



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you make good rules for your child?

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.

Setting and following rules and limits is an important part of raising children. Good rules let young children know what to expect and teach them what they can and cannot do. Having too many rules makes it hard to enforce them all, but not having enough rules lets children think they are in charge.

As a parent, you will need to decide what rules are important for your child to follow. Even if you make good rules and enforce them regularly, it is normal for young children to test when and how often they can get away with breaking them.

Try these tips for setting limits with your preschooler:

- Decide what is important to you and make those your rules.
- Set limits that you will enforce all the time. Be consistent!
- Try to make sure each rule is necessary. It is necessary that your child never runs into the street, but it may not be necessary that their pants and shirt match.
- Make sure the rules are clear to your child.
- Explain the reasons for your rules so that your child understands them.
- Let your child help decide the limits, when appropriate.
- Remind your child of the rules often.
- Tell your child what they can do (*“Walk in the house”*) instead of telling them when they are breaking or have broken a rule (*“Stop running!”*).
- Make sure your child knows in advance what the immediate consequence of breaking a rule will be. For example, if they run in the house, they sit for 3 minutes.
- Tell them what they need to do. Instead of asking a question (*“Are you ready to go?”*), make a statement (*“It’s time to leave.”*).
- Be willing to change the rules as they get older.
- Always be consistent when enforcing the rules you set.

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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