

Early Childhood Parents®

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Division of Early Childhood Education

make the difference!



Five ways to maintain routines during breaks from preschool

Winter break is almost here for many preschool students. While a break from school is exciting, it often disrupts routines—which can make it challenging for young children to readjust when preschool resumes.

Here are five ways to make it easier for your child when school starts again next month:

1. **Maintain a consistent routine** whenever possible. While there may be days your child eats or sleeps at unusual times, these are usually due to planned events. For all other times, maintain a regular eating and sleeping schedule.
2. **Stick to your rules!** The holidays are not a time to abandon discipline and respectful behavior. In fact, the many changes that take place this

season are even more of a reason to keep discipline unchanged.

3. **Read and play every day.** Engage your child in both structured and free play. Continue reading books together, and make time for outdoor play to encourage physical activity.
4. **Keep a close eye on screen time.** Follow the same limits you set during the school year. When screens are used, prioritize interactive and educational apps or shows.
5. **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?”

Introduce your preschooler to journaling



It might seem odd to suggest journaling for a child who hasn’t yet mastered writing.

However, your preschooler doesn’t need to know how to form letters to benefit from this engaging activity.

Journaling at this age is less about penmanship and more about fostering creativity, self-expression and early literacy skills. To introduce journaling:

1. **Ask your child** to tell you about something that happened today. Offer prompts as needed: “You went on the playground at preschool. What did you do there?”
2. **Have your child** draw a picture of the activity on a piece of paper, and then tell you about the drawing.
3. **Write a sentence** or two under the drawing to capture your child’s words. Explain that the words tell about the picture.
4. **Have your child** write something, as well—even if it’s just scribbles. As your child builds writing skills, you will likely see letters.

Repeat this process often and staple the pages into a book.

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 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.
- **Help your child pass on** some gently used clothing and toys 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

Introduce your preschooler to fun 'spacial reasoning' activities



Children love to build with blocks—but blocks aren't just for fun. Research shows that blocks, jigsaw puzzles and other toys that improve *spatial reasoning* can help children learn math.

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

To sharpen your preschooler's spatial reasoning:

- **Encourage your child** to build different things using materials like cardboard tubes and boxes.
- **Remove the lids** from empty containers, such as coffee and

oatmeal canisters, mayonnaise and peanut butter jars, etc. Challenge your child to match the lids with their containers.

- **Make jigsaw puzzles.** Remove the front panels from cereal boxes. Cut them into puzzle pieces and let your child put them back together.
- **Use spatial language.** Include words in conversation that describe shapes, sizes or positions of objects. "Let's walk *across* that curved bridge. It goes *up* and then *down*."
- **Play I Spy** with shapes and positions. Focus on geometric shapes, sizes and their positions. "I spy something that is *round* and *under* the table."

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

Are you showing your child how to respect property?



At school, students are expected to treat school property and other students' belongings with care. Answer *yes* or *no* to

the questions below to see if you're helping your child practice this behavior:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child places to store items, such as a bin for blocks or a container for crayons?
- ___ **2. Do you make** cleaning up a habit? "Before we get out a new game, we need to put away the one we just played."
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about the benefits of respecting others' belongings? "If you treat Grandpa's piano gently, he will probably let you play it again."
- ___ **4. Do you notice** when your child treats belongings properly? "Thanks for putting your books on the shelf. That will keep them in great condition!"
- ___ **5. Do you set** an example by caring for household items, including your child's belongings?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are building your child's respect for property. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Play board games to help your child focus and follow rules



Most preschoolers are ready to start playing board games. These games are fun and can help your child

build skills such as concentration, cooperation and sportsmanship.

Thrift shops are great places to find inexpensive board games. You could also arrange a neighborhood game swap. When choosing games:

- **Check the box** for the appropriate age for players. Your child will get the most out of games that have simple rules and are geared to preschoolers' skill levels.
- **Look for ones with themes** that will appeal to your child. Most preschoolers enjoy games about animals more than games about money, for example.

As you play board games with your preschooler:

- **Encourage your child** to count as players move around the board, or to name the colors on the game. Preschoolers like to show off what they know.
- **Ask questions** to boost thinking skills. "What do you think will happen if we draw this card?" "Which space should I move to now?"
- **Explain that rules** make games (and life) go smoothly, and encourage your child to follow them.
- **Remind your child** that nobody wins all the time. Some children take losing very hard. So be sure to offer praise for playing fair, following directions and taking turns—not just for winning.

Everyday adventures boost your child's skills and knowledge



Children learn all day long as they practice skills and experience new things. Expand your child's foundation of

knowledge by introducing a wide variety of activities.

Together you can:

- **Attend open houses** at your local fire station, police station or post office. Your child will enjoy meeting the employees and learning about what they do in their jobs.
- **Take a tour** of your neighborhood. Go on a walk and notice the people, pets, buildings and activities around you.
- **Go outside** and look at the trees, clouds and landscape. What shapes and colors does your

child see? What sounds does your child hear?

- **Take a trip in a car, bus or train.** Talk about all the interesting things you pass along the way and the interesting people you see.
- **Get library cards** for the family. Visit the library regularly and find out about special events offered for preschoolers.
- **Explore a new place.** Try to go somewhere your child has never been before—the zoo, a farm or a local museum.
- **Go to work.** If possible, take your child to your job to see what you do. Or, make plans to visit a relative's workplace.

Source: *The Little Things Make a Big Difference*, National Association of Elementary School Principals and World Book Educational Products.

Q: The educational toys I see in the stores are expensive! Will my preschooler's learning suffer because I can't afford to fill our home with fancy toys?

Questions & Answers

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

Why? Because these toys encourage children to use their imagination and thinking skills to figure out how they want to play.

The best toys for your child's development:

- **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 more likely to cause accidental injury to your child than simpler toys, like stuffed animals.
- **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

Listening skills are important for learning



Students who have strong listening skills tend to be better at speaking, socializing, and communicating with others—which also contributes to their school success.

To strengthen your kindergartner's listening skills, offer opportunities to practice in engaging ways. Encourage your child to:

- **Help out around the house.** Choose tasks that interest your child. Maybe your child likes setting the table or watering house plants. Then, give specific directions to follow. "Fill the watering can. Touch the plant's soil. If it feels dry, water the plant."
- **Tell stories.** Read or tell your child a detailed story several times. Then, pretend you can't remember a part of it. Can your child complete the story for you? You may be surprised at how well your child listened and remembered!
- **Play Simon Says.** Building listening skills is always fun with this classic game! Children love listening to "Simon's" instructions ("Simon says raise your right hand") and doing what he says. When Simon's name is not in the order ("Raise your left hand")—kids should ignore the instruction.
- **Learn new board games.** Board games have rules that often need repeating. But that's OK. This gives your child opportunities to listen. Just make sure your child is enjoying the game, too.

Improve your child's behavior with teacher-tested strategies

Ever wonder how kindergarten teachers manage to get 20 or more young children to pay attention and follow directions? It's a skill they've mastered, and many of the strategies they use can work for you at home.

Here's what some teachers suggest:

- **Explain what you want** your child to do. Focus on the tasks you want to be routine—like picking up toys after playing with them.
- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Let your kindergartner know how many minutes are left before it's time to switch gears and do something else.
- **Post a schedule with pictures.** Your child will know what to do and when to do it—and will feel more independent.
- **Use silent signals.** A gentle touch on the shoulder should get your



child's attention. Flick the lights off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.

- **Make ordinary tasks fun.** Challenge your child to clean up a mess in rhythm to music.
- **Assign your child** meaningful tasks that benefit the family.

Show your kindergartner how to resolve conflicts peacefully



The ability to resolve conflicts peacefully is a social skill that improves the school learning environment for everyone.

To teach your child this skill:

- **Do not allow physical fighting.** If your child hits, or another child does, separate them immediately. Say, "We do not hit."
- **Give examples of peaceful words** to use instead of hitting or fighting. "It's my turn now, please."
- **Teach your child to say "Stop!"** when being provoked by another

child. If the other child won't stop, your child should tell an adult.

- **Suggest alternatives** when your child is upset and needs to do something to cool off. Outdoor alternatives to hitting and fighting include running, jumping or even a loud yell. Indoor choices could include drawing an "angry picture" or punching a pillow. You can even make a rule that "Hitting is for pillows only."

Source: J.L. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, Ph.D., *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets From Birth to Age 11*, Free Spirit Publishing.