
 - **Are safe.** Toys with lots of little parts or sharp edges are much more likely to cause accidental injury to your child than simpler toys, like blocks.
 - **Hold interest.** Dress-up accessories or plastic animals, for example, are things children will probably come back to again and again. Each time they approach them, they will think of a new way to play with them.
- A few basic enjoyable toys—along with books and puzzles—are all children need to develop many of the skills they will need to be successful in school.

The Kindergarten Experience

Reinforce basic geometry with your child



Kindergarten math involves much more than numbers and counting. Many parents are surprised to find out that it also includes learning the basics of *geometry*.

In a nutshell, geometry is the study of shapes, sizes, patterns and positions. And your child probably knew something about it before even starting school!

When your child names a shape, that's using geometry. When your child uses words like *above*, *below*, *beside*, *in front of*, *behind* and *next to*, that's also using geometry.

There are many ways parents can reinforce kindergarten geometry. Here are just a few:

- **Go on a shape scavenger hunt.** Look around your home with your child and name the shapes you see: round table, rectangular place mat, square napkin. See how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find. Look for shapes when you are outside, too.
- **Learn about lines.** Talk about *horizontal lines* which run from side to side and *vertical lines* which run from top to bottom. Then give your child a few pictures or illustrations to look at. How many horizontal and vertical lines are there?
- **Practice positional words.** Ask your child questions about the position of everyday objects. Is the dog *in front of* or *behind* the chair? Is the clock hanging *above* or *below* the shelf?

Perseverance is important in kindergarten and beyond

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

To foster perseverance:

- **Encourage your child to engage** in quiet activities at home. Give your child time to read and work alone.
- **Let your child struggle** a bit when working on a task. If you always jump in to help, your child won't develop a "can do" attitude. Suggest trying different strategies to figure out a solution.
- **Give your child** only a few pieces of paper when drawing. Don't let your child throw away 10 drawings before really getting started.



- **Let your child run around** and be noisy when completing a task. Your child can let off steam after work at home, and understand how to wait until recess to let off steam at school.

Daily routines help students have a successful school year



Most kindergartners thrive on routines. Knowing what to expect helps them feel safe and secure. Following routines also helps kids develop responsibility and practice skills.

Before school, have your child:

1. **Wake up** at the same time each day.
2. **Make the bed** or straighten it.
3. **Eat breakfast.**
4. **Get dressed** and brush teeth.
5. **Read or play** until it's time to leave for school.

After school, have your child:

1. **Empty school bags** and show you important papers.
 2. **Unwind** and eat a healthy snack.
 3. **Complete assignments** or read with you for 10 minutes.
 4. **Play.** Encourage outdoor play and limit the use of screen devices.
- Before bed, help your child:*
1. **Pack up items** needed for school the next day.
 2. **Make lunch** if needed. Put it in the refrigerator.
 3. **Choose clothes** for tomorrow.
 4. **Take a bath**, put on pajamas and brush teeth.
 5. **Read a story** before bedtime.