

Make Learning Fun for Your **PRE-K CHILD**





Dear Pre-K Parent,

A tremendous amount of learning takes place between the ages of three and five, and throughout these years, you are your child's most important teacher. With every story you read, skill you teach, and hug you give, you are helping your child become a more capable and confident learner.

This booklet walks you through the skills that are developed during these exciting years—and it shows how you can help your child acquire the skills needed for kindergarten.

Enjoy this special time!

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COMMUNICATION Skills

Three- to five-year olds have varying levels of communication skills. The following checklist will, however, give you an idea of what most Pre-K programs hope their students will be able to do.

- answer “yes/no” questions
- respond when their name is called
- verbalize basic wants and needs
- name common objects
- use action words to talk about what’s going on
- listen and respond when someone talks to them
- follow simple directions
- speak in short three- to four-word sentences
- answer “who,” “what,” “where” questions
- speak clearly enough that adults can usually understand them

Regardless of your child’s current skill level, the following tips will show you how you can help improve your child’s communication skills.



8 Tips!

1. Talk with your child as much as possible, and listen attentively.
2. Expect your child to use words to get what they want.
3. Provide the names of common objects in your environment, as well as things you see together in books, games, and TV shows. *"That's a very pretty flower. It's called a tulip."*
4. Encourage your child to use short sentences and clear speech.
5. Respond to what your child says in a positive, meaningful way. For example, if your little one says, *"Look what I did!"* you can say, *"Wow I love the way you stacked those blocks!"* or *"Great job putting your shoes on!"*
6. When you're having conversations, try to ask questions. If your child has trouble answering a question, help by providing the words needed.
7. When you or someone else talks to your little one, help your child learn to stop what they're doing and respond.
8. Make comments to encourage conversation and the exchange of ideas. For example, *"I am so hungry. I think I will have a snack,"* or *"It looks like it might rain. Do you think we should take an umbrella?"*



Practicing Speech

Throughout the day, talk about the things you see and do together. Here are some things you might talk about:

- ▶ everyday activities such as cooking, cleaning, bath time, or going to the grocery store: *"We're almost out of cereal. We better buy some more."*
- ▶ things you see around you, especially things your child shows an interest in, such as animals, rocks, or vehicles
- ▶ things you see other people doing: *"Why do you think that man is digging a hole?"*

Basically, you can talk with your child about anything and everything. *The more you talk together, the better!*



Improving Speech

At this stage, *what* your child says is more important than *how* it is said.

It's okay if your child doesn't say all sounds correctly, but if family and friends are having trouble understanding their words, follow these steps to help your little one speak more clearly.

1. Have your child look at you and listen while you say a difficult word very slowly.
2. Say the word again WITH them, exaggerating the difficult part of the word.
3. Repeat this process two or three times.

Give your child lots of praise for trying, even if they don't get it quite right. Try again another time. *Be sure to keep the interaction playful and fun!*

Developing Sentences

Encourage your child to use short sentences by expanding on what they've said.

When your child talks to you, respond back using your child's words, adding one or two more of your own. Doing this will help your preschooler get used to hearing more words put together—and figure out how to do the same thing.

If your child says, "I see a dog," you can say, "I see a big black dog."

If your child says, "I like that car," you might say, "I like that car with the red stripes."



As you help your little one learn to use longer sentences, keep in mind that you are not correcting what they say. You are giving your child the opportunity to hear more language and to continue the conversation.

Keep your tone of voice fun and positive!

Use teachable moments

If your child tends to use single words to tell you what they want, help them learn how to use short sentences to ask for things.

For example, if your child says "Milk," respond with "Milk, please" or "I want milk."

Ask your child to repeat the words after you.

Once the words are said, give the requested item, and praise your child for using their words.

Children often make grammatical errors. Instead of correcting, try repeating your child's words the correct way. "That cat *runned* after the squirrel." "Yes, that cat *ran* after the squirrel."

READING

Readiness

Reading to your child expands vocabulary, stimulates the imagination, and teaches your child to listen. It also nurtures a special bond between you and your child.

Learning About Books

Reading to your child can help them understand the following key concepts about printed material.

- ▶ We read from left to right and top to bottom. *Running your finger under the words as you read will help demonstrate this.*
- ▶ We create words by putting letters together in a specific order—and we create sentences by putting words together.



When reading to your child, talk about the pictures and the story. Ask questions such as:

- *“What do you think will happen next?”*
- *“What was your favorite part?”*
- *“How do you think that character felt?”*
- *“What would you have done?”*

Children love to read nursery rhymes and favorite books over and over. Reading a book repeatedly is not only fun for children, it helps them better understand the story, recognize words in print, and learn vocabulary.

Letters, sounds, and words

Learning about letters, sounds, and words will give your child the foundation needed for reading.

As you read together, point out the following:

- ▶ Upper case (capital) letters are different than lower case letters.
- ▶ Some words start with the same letter.
*“Look—**bat** and **ball** both start with the letter **b**.”*
- ▶ Some words rhyme. *“**Cat** and **hat** rhyme. Can you think of another word that rhymes with **cat** and **hat**?”*

Fun ways to practice letters and sounds

1. Read an alphabet book. Talk about each letter and the sound that letter makes.
2. Put magnetic letters on your refrigerator and ask your child to find a specific letter.
3. Form letters with playdough, in shaving cream, or by putting salt on a cookie sheet. You can also write letters with sidewalk chalk.
4. Sing the alphabet song.
5. While driving in the car, think of words that rhyme with objects you see (car–star, tree–bee, man–pan).



Help your child also develop their writing readiness skills. For some tips on how you can do this, watch this quick video.



MATH

Readiness

To help develop a good foundation for math, look for opportunities to have your child count items and compare and sort objects.

Counting and Numbers

Knowing numbers and learning how to count are important early math skills.



- When reading a picture book, count the number of objects on a page.
- As you drive around town, point out the numbers you see on buildings, billboards, and street signs.
- Ask your child to bring you a specific number of objects, such as two books or four crayons.
- Play a game of "I Spy" with magnetic numbers on the refrigerator. *"I spy the number 5."*
- While traveling, count the number of red (or blue) cars you see.

"How many?"

Sometimes children have difficulty understanding the question, "How many?" If you show children three items and ask how many, they will often count the items individually. Help your child understand that when answering the question "How many?" they should say the total number of items.

Above, below, over, under...

To help your child learn positions such as *over*, *under*, *above*, *below*, *in front*, and *behind*, sit on the floor together, each of you holding an item. Take turns giving directions such as, “Put the ball behind your back,” or “Put the ball under your chin.”

At first you may need to model these concepts and have your little one copy your movements.

Comparing and Sorting

Comparing and sorting items helps children identify and describe relationships—a skill that’s necessary for more complex math learning.

- Sort items such as socks by size and/or color.
- Take loose change and sort the coins into groups (pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters).
- To help your child understand descriptive terms such as *more*, *less*, *bigger*, *smaller*, *taller*, *shorter*, *same*, and *different*, look for opportunities to compare objects by size, shape, and weight.

For example, when you’re at the park, you could ask:

- “Which tree is taller?”
- “Which rock is heavier?”
- “Which bench is longer?”

At home, you might ask:

- “Which plate is bigger?”
- “Which glass has more juice?”
- “Are there more blue Legos or more yellow Legos?”



SOCIAL Skills

While three- to five-year olds have varying levels of social skills, the following checklist will give you an idea of the things most Pre-K programs would like their students to be able to do.

- listen when others are talking
- show interest in what others are doing
- begin to take turns with peers
- initiate interactions with others
- begin to share toys
- remember friends' names
- greet others
- use good manners—say *“please”* and *“thank you”*
- begin to understand that no one always gets to do what they want to do



Spending time with other children the same age is the best way for your child to develop good social skills.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- ▶ Start with short periods of time with peers.
- ▶ Provide adult supervision to help keep interactions positive.
- ▶ Praise your child for getting along with other children.

Look for social opportunities

Time spent with peers teaches children how to solve problems, share ideas, cooperate with others, and develop conversational skills.

Plan activities that give your child the opportunity to play and interact with other children.

- ▶ Arrange play dates.
- ▶ Take your child to the library for storytime.
- ▶ Go to the park.

Use Teachable Moments

Look for opportunities to demonstrate how words can be used in various situations.



Here are three specific examples:

- 1.** If your child grabs something from another child, go to your son or daughter, gently give the toy back, and tell them, *"If you want to see the toy, you should ask, 'Can I see your toy?'"* On a good day, the other child will be willing to share. If not, help your child understand that the toy belongs to that child, and then help your preschooler find something else to play with.
- 2.** If you see someone bothering your child or taking a toy away, go to your child and model what they might say, such as, *"Please stop doing that."* Hopefully, the other child will understand and stop. If not, redirect your little one to play with someone else.
- 3.** Encourage your child to express themselves. For example, if your child seems to really like another child's shirt, you can help them say, *"I like your Ninja Turtles shirt."*

MOTOR Skills

Help Develop Gross Motor Skills

Children need gross motor skills for playing games, sports, and other physical activities.

- Take your child to the park to run, swing, and climb on the playground equipment.
- Throw or kick a large ball back and forth.
- Practice hopping, jumping, and standing on one foot.



Help Develop Fine Motor Skills

Children need fine motor skills to color, paint, cut, and draw—and to learn how to write letters.

- Always have crayons, pencils, markers, and different types of paper available for scribbling and drawing.
- Provide playdough or clay to help develop hand muscles.
- Help string cereal on pipe cleaners, build towers with blocks, and put simple puzzles together.
- Provide safety scissors and old magazines to cut up.
- Draw simple shapes and have your child try to trace over them.
- When ready, teach your child how to write their name. Have your child then “sign” all drawings and artwork.

When you're making grocery lists, paying bills, and writing notes, talk about how important writing is—and how you use it every day.

Promoting INDEPENDENCE

Over time, encourage your child to do more on their own.

It might be easier and quicker for you to put your child's jacket on them yourself, but taking a few extra minutes to teach self-help skills will encourage independence and build self-confidence.

Here are some important things you can help your child learn how to do.

- use the restroom
- wash their hands
- use eating utensils
- drink from a cup or juice box
- put on a coat and hat
- button, snap, and zip
- cover their mouth when sneezing or coughing
- take shoes off and put them back on



When something is difficult, don't immediately swoop in to help. Instead, let your child try to problem solve—and celebrate when they are successful!

For additional information on how you can help your child build life skills, watch this quick video.



Make Learning Fun for Your PRE-K CHILD

This is a time of tremendous growth for your child, and you are your child's most important teacher.

This tip-filled booklet will show you how you can make learning fun!