

Connecting with your Preschooler

Preschool years can be challenging for parents. Your beautiful baby has grown to a point where they have a will, and often a very definite idea of what they want to do! They talk non-stop about anything and everything, and can hold deep feelings about things we might see as small and insignificant. If they aren't talking, they can be strongly moody, and often seem very frustrated, and even aggressive at times. They are becoming independent at caring for themselves: dressing, feeding, and toileting. If our job, as parents, is to help them mature and grow up into caring, compassionate, and capable adults, what should we do with them at this stage?

Be consciously intentional

Everything you do is modeling a way of being to your child. Keep in mind, when you are speaking to them, whether you are being supportive, caring, listening, and understanding, or demanding, rude, insulting and hurtful. Children learn what they see and experience. Decide what you want your child to see in you, and practice those skills. If they don't come naturally to you, it will take a while to develop new habits, but it will be worthwhile. Think about how you would prefer to be treated when you make mistakes, or have accidents, as well as when you are successful and achieve something new.

Children learn by doing

Invite your child to participate with you in daily chores. Getting them to help you cut the vegetables, tear lettuce for a salad, stir a pot, and add ingredients, is allowing them to begin learning about foods, nutrition, and cooking. It is enjoyable, if a little hectic, but can be a fun way to introduce them to new skills.

They might also help you put things in the dishwasher, or take out clean dishes. They can help load the washer, or take clothes out of the dryer, folding the dishcloths and facecloths while you fold the clothes.

Children with disabilities can participate in cooking by turning on and off switches, controlling the mixer or the popcorn machine. They can enjoy smelling some of the ingredients, and some can dump a cup of something into a bigger bowl. They might also enjoy the feeling of warm clothes from the dryer on the tray of a wheelchair while transporting to the bedroom.



Read stories with your child

Ask them to point to features in the pictures, or to tell you what they think will happen next. If there is a repeating phrase in the story, they will quickly learn it and a pause in a familiar story will often elicit the child to fill in the blank. You may feel that you can't possibly read familiar stories one more time – but children love repetition, and learning stories by heart. You can play with it once it is familiar by changing a word for something funny, and enjoying your child's responses.

Reading rhymes is a great way for children to hear the rhythms of speech, and its sounds and patterns. Mother Goose rhymes, Dennis Lee poetry, and Dr. Seuss stories are just the beginning of possibilities.

Take time to play

Take on a character when they dress up and pretend. Provide old hats, purses, old clothes and scarves. Put on music and dance together with scarves, and any instruments you have in the house – even spoons. Play games together, like hide and seek, and early board games. Go for walks and get interested in what you see along the way. Remember that children are learning about the world around them for the first time, so anything you see will be of interest to them.

Keep screen time to a minimum, for both of you

The latest research is showing that children's brains are actually influenced to the negative by television, movies, and excessive screen time with iPads, phones and tablets. Nothing is richer than sharing laughter and common experience with your children and friends, so put aside the phones and other technology and engage in real life. Your children will do what they see you doing, so let the majority of what you do be healthy, engaged activity with others, or just with your family.



Play

Learn

Grow

