

Boosting your Preschooler's Brain

Your preschooler's knowledge and ability is expanding. His short-term memory, attention and self-control are all rapidly developing. Your preschooler is learning quickly because many pathways in his brain are available due to the synapses being at the highest in his life right now. He may be beginning to show independence, using self-help skills and practicing his evolving social skills and cooperative play. As parents and caregivers, we should set larger boundaries, ask questions and talk with our children often. We should also provide plenty of opportunities for play, time and space for exploration, and experiences with other children his age.



Appropriate toys

Great toys and learning tools for this age include a variety of art materials (markers, construction paper, paint, etc.) and several types of books. Large motor toys (such as large balls to kick and throw, shopping carts, wagons and bikes with training wheels) and small motor toys (such as beads to string and small blocks) are great for development. Also, pretend play items like food sets and dress-up clothes are great for your preschooler's imagination.

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Activities

Here are a few ideas for a parent or caregiver to boost a preschooler's brain activity and school-readiness, broken into three areas of play: thinking, active and imaginative.

Thinking games

- Bring out buttons of different sizes and shapes. Ask your child to help you sort the buttons by color, size and number of holes. Try other categories as well.
- Make up silly stories and ask your preschooler to add sounds and motions to go with the story. Then ask your preschooler to try telling the story back to you. Help your child make up her own story with sounds and motions.
- Pick out four small toys with your preschooler. Place them in front of you and ask your preschooler to close his eyes. Take one away. Have your child guess what is missing. You can increase the number of toys or change the toys as the game continues.
- Make many statements about items and people in the room with you. For example, "All of the walls in this room are white." Have your child answer true or false. Reverse the game and have your child try asking you to identify true or false statements he makes.

Active games

- Ask your child to point to different parts of her body. Then ask her to point to parts of her body with other parts, i.e., "Touch your knuckle to your ankle," or "Touch your ear to your knee."
- Make a body movement and ask your child to copy it. Then add another movement so that the two are combined. Continue to sequence movements and praise your child for remembering as many as he can.
- Listen and dance to all types of music together. You can even make homemade instruments from materials around the house (for example, place seeds into end-to-end cups and tape together to make shakers). Have a parade around the house.

- Go on a silly movements walk. Yell out a large motor command (hop, walk on one foot, skip) and try them together. Let your child make commands as well.

Language games

- When you are reading to your child, stop to look at the pictures and ask your child questions like, "What colors is he wearing?" or "What do you think will happen next?"
- Pick up an object like a dinner plate. Ask your child what else goes with it. She may answer a cup, fork, knife, spoon, etc. Try this with many different objects around the house that your child can associate with other things.
- Play "I spy" together. Describe an object you see in the room and have your child guess what it is. Be as specific as possible when you are describing. Reverse roles and let your child try to find and describe an object so you can guess.
- Explore and talk about all of the ways you can say goodbye (hug, kiss, shake hands, say things like, "Bye," "See you later," "Have a good day"). Talk about who you would say what to.

Look for activities and keys to boosting your toddler and preschooler's brain development in future editions. For more information on these and other parenting, money management, food, nutrition or health issues, contact the MSU Extension office. MSU Extension Family and Consumer Science educators are located in all 83 Michigan counties to integrate university and community resources to help families succeed.

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References

500 Five Minute Games; Quick and Easy Activities for 3-6 Year Olds. Jackie Silberg. Maryland: The Gryphon House, Inc. 1995

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