

Early Childhood Parents[®]

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David L. Rainer Elementary School
Dr. Deborah Milstead, Principal

make the difference!



Focus on kindergarten skills over the summer months

Summer is the perfect time to make sure your preschooler is on the path to kindergarten readiness. So what does he need to know?

When children enter kindergarten, they do better if they already have some basic skills. These include being able to:

- **Express themselves** in complete sentences.
- **Listen and pay attention.**
- **Identify colors.**
- **Work with their hands.**
- **Locate print on a page** and know that it tells a story.
- **Tell how two objects** are alike and different.

To help your preschooler develop these necessary skills:

- **Encourage him to talk.** Discuss the things he sees throughout the day. Ask him to name common

objects. Ask about colors. Ask him lots of questions every day.

- **Take time to really listen** to him. Does he state his thoughts clearly? Can he retell an event in the proper sequence?
- **Let him work with his hands.** Show your child how to hold a pencil and a small pair of safety scissors. Teach him how to zip and button his clothing.
- **Read together daily.** Encourage your child to hold books and turn the pages. Give him plenty of opportunities to “read” to you, too.
- **Ask him to sort objects.** After the dishes are washed, your child can help sort them. Before you put clothes in the washer, he can put them in piles by color. Talk about how items are similar and how they are different.

Teach your child to think like a scientist



The term *science* can be intimidating to some adults. But the goal of science is to discover how

the world works, something children love to do all day.

To keep your preschooler thinking scientifically over the summer:

- **Talk about how things change.** Observe a tree this summer and take notes about how it looks. Plan to do the same thing in the fall, winter and spring. How does the tree change each season?
- **Test your child’s predictions.** Have your child guess how far you (or she) can throw a ball. Then measure and see how close her answer comes to the real distance.
- **Ask your child questions** that require thought: “Why do you think giraffes are tall?” “Why doesn’t it snow in the summer?”
- **Begin a collection** of shells, rocks or leaves with your child. Each time you add something new, talk about how it compares with the other items you’ve gathered.

Show your preschooler how to make a summer picture book



Young children enjoy looking at picture books. They also love to create their own picture stories.

With all of the new experiences that this summer will bring, it is a great time to encourage your preschooler to draw and write.

Over the summer, give your child some drawing paper and ask her to draw a picture of something that happened that day or that week. Cover up the bottom third of the paper so that it remains blank.

Have your child tell you about the picture once she finishes it. On the bottom third of the paper, write down exactly what your child says.

If she is learning to print letters, have her use a colored marker to trace over the letters you have written.

At the end of the summer, staple all of the pictures together for your preschooler's own summer picture book.

Source: B. Johnson, *Never Too Early to Write*, Maupin House Publishers.

“Childhood means simplicity. Look at the world with the child’s eye—it is very beautiful.”

—Kailash Satyarthi

It’s never too early to teach your child about community service



This summer, plan to teach your child about giving. Volunteering together is an effective way to help your child

develop empathy and concern for others.

To raise a kind and caring child:

- **Talk about it.** Discuss how your child’s efforts can make a difference. This will make him feel powerful and motivated to help others and continue volunteering throughout his life.
- **Look for books and stories** about people who are givers. Ask your librarian for some suggestions. Read them with your child and talk about how one person can make a big difference.
- **Select one or two** community service activities in your area to do with your child this summer.

You could collect canned goods for a food pantry. You could visit an elderly neighbor. Your example of service is a powerful way to teach your child about your values.

- **Have fun.** If your child loves animals, see if you can volunteer at an animal shelter or the zoo. If he loves the outdoors, perhaps you could pitch in at a park.
- **Make giving a tradition.** Instead of always asking your child what he *wants*, ask him what he *wants to give*. Does he have any books or toys in good condition that he would be willing to donate to a hospital or a homeless shelter?
- **Introduce your child** to people who help others for a living. Talk to police officers, fire fighters or emergency paramedics. Ask them to tell your child how they serve others in your community.

Are you planning ahead for a fun learning summer?



You won’t hear, “I’m bored!” if you plan now for a summer that’s filled with learning and fun.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the statements below to see how you’re doing with your summer planning.

My summer plans for my child include the following:

- ___ **1. Childcare.** Have you looked into summer camps and programs that offer a variety of activities?
- ___ **2. Summer reading.** Have you checked out the reading program at your local library?
- ___ **3. Family outings.** Are you planning museum visits, picnics in the park, swimming and other activities?
- ___ **4. Home craft projects.** Have you stocked up on supplies such as markers, paste, felt, paper, pipe cleaners and cotton balls?
- ___ **5. Free time for my child.** Are you planning to allow time for your child to play and to just be a kid?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are well-prepared. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Give your preschooler plenty of opportunities to solve problems



Your child has the ability to think. But how far she takes this ability will depend on how much practice

she gets. During the preschool years, no one is in a better position to stimulate your child's thinking than you, her parent.

To provide your preschooler with opportunities to practice thinking and solving problems:

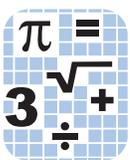
- **Help her anticipate.** “Put your toys away right now!” may in fact result in your child doing what you commanded. But it doesn't do much to engage her brain.

Instead, try, “I am going to set the timer for three minutes. I want you to get as many toys put away as you can before the timer rings.” Now your child has time to think:

“It's time to put the toys away. What should I put away first? Where should I put my toys?”

- **Question, question, question.** Few activities make your child think more than having to answer questions with more than one word. Make a habit of asking your child “Why?” You can even turn her “why” questions back on her. If she asks, “Why are you getting your umbrella?” ask her, “Why do you think I am getting my umbrella?” Be sure to use a friendly tone.
- **Do not run to the rescue.** If your child says, “I can't get my shoe on,” instead of rushing to do it for her, give her a suggestion: “What would happen if you pulled on the shoelaces to make them looser?”

Your child can learn key math skills by playing with shadows



Most preschoolers have fun making shadows—and have no idea that they are learning about measurement, time and space while they are doing it!

All you need is a sunny day, a piece of chalk and a sidewalk or driveway. Then, try a few of these ideas:

- **Draw an X on the sidewalk** or driveway. Have your child come back several times throughout the day and stand on the X. Each time, draw an outline of his shadow. What is happening? What can he tell you about what he observes?
- **Take a few objects**, such as a ball, a block and a crayon, and move them in several different ways.

Ask your child to tell you about the shadow shapes he sees as you turn the objects.

- **Have your child hold** a crayon and then crouch down. What does the crayon's shadow look like? Now have him stand as tall as he can and hold the crayon as high over his head as he can. What does the shadow look like now? Ask your child to tell you about the ways the shadow has changed. Follow up your fun by reading a few books about shadows. Try *The Dark*, *Dark Night*, by M. Christina Butler and *What Makes a Shadow?* by Clyde Robert Bulla.

Source: A. Koester, “Preschool Shadow Science,” Association for Library Service to Children, nswc.com/ec_shadowscience.

Q: On weekends, I spend most of my day playing with my four-year-old son. We read, do puzzles, play with blocks and go outside. However, I think it would be good for him to play on his own a little bit. How can I encourage him to do this?

Questions & Answers

A: You're absolutely right. By the time a child is four, he should be able to play on his own for short periods of time. Children often come up with some of their best creative moments when their parents are not hovering over them.

Try these strategies to create a little space for your child:

- **Be there when he needs you.** If your preschooler really needs your attention, give it to him for a few minutes. Then suggest a fun activity he can do on his own. Most children play alone best after they spend a bit of one-on-one time with parents.
- **Designate special toys, games and supplies** to be used only during alone time. Hold back some favorites—markers, paints, paper or a puzzle. Bring them out only when you want your son to entertain himself. A box of old clothes for dress-up is another great idea.
- **Let him work alongside you.** If your son wants to be with you, but you have work to do, let him do some “work” of his own. If you are paying bills, give him a notebook and crayons. If you are busy making dinner, give him a task he can work on at the kitchen table, such as matching and folding clean socks.

The Kindergarten Experience

Find out if your kindergartner mastered skills



Studies show that students need to keep learning over the summer. If they don't, they may suffer a loss of learning.

Summer learning is especially important for kindergarten students who may not have mastered the skills introduced during the school year. Knowing what your child should have learned this year is crucial.

Over the summer, work with your rising first grader to make sure he can:

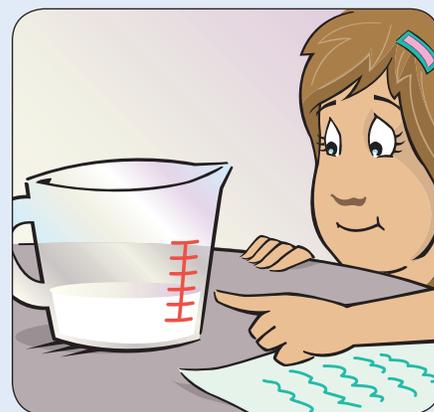
- **Identify, name and write** all the letters of the alphabet.
- **Find a specific word in a text.** "Look at this paragraph and find the word *cat*."
- **Identify words that rhyme.**
- **Identify words that start or end** with the same sounds—for example, *boat/bird* or *dog/frog*.
- **Use pictures to guess** about a story.
- **Retell stories he knows**—with a beginning, middle and end.
- **Write his name.**
- **Write using phonetic** or invented spelling.
- **Count to 30** by ones and to 50 by fives and tens.
- **Add and subtract** using up to 10 items.
- **Answer questions** about quantities: *how many, how many more, less, all, some, none.*

Source: B.M. Miller, "The Learning Season: The Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement," Nellie Mae Education Foundation, nismc.com/ec_kinderskills.

Engage in summer activities that combine learning and fun

Your kindergartner has worked hard all year, and you want her to retain what she's learned. But you also want summer to be relaxing. To combine learning and fun:

- **Have a family spelling bee.** Give each family member words that match their skill levels.
- **Read together** and discuss what you read. Choose books, poems and other material your child will enjoy.
- **Answer questions** about science and nature: "What would happen if we mixed red and yellow paint?" "Why does that toy float in the bath?" "What kind of bug is that?"



- **Make math part of your day.** Have your child count how many steps she climbs, measure ingredients, and look for numbers everywhere she goes.

Make sure your kindergartner keeps reading over the summer



Your child learned many new reading skills in school this year. But when students don't continue reading over the summer, they can lose up to two months of reading skills. By fifth grade, those same students can be two years behind students who do read over the summer.

So get in the habit now of making reading activities part of your child's summer fun. Here's how:

- **Read books together** about your summer activities. If you go to the zoo, read a book about zoo animals.
- **Enroll your child** in the summer reading program at your local

library. Many libraries offer author readings, prizes and internet access. Hard to get to the library? See if there's a Bookmobile that stops in your neighborhood or complex.

- **Engage your child** in online reading activities. Visit the International Children's Digital Library at <http://en.childrenslibrary.org>. This award-winning site offers reading lists, free online interactive books and lots of print-out activities.
- **Bring books everywhere.** See how many places you and your child can find to read. Read on a walk, at bath time, during dinner and with relatives you visit.