



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

What do you do to help your child learn to follow directions?

Ages & Stages

PRESCCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

All parents want their children to follow directions, but getting children to cooperate can be very hard! Parents need to guide children in learning how to follow directions and make good choices. When your child is older they will need to make good choices on their own. When you teach them how to make good choices as preschoolers, they will be ready to make good choices later.

To help your child learn to follow directions, there are many things you can do:

- Give them the chance to make choices whenever possible. Make sure you can live with either choice you offer. For example, ask your child if they would like to put their books away before or after their bath. They will be more likely to follow directions if they feel they have a say!
- Have predictable routines. When your child knows what to expect and when, they are more likely to do what you want them to.
- Be specific and clear. (*“Put your dolls in the toy box and your blocks in the bucket.”*)
- Tell your child what they need to do. Instead of asking a question they can say no to (*“Are you ready to go?”*) make a firm statement (*“It’s time to leave.”*).
- Set limits and stick to them. Tell your child they may have a bedtime snack after their pajamas are on, or they may watch TV after their teeth are brushed. Do not change your mind.
- Find other words to say besides “no.” (*“Yes, later.” “Let me think about it.” “Next time.”*) Save “no” for the important things.
- Prepare your child ahead of time for what will be happening next. (*“The car is leaving in 5 minutes.” “You have 10 minutes until clean-up time.” “I will read you one more story before bed.”*) That way they will know what to expect.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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