



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

What is your child doing to show independence?

Ages & Stages

PRECHOOLER 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.

Preschoolers are figuring out that there are many things they can do for themselves. It is normal for children to want to be more independent as they get older. When children are allowed to try new things, they learn what they can do on their own and what they still need help with.

While it feels good to children to have more control over certain parts of their lives, this can be a frustrating time for both children and parents because:

- Children sometimes think they can do more than they actually can.
- Parents sometimes do more than they should for their children.

Letting children do things for themselves helps them develop self-confidence – and gives parents a few minutes to do something else!

Remember to keep these things in mind as you help your child do more for themselves:

- Let them do as much as possible for themselves. This includes things like getting dressed, pouring drinks, and doing simple chores. Try not to be critical if they spill a little when they pour or their clothes don't match when they dress themselves.
- Leave enough time for your child to do things on their own without feeling rushed or making you late!
- Be realistic in what you expect. A preschooler may set the table backwards or make the bed crooked. It is more important that they try than that they do a task perfectly.
- Set limits. Let them know what things they can do and what things you will do.
- Give your child choices. Let them pick between two outfits, cereals, or colored cups, and make other simple decisions.
- Give them easy chores like sorting silverware or moving laundry from the dryer into the basket.
- Break larger jobs down into smaller tasks to help your child feel successful. (*“Put the toys in the box, put your clothes in the closet, and lay the blankets on the bed.”*)
- Help your child when you see they are frustrated.
- Be patient. It will take some time for your preschooler to learn how to do new things well.

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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