

Early Childhood Parents[®]

December 2009
Vol. 14, No. 4

Citrus County School District

make the difference!



Use time over the holidays to read with your preschooler

Some time this month, your child will be starting winter break and will likely not return to preschool until January. This is a time to focus on spending family time together. Reading and literacy fit that goal perfectly. And as a bonus, your child continues to learn.

Here are some ideas for strengthening your family bond, and your child's bond to literacy, during break:

- **Blend reading** into your everyday or holiday activities, such as cooking and baking. Read part of a recipe to your child. Then have him retrieve an ingredient from the pantry. Read directions, such as, "Stir for one minute." With your help, have your child carry out the directions.
- **Get cozy with your child.** For most people, winter break means cold

temperatures. So grab a blanket and several books. If you're in a warm climate, have a "reading picnic" outdoors.

- **Join your child as a listener.** Sometimes your eyes and hands are busy, such as during a car trip to visit family. You can still use your ears to listen to an audio book with your child.
- **Trade stories with your child.** Tell him a story about how you spent winter breaks when you were his age. Then have him tell you a story about something he would like to do (or has already done) during break. Write down his story and ask him to draw pictures to go along with it.

Source: "Creating Learning Traditions," Reading Rockets, Public Broadcasting Service, www.readingrockets.org/article/20545.

Do you know what discipline should teach?



According to many experts, discipline should teach your child good behavior and the ability to be

"competent, caring and in control." To encourage these qualities:

- **Set age-appropriate limits,** but give your child freedom within them. Let her try new things, make choices and take on responsibilities.
- **Do kind things** and talk about why this is important. How does it make other people feel? How does it make you feel? Spend time being grateful each day.
- **Be a role model** for your child. In addition to telling her what to do, show her how to behave. When you're angry, for example, stay calm. Point out other role models, too.
- **Compliment** your child's successes. Speak up when she does something right. Be specific. "You put your books in the bookcase. How grown up!"

Source: Barrie Gillies, "Let Your Child Soar," *Parents*, December 2008 (Meredith Corporation, www.parents.com).

Teach your preschooler how to respect boundaries and limits



Much research shows that young children respond well to clear expectations and consequences. They feel secure when adults are calm and matter-of-fact about what they may and may not do. When adults are consistent in this way, children learn to respect boundaries. As a natural result, they also respect those who set the boundaries.

To grow this respect:

- **Don't treat boundaries** as a punishment. Rather than saying, "Get your hand off that cake!" say, "I know the cake looks good. But we stick to one treat a day."
- **Consider your preschooler's** developmental level. What looks like disrespect in young children

is more likely to be an age-related lack of skills or self-control. Take the time to teach and practice the lacking skill with your child.

- **Give choices.** Children do deserve some control over their lives. Give two choices you approve of and let your child decide. This is win-win.

Source: Jolene L. Roehlkepartain and Nancy Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, ISBN: 1-57542-070-8 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

"I talk and talk and talk, and I haven't taught people in 50 years what my father taught by example in one week."

—Mario Cuomo

Do you know what your child is learning during play time?



You've heard how much preschoolers learn through play. "For young children, play is the main vehicle for learning," says parenting expert Sylvia Rimm. But have you ever wondered just what your child is learning while having fun?

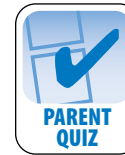
Consider that:

- **Art inspires creativity** and helps kids coordinate hand muscles. Supervise while your child cuts, colors, glues and tapes—and marvel at the masterpieces!
- **Pretending allows children** to imagine. Puppets, dolls, props and costumes prompt kids to wonder, "How would someone feel in this situation?" "What might they do or say?"

- **Building encourages kids** to plan, count and figure things out. Materials such as blocks and puzzle pieces provide good motivation.
- **Music draws children in**, improving their listening, movement, rhythm and pre-reading skills. Practice singing, playing instruments and moving to the beat.
- **Playing games requires** cooperation and sportsmanship. It also helps kids use letters, numbers and words.
- **Reading builds attention**, language skills and imagination. It's a perfect activity to do every day!

Source: Dr. Sylvia Rimm, *How to Parent So Children Will Learn*, 3rd Edition, ISBN 13: 978-0-910707-86-2 (Great Potential Press, Inc., www.giftedbooks.com).

Are you in control of your child's screen time?



Many TV shows, video games and computer games are marketed to young children. Setting limits on "screen time" can be tough.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see how you're doing:

1. **Do you choose** interactive, non-screen activities, such as reading, if your child is under age two?
2. **Do you limit** your child's screen time to two hours (or less) per day?
3. **Do you provide** fun alternatives to screen time, such as playing games, exercising and reading?
4. **Do you supervise** during screen time so you can discuss what your child sees?
5. **Do you pick** shows and games that are age-appropriate?
6. **Have you asked** your pediatrician for the latest recommendations on children and screen time?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're managing your preschooler's screen time carefully. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2009 NIS, Inc.

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Bring a little bit of summer into your winter break with chalk art



Your child may enjoy using chalk to draw on the driveway or sidewalk in the warm months. But chalk can be fun indoors during the winter as well.

Using chalk benefits young children in several ways. It's thick and easy to hold, which allows them to better control what they draw. It gives a sensory experience because of its texture and because it allows children to "feel" their drawings.

Here are two ideas for having fun in the winter with chalk:

1. **Dip a piece of colored chalk** into white paint. Choose a non-toxic paint suitable for young children. Then use the chalk to draw on dark paper. Show your child how

the colored chalk looks against the outline of the white paint and how it all shows up on the dark paper.

2. **Work with glue** instead of paint. Use white glue (in a bottle) to draw a design on dark paper. Let the glue dry. Then have your child draw with colored chalk inside the glue lines (which are now clear instead of white.) If you wish, you can spray hairspray over the drawing to preserve it. You may want to do this part outside. Encourage your preschooler to give some of these masterpieces as gifts to special people this holiday season.

Source: MaryAnn Kohl, *Preschool Art: It's the Process, Not the Product*, ISBN: 0-87659-168-3 (Gryphon House, www.gryphonhouse.com).

Expand your child's language skills with adjectives, adverbs



When your child began speaking, her first words were probably nouns—things she could see, hear, touch or taste—

such as, "Mama," "Dada" or "ball." Next up were probably verbs, such as "want," which led to her first sentences, such as, "Want cookie."

Using verbs showed that your child's thinking skills, as well as her language skills, were developing well.

And now, your preschooler is capable of more complex language. She can *describe* the nouns and verbs she uses. These parts of speech are called *adjectives* and *adverbs*.

To help your preschooler become comfortable using adjectives and adverbs:

- **Ask questions.** If your child points out a dog, ask her, "What kind of a

dog is it?" If she has trouble with this, help her by asking further, "Is it a *big* dog or a *small* dog? What color is it?"

- **Play a description game.** For example, say, "I'm thinking about pancakes and I'm going to tell you two things about them. They're *round* pancakes and they're *yummy* pancakes. Can you tell me two things about that tree outside?"
- **Play a movement game.** Ask your child to clap *loudly*, then to clap *softly*. Or ask her to run *quickly* across the room. Carry this over into your day by asking questions like, "Did you just come down the stairs *quickly* or *slowly*?"

Source: Becky Daniel, *The Playful Preschooler*, ISBN: 1-56822-955-0 (Instructional Fair, a brand of School Specialty Publishing, www.schoolspecialtypublishing.com).

Q: After behaving well all year, my preschooler has suddenly started acting up. His preschool teacher reports he is distracted, chatty and often just "doesn't listen." Could he be reacting to the upcoming holidays?

Questions & Answers

A: Certainly! You don't mention other changes in your son's life or in the school routine. So, the short answer to your question could well be: "It's December."

The decorations, parties, TV commercials and other trappings of the holiday season can easily overstimulate a five-year-old child.

Transition is another issue. Your child has been in preschool about four months. Now suddenly a large break looms. Your son will have to adjust to a change in routine, then a change back.

You can't "cure" December behavior. But you can work to minimize it. Here are some tips:

- **Keep your regular routine** while school is still in session. Resist the temptation to take him to a holiday event on a school night. Put away, for now, the big tin of cookies from Grandma. He needs sleep and regular meals.
- **Find outlets for physical energy.** Unless it's dangerously cold, bundle up and go outside for a bit each day.
- **Cut way down on TV time.** Screen time can distract your child even more. And he can do without all those holiday toy commercials.

Your son will likely settle right back into a successful routine in January. Consult his teacher or doctor for advice if problems continue beyond that point.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance in kindergarten is linked to success



Approximately one in 10 kindergartners is chronically absent from school. But does attendance in kindergarten really matter?

Yes! Research shows that missing 10% or more of the school year is linked to trouble with achievement in first grade. (Both excused and unexcused absences count.) To prevent attendance problems:

- **Ask the school** about attendance policies. What is an excused or unexcused absence? What is a tardy? Check school calendars before planning appointments and trips.
- **Create routines** that make it easier to get to school on time. Prepare school bags, lunches and outfits at night. Establish a regular sleep schedule.
- **Seek help** if issues such as transportation, illness or child care make getting to school difficult. Community programs may be able to help.
- **Keep in touch** with your child's teacher. If your child needs to miss school, the teacher might suggest at-home activities or resources.
- **Enroll your child** as soon as possible if you're moving from one area to another. The sooner your child gets to school, the more your child can learn.

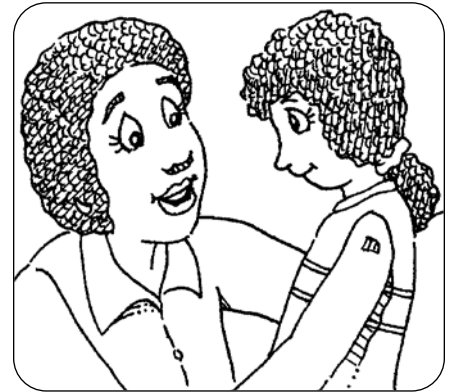
Resource: Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html.

Use praise to encourage, motivate your kindergartner

Kindergarten children usually want nothing more than to please their parents. Your words and actions are key to whether your child will be encouraged and motivated to do well in school, or discouraged and apathetic.

Praise your child whenever you see behavior you want her to repeat. Follow these steps:

1. **Make eye contact** with your child.
2. **Stand near your child.**
3. **Smile at your child.** You can be saying the kindest words, but your child will look first at your facial expression to determine whether she can believe you.
4. **Cuddle your child.** Combine praise with a hug or a high-five. Take advantage of your ability to do this now—she may not be as



accepting of it in her later school years!

5. **Don't delay.** Your child needs reinforcement immediately following behavior. Wait too long and the lesson is lost.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4808-4 (Teachers College Press and the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, www.tcpress.com).

Build your kindergartner's language skills with a poem



Looking for a simple project that will boost your child's language skills? Help him write a winter poem! It's easy with the following steps:

1. **Write five sentences** that begin with, "In winter, I" End each sentence with a different sense (*see, hear, touch, taste, smell*) and a space for your child to add a word. For example, "In winter, I see snow."
2. **Discuss what each sense means.** Your child may need examples, such as, "Remember in the fall

when we *heard* leaves crunching under our feet? We baked apple pie, and it *smelled* so good!"

3. **Spend time observing winter.** What do you sense inside? Outside? While doing errands? Bring the poem with you, and help your child fill in the blanks.
4. **Help your child choose a title** for the poem. Let him add illustrations and his name. All along, be encouraging and enthusiastic about your "poet's" creation!

Source: Lawren Allphin, "Instant Poetry! A Writing Exercise," Education.com, www.education.com/activity/article/Instant_Poetry_kindergarten.