



Helping Toddlers Become PROBLEM SOLVERS

All parents and teachers have seen the unique ability of toddlers to use toys and materials in unexpected ways. One child may turn a cup into a hammer or a basket into a hat. Another toddler may stand on a riding truck to try to reach a toy or pull over a chair to climb onto a bookshelf. Observant adults recognize these innovations as signs that children are learning to use their thinking skills to solve problems.

Experiences in problem solving help children develop curiosity and patience, along with thinking skills such as flexibility, and understanding of cause and effect. They learn to work toward achieving a goal, and gain confidence in their ability to reach a solution.

Even very young children make discoveries on their own. An infant who accidentally creates a noise with a rattle may then make the sound again and again on purpose. An older infant discovers that by looking under a blanket, he can find a hidden toy. A toddler who cannot pull a wagon up a hill by herself learns that she and a friend can push it up from behind.

By not rushing in and rescuing young children who are facing minor everyday problems, adults can help infants and toddlers develop confidence and increase their thinking abilities.

It's also helpful for parents and teachers to provide materials that encourage children to explore. Some toys, such as jack-in-the-boxes and busy boxes, provide opportunities to explore simple cause-and-effect relationships. Other common materials like empty cardboard boxes, plastic bowls, or scarves can provide open-ended experiences through which toddlers can make choices and decisions, and find different ways to manipulate the materials.

Other activities can involve materials such as clear plastic tubing (such as the tubing used for aquariums) which children can fill with bright materials, and watch the materials move as they shake the tubes. If you provide inclines or ramps of wooden blocks, a toddler can watch what happens as objects roll down inside the tubes. She may discover that some objects roll faster than others. He may learn about actions and reactions when he sets plastic bottles at the bottom of the ramp to create a unique bowling game.

(Whatever materials you provide to help children experiment with problem solving, remember to be very careful about choking hazards.) These everyday materials are fun, and can hold children's interest for long periods. They also help children experiment with cause and effect and with gravity and physics. In addition to supporting cognitive development, problem-solving activities help in the social arena as well. Groups of children engaged in these activities negotiate with their friends and learn how to solve interpersonal problems.

By providing interesting materials and enthusiastically reinforcing children's attempts to explore and solve problems, parents and teachers can stimulate children's development, promote advanced critical thinking, and help children take pride in their own abilities to find out more about how their world works. ■

Excerpted from "Using Everyday Materials to Promote Problem Solving in Toddlers" by Laura Segatti, Judy Brown-DuPaul, and Tracy L. Keyes - an article in the NAEYC journal, Young Children. Many articles and resources from Young Children are available on the NAEYC "Beyond the Journal" Web site, at www.journal.naeyc.org/btj. Early Years Are Learning Years™ is a regular series from NAEYC providing tips to help parents and early childhood educators give young children a great start on learning.

Helping children learn about reading

Why read a book to an infant who does not yet know the meaning of a word--or of words at all? Why sing to a toddler who cannot understand your song?

Both of these activities help children make connections between words and meaning. They also help to create a warm, safe environment for children and lead to a lifetime love of reading and learning.

Some parents assume that learning to read starts with memorizing the alphabet and sounding out words, but actually the fundamentals of reading begin much earlier. Adults lay the foundation for reading every day, when they point out objects and describe what they are doing while dressing an infant, grocery shopping with a toddler, or cooking with a preschooler.

The most important thing is that teaching children about reading becomes an activity that brings children closer to the caring adults in their lives. Here are some tips for families who want to help their children make connections between meaning and words.

Infants

- Talk or sing to your baby when you change his diaper, give him a bath, feed him lunch or join him in play.
- Introduce cardboard or cloth books with brightly colored pictures. Be aware that at this point, your baby might enjoy looking at, tossing, or chewing the books more than being read to!
- Help increase your baby's vocabulary by playing "What's that?" or "Where's the teddy bear?" when enjoying books together.
- Point out words on signs at the park, at the zoo, or when walking or driving.
- As children begin to notice letters on blocks or other toys, name the letters for them. Read words aloud and explain what they mean.

Toddlers

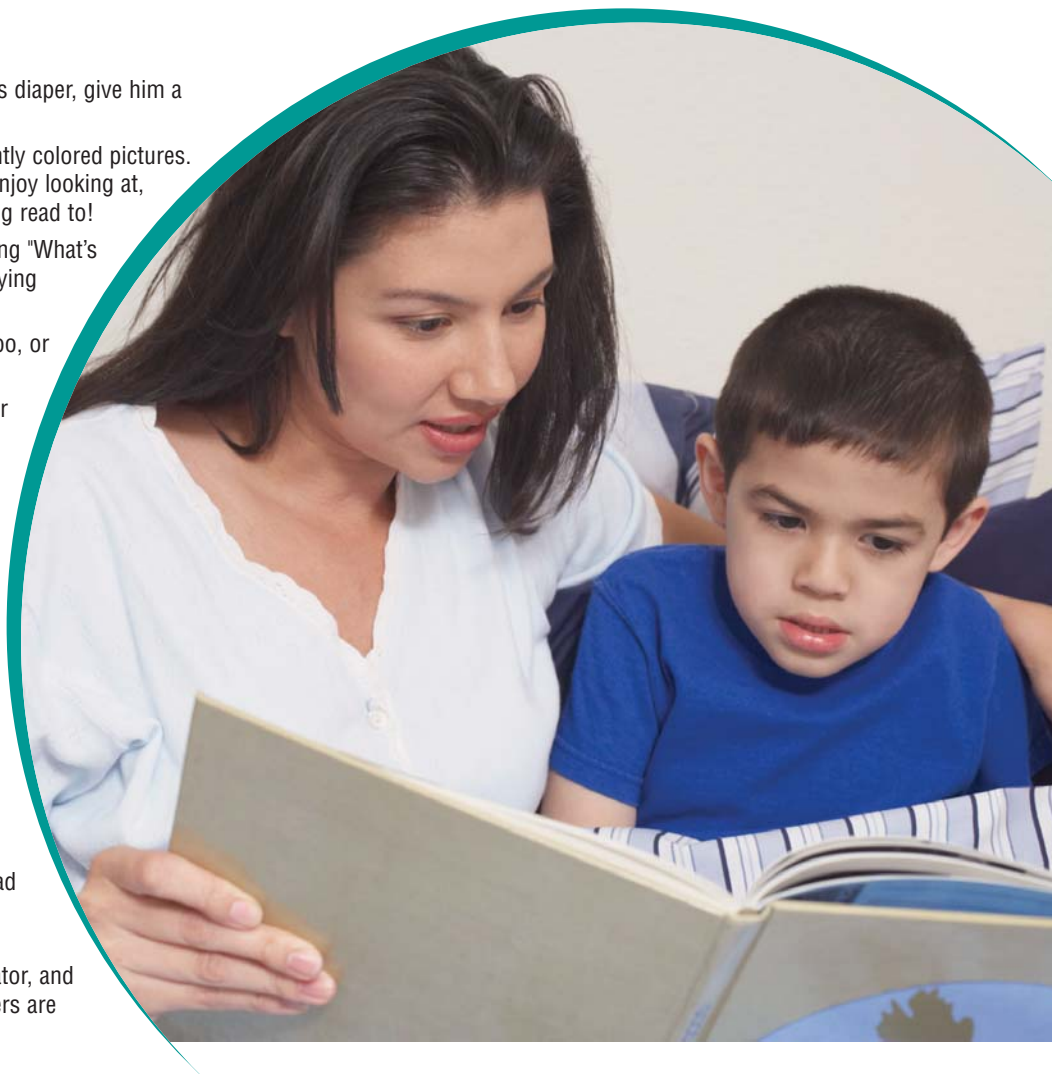
- Reading stories before bed makes a good transition between active play and restful time. Toddlers may ask you to read their favorites repeatedly. They may begin to connect pictures with words, or fill in missing words if you hesitate.
- Let toddlers "write" shopping lists with you. They may want to watch you sort coupons and engage in other grocery store activities.
- Take short trips to new places and talk about what is happening around you. If possible, read together about similar events beforehand and again afterwards.
- Give children magnetic letters for the refrigerator, and begin spelling out words and names as toddlers are introduced to them.

Preschoolers

- Encourage preschool children to carry out the steps to written recipes, or read printed labels at the store.
- At four or five, children may begin to ask questions about the print they see in books. Books with labeled pictures help children to connect words and objects more easily.
- Play picture-card games with your child--but remember, they may not always play by the rules at this age!
- Provide a variety of materials to encourage children to "play" at writing and reading--checks or traffic tickets, menus or greeting cards.

Primary grade children

- Continue to read with your child, especially at bedtime, even if she has already learned to read.
- Visit the library on a regular basis to make books a regular part of children's lives. Show children that you read books and magazines for information and enjoyment.
- Listen to the stories children write, as well as their jokes or riddles. Encourage them to write down their ideas.
- Play word games such as Boggle or Scrabble with your child. ■





BEDTIME BASICS

Kids need plenty of sleep to rest their growing bodies and minds. But for many kids, bedtime is no fun, and for many parents, getting kids to go to bed – and stay there – can be frustrating.

Heading Off Bedtime Troubles

Make sure your child has everything he or she needs to get a good night's sleep, including:

- A regular bedtime.
- A reminder to start winding down, about 30 minutes ahead of bedtime.
- A place to sleep with comfortable temperature, ventilation and a nightlight.
- A bedroom without a TV or video games.
- A trip to the bathroom to use the toilet, wash up and brush teeth.
- A consistent bedtime routine that includes soothing activities, such as storytime.
- A glass of water or any necessary medications.
- A reminder to stay quiet and in bed, and a final goodnight from you.
- Praise the next morning for staying in bed.

When Your Child Won't Stay In Bed

- Return your child to bed right away.
- If your child cries or protests, wait a few minutes, then go back to check on him or her.
- If your child continues to cry or call for you, wait a little longer each time before you go check.
- Remind your child that it's time to go to sleep, and if your child stays quiet, you'll come back to check on him or her in a few minutes.

Quick Tips!

- Keep a consistent bedtime and soothing routine for getting to bed.
- Turn off the TV, video games and computer at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Praise your child for staying in bed. ■

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The Ohio Family Child Care Workgroup recommends: FALL '08 "Top Ten" Tips for Parents

The Parents' Role: As a parent seeking a professional in a family child care home business, it is your shared responsibility with the provider to see that children are cared for in safe, engaging, and nurturing care. Did you know that more families choose child care home businesses over any other type of childcare setting? Here are the top 10 things you will need to know to help you make a choice that is best for your child and family.

- 1. Start Early In Your Child Care Search:** Child Care providers recommend at least 3 months before your need for care arises to properly plan, meet with providers, and interview your final choices. There is more demand than openings and you should not be surprised with possible waiting lists.
- 2. Know Who To Turn To:** Do you know what your resources are? Familiarize yourself with the role of local Childcare Resource & Referral Agency's in your area. (www.childcareohio.org). Also familiarize yourself with the roles, resources, and responsibilities of your county and state Department of Job & Family Services. (www.childcareohio.org).
- 3. Know what questions to ask the Provider:** For example: What is their training and credentials in the child care field? CPR Certified? How would you handle an emergency? How many children will you care for at one time and what are their ages? Has there ever been an injury requiring a 24hr hospital stay or death in their care? Some other guidelines available online at www.childcareohio.org.
- 4. Know how to recognize Health and Safety Risks:** Much work has been done lately to identify the nature and cause of instances where children's safety may be at risk. The experiences can be lumped into Supervision, Environment, and Transportation. (http://www.jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/docs/rules_bullet_format.pdf)
- 5. Know the Types of care that are available to you:** Ohio Law defines "child day care" as administering to the needs to the needs of children outside of school hours by persons other than their parents or guardians on a less than twenty four hour basis. Some types of child care must be regulated in Ohio; other types of child care may operate without a license. Familiarize yourself with the different choices (<http://jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/page2.stm>).
- 6. You have responsibilities too:** Caring for your child involves teamwork and a partnership between you and your provider, so keep providers aware of things that impact your child's life. Do your part as part of the team. Try your best to pick up your child on time and pay on time. Refrain from sending your child to provider knowing they are sick.
- 7. Licensing:** According to Ohio's Child Care Resource & Referral Association, the majority of parents using referral services believe that child care providers in Ohio are already licensed and monitored for healthy, safe child care practices. But, in fact, MOST Ohio providers are UNregulated. Approximately 9,000 providers are currently regulated but an estimated 20,000 unregulated



providers exist in our neighborhoods. As it stands now, any provider caring for six or fewer children at one time in their home is not required to be regulated or monitored by any agency. This provides a false sense of security for parents seeking care services. Consumers need to be informed of care that provides children a safe early learning environment.

- 8. Proposed Legislation:** Legislation was recently introduced in Ohio toward licensing Family Child Care Home Businesses (House Bill 342, introduced by Representative Jon Peterson, and Senate Bill 232, introduced by Senator Steve Stivers). For more information, please contact OCCRRA at **1-877-547-6978**.
- 9. What can parents do now to encourage quality in care?** Parents can encourage their provider to learn and grow in their profession, and to seek regulation for support and education. Did you know that any Certified Type B Provider now has the opportunity to earn a Child Development Associate credential (C.D.A.) with a scholarship to help with the application fee? The CDA is a nationally recognized certificate of authenticity that the provider has undertaken coursework and experiences that enhance the quality of care and education they provide to children. For more information contact Elaine Fencl at **1-877-547-6978 ext. 304** or efencl@occrra.org.
- 10. Help Is Available to Make that Child Care Choice:** Families needing information about how to recognize quality and choose the setting that best fits their family's needs can contact their local child care resource & referral agency for FREE referrals and information through www.occrra.org or at **614-396-5959** or Toll-free at **1-877-547-6978**. ■

Helping Your Child to Stay Well And What to Do When Illness Strikes

Every child gets sick sometimes. It's a fact of life. Whether your child has a tummy ache, a runny nose, or the flu, sicknesses are a normal, natural part of life. As a parent, you have to deal with it... and it's often an unwelcome "surprise."

However, there are some things you can do to try to help your child avoid getting sick. You can make sure her hands stay as clean as possible, and that she knows how to wash her hands. This lowers her exposure to germs. You can work with your child's doctor to make sure your child is up to date on his vaccines. This will help him avoid harmful and preventable early childhood diseases.

Still, no matter what you do, your child will occasionally get sick. And what should you do then? This issue of The Daily Parent will give you tips on how to help your child avoid sickness, and what to do when he does get sick.

Hand-washing:

A Simple Way to Ward Off Illnesses

Germs can be passed onto others easily. Washing hands often and well reduces the chance that germs will be passed along and that your child will get sick. Children and adults should wash hands after using the bathroom, before preparing food and eating, after handling animals, any time they come inside from the outdoors, and at other times. **Here is the recommended way you can teach your child to wash her hands:**

1. Wash with warm water: Not too hot or too cold.
2. Use soap.
3. Take 20 seconds to wash hands – and don't forget between the fingers (about as long as it takes to sing "The ABC Song")
4. Remember to wash fingernails.
5. Make sure all the soap gets rinsed off.
6. Dry hands thoroughly with a towel or air dryer.

If your child is careful about washing her hands at the right times, she will be much less likely to get sick! You can help by being a good example. Follow the guidelines above, so your children have a good model to follow. It's also a good idea to remind them, when you have a meal, or at other appropriate times, to wash their hands!

Vaccines: Why and When

When children are born, they are naturally immune to many diseases. However, after a few months, that immunity fades and their bodies aren't prepared to fight against diseases. Vaccines give children the ability to ward off many of these diseases. For instance, vaccines protect children from: Hepatitis A & B, tetanus, polio, flu, measles, mumps and rubella, bacterial meningitis, and chickenpox.

Most child care programs require children to have at least some of the vaccines listed in the chart. When your child is ready to enter school, they will need to be up-to-date on their vaccines or they may not be able to enter school until they do. This is because children who are current on their vaccines are less likely to get or to pass along diseases. When all the children in a program are healthy, this reduces the risk of your child getting sick.

Immunizations

(Recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices)

Age at 1st Dose	Immunization	Recommended Schedule
Infants		
	Hepatitis B (HepB)	Birth, and monthly until 2 years old
	Rotavirus (Rota)	2 months, 4 months, and 6 months
	Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis (DTap)	2 months, 4 months, and 6 months; fourth dose at 15 and 18 months; final dose at 4-6 years
	Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib)	2 months, 4 months, and 6 months
	Pneumococcal (PCV/PPV)	2 months, 4 months, and 6 months
	Inactivated Polio Virus (IPV)	2 months, 4 months
	Influenza	Yearly starting at 6 months
Toddlers		
	Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR)	Between 12-15 months, final dose between 4-6 years
	Varicella Vaccine	Between 12-15 months, final dose between 4-6 years
	Hepatitis A (Hep A)	2 doses between 1 year and 2 years
Preschoolers		
	Meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (MPSV4)	Only for high-risk groups - your doctor will make a recommendation
School-Aged Children		
	Tetanus and diphtheria toxoids and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap)	11-12 years, or 13-18 years, ask your doctor
	Human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV)	Only for females, age 11-12, boosters 2 and 6 months later
	Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4)	Age 11-12 years

What to Do When Your Child is Sick

When your child gets sick, it can be stressful! The most important thing to remember is that the sickness will usually pass in a few days or weeks, and that rest is important for the body to heal.

Is the Doctor Necessary?

Each child is different, and each child reacts differently to sicknesses. Sometimes, a child just needs sleep and time to get better, such as when they have a cold or even the flu. Sometimes, medicine is needed, such as when they have a bacterial infection. It is always good if you can call your pediatrician or nurse to help determine if they will need to see a doctor. Many doctors have a nurse help-line or service where you can call in and speak with a nurse and they will help you determine what to do.

Stay Home or Go to School or Child Care?

Your child should stay home from child care or school if he has an illness or condition that could spread to others. In some cases, child care programs don't allow sick children to stay in care. Another reason to keep your child home is that he may be too tired to do any of the normal activities at care or school. There's no way to know when your child may get sick. If you are working, you may or may not be able to stay home with him. A good idea, in this instance, is to have a back-up plan. Though each suggestion may not work for everyone, here are some ideas for what that back-up plan might be:

- Arrange with your spouse or partner to take turns staying home with a sick child
- Find a neighbor or friend that stays home that can care for your child
- Family members may be able to help

Some conditions may require antibiotics or other medicines that can provide enough relief in a few days for your child to be able to return to child care or school. Get to know your child care or school's policies on illness or communicable conditions.

Take Care of Yourself

When your child is sick, she usually just needs a chance to rest and some "TLC": tender loving care. And remember, when your child is sick, it's important to take care of yourself. If you need help when your child is sick, ask family or friends to help you with errands, shopping, or other tasks that can help you out.

Young children will always get sick at some time or the other. Most of the time it will not be serious. Try to follow the recommended guidelines for staying well, including taking care of yourself. When your child does get sick, you will be able to handle it, give her lots of attention and comfort, and know this is all a part of growing up.



For More Information

- **Is This the Right Place for My Child?: 38 Research-Based Indicators of High-Quality Child Care**, NACCRRA. This userfriendly booklet contains a checklist of 38 questions that parents can ask to evaluate the quality of child care programs and explains why each question is important and how it relates to the quality of care. It includes a section on making sure your child care program is safe and healthy for your child.
- **American Academy of Pediatrics** is a national organization committed to the optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. There is a special section of their website just for parents. You can do an online search by health topics.
- **Recommended Immunization Schedules for Ages 0-6 Years, Ages 7-12 Years**. This is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' chart on when to immunize your child for what disease. It is updated each year, and the American Academy of Pediatrics helps develop it.
- **NSF Scrub Club** is a fun website designed to teach children how to wash their hands. It is sponsored by the NSF International. ■

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Selecting a **QUALITY** Child Care Program

Finding a quality care and education program for your child is very important. By age 6, 90% of your child's brain development has occurred. Begin your child care search by calling your local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agency. Toll free phone numbers are listed on page 5 of this guide. You can also visit www.childcareohio.org to be connected to the web sites of the local agencies.

Parent Counselors at CCR&R will help you identify several options that can meet your needs based on the age of children, location, cost and type of program.

Once you have identified potential options, make appointments to visit at least two to three of those that sound most promising. Try to spend at least one hour at each program when the children are there. Evaluate each program using the following checklists. Keep in mind what is best for your child and family's needs. Choose carefully.

Regulation

The state of Ohio requires licensing for child care centers, preschool programs, Head Start programs, large family child care homes (7 to 12 children) and many but not all school age programs. Small family child care homes are not required to be licensed as long as six or fewer children are in care.

Licensing establishes minimum health and safety standards but does not guarantee quality care for your child. You can view the licensing compliance reports for programs licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/childcare.stm>. Click on Search for Child Care. Select the county to produce a list of licensed programs. Click on the program name and then click to view current inspections.

Step Up To Quality

Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) is Ohio's voluntary quality rating system for licensed programs. SUTQ identifies three progressively higher levels of standards which build on Ohio's minimum licensing requirements. A one-, two- or three-star rating identify programs that have met the quality standards. For additional information visit www.stepuptoquality.org.

National Accreditation

Accredited programs meet voluntary standards for care that are higher than most state licensing requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) accredits programs that serve children birth through age five. The National After School Association (www.naaweb.org) accredits programs that serve school age children ages 5 to 14 years. The National Association for Family Child Care (www.nafcc.org) accredits family child care programs.



Questions to Ask & Quality Indicators to Look for:

- How have staff been trained to care for children?
- Director and head teacher have college level training in how children learn and grow.
- Teachers receive training every year in how children learn and grow.
- First-aid and CPR trained teacher is on-site at all times.
- Staff are trained on child abuse prevention and how to report suspected cases.
- Teachers stay employed long enough so that children form healthy bonds with them.

How will my child be able to learn and grow?

- Teachers talk to, laugh with and listen to children.
- Teachers are warm, caring, patient, friendly, positive and creative.
- Teachers use positive ways to guide the behavior of children.
- Teachers comfort angry, sad or frightened children in a caring, supportive way.
- Teachers set limits for children that are suitable for their age.
- Children sound happy and are involved.
- Individual needs of children are being met.
- Activities should be child chosen for most of the day.
- Several different activities are usually going on at the same time.
- Activities are interesting, fun and challenging. Children learn by doing.
- Children are encouraged to solve problems.
- Toys and supplies are offered that promote learning at different levels such as puzzles, books, games, blocks and dress-up clothes.

What shows that this is a healthy and safe place for my child?

- Children are well supervised at all times, even while sleeping.
- Infants are placed on their backs to sleep with firm bedding and no fluffy blankets, toys or pillows.
- Cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials are locked up and out of children's reach.
- Outdoor play area is in good condition, fenced, child sized equipment, shaded and open, room to run and places to climb.
- Teachers and children's hands are washed regularly.
- Diaper changing area is cleaned after each use.
- Accreditation requires a minimum of two staff per group of 6-8 babies, 10-14 toddlers, 16-20 preschoolers or 20-30 school-agers.
- Written policies exist and are followed for children that are sick or become sick, injured or lost.
- Written policy regulates for storing and giving medicine to children.
- First aid kits are in each classroom and are easy to reach.
- Emergency and exit plans are posted and drills are practiced.
- All staff have successfully passed a criminal background screening.

How is family involvement encouraged?

- Parents are allowed to visit any time.
- Newsletters and information boards are used to keep families up to date.
- Parent conferences are held on a regular basis.
- Notes are often sent to families about their child's successes or needs.
- Parents are informed of any special events, visitors or trips.

How well is the program managed?

- Current state license (city license, if required) and compliance report are displayed.
- Schedules and lesson plans are posted and show a good balance of quiet and active play offered each day.
- Program policies and rules are reviewed with and copies given to parents.
- Written policy that does not allow physical punishment. Discipline is handled in a positive way.
- Rules about holidays, vacations and other child absences are reviewed.
- Parents and teachers are asked to evaluate the program at least once a year.

Warning signs:

- Center does not encourage parents to observe.
- Infants are confined to swings, seats or cribs for more than thirty minutes.
- Babies are not held while being bottle-fed.
- Children move about for 30 minutes or more without interaction with staff or being involved in an activity.
- Teachers spend most of their time scolding or controlling children. ■





Talking to Your Child's Preschool Teacher

Enrolling your little one in preschool can be a time filled with many questions. How well will my child adjust to preschool? Will my child make friends? Will the teacher understand my child? Establishing and maintaining an open, clear channel of communication with your child's preschool teacher can lessen many parental concerns.

Getting to Know the Teacher

When selecting your child's preschool, there are many factors to consider: safety, cleanliness, general curriculum, overall philosophy, cost, and location. It's a good idea to meet your child's teacher before making your selection and make an appointment to visit the classroom. Watch how the teacher interacts with the children, talk with the teacher, and ask any questions you may have.

While in the classroom, pay attention to how the teacher runs the class and how the children respond to his or her direction. If the children seem happy and interact well with the teacher, chances are good that the teacher's classroom style will serve your child as well.

When you talk with the teacher, ask about a typical day. You may also want to ask specific questions, such as, "If my child came into class crying one morning, how might you handle that?" or "How do you deal with a child who hits others?" Other useful questions might include how the teacher handles discipline, temper tantrums, toilet teaching, biting, or other preschooler concerns. A teacher's answers can help you evaluate how creative he or she might be in responding to everyday classroom dilemmas. You can also learn a great deal from how

responsive a teacher is to your questions. If the teacher appears defensive, uncomfortable, or uninterested while replying to your inquiries, that could signal future communication problems and may mean that the teacher and preschool aren't the right fit for you and your child.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Some preschools schedule meetings during the year to discuss a child's developmental and behavioral progress. Typically, these conferences cover a child's play style and social, language, cognitive, and physical development. If your child's preschool doesn't schedule conference time, you should feel comfortable making arrangements to speak with the teacher about your child's progress. It's important to participate in conferences with your child's teacher because it can help you understand your growing child and shows your interest and cooperation. If your work schedule doesn't allow you to attend, ask if you could schedule a meeting after school hours or over the telephone.

A parent-teacher conference should be the time for listening and communicating openly. If your child's teacher has prepared a formal report for the meeting, let him or her go through the report before asking questions.

Most of the time, a preschool teacher will emphasize your child's strengths. But the parent-teacher conference also offers an opportunity to point out areas that your child may need to work on. For example, a teacher may suggest writing letters, stringing beads, or practicing

cutting skills at home to improve a child's fine motor skills. If the teacher has concerns about your child, try not to become defensive - this may make the teacher hesitant to discuss any problems for fear of confrontation. Try to ask direct and focused questions, with the assumption that any problems raised are ones that can be solved. Because of the limited time of most parent-teacher conferences, however, it might be useful to schedule a future time when any troublesome issues can be discussed in more detail.

Discussing Problems

If a problem, such as biting, arises with a preschooler in the classroom, the best tip is for parents and the teacher to sit down and discuss the issue together. If your child has serious behavioral problems, talk to your child's doctor, who can work with your child and may refer you to a psychologist.

In deciding whether to bring up a problem with a child's preschool teacher, it's important not to overestimate a preschooler's point of view. If, for example, your toddler complains that "no one plays with me" or "I'm bored" in school, give it some time if it doesn't seem serious. Preschoolers' likes and dislikes frequently change, and they're just starting to learn how to interact with other children their age. Also, there's a whole range of factors, including whether they're sick, hungry, or didn't get enough sleep the night before, that can influence a child's day-to-day reactions to school. However, if your child continues to complain, is acting different, or is unusually unhappy, contact the teacher at once.

If your preschooler complains about the teacher, try to find out what he or she is unhappy about. Often, a preschooler may complain if he or she isn't given a popular classroom job, such as lunch helper. It's helpful if you support the teacher and talk to your child about following rules or taking turns.

If you have concerns about the teacher's style or performance, talk to him or her first. If your concerns aren't resolved to your satisfaction, your next stop should be the teacher's supervisor. It's a good idea to try to work out any problems rather than to change preschool teachers midyear, unless absolutely necessary. Your child may take a switch to a new school to mean that any time there's a problem, it can be solved with a new teacher or a new school. It's better to show your child how to work through problems rather than avoid them.

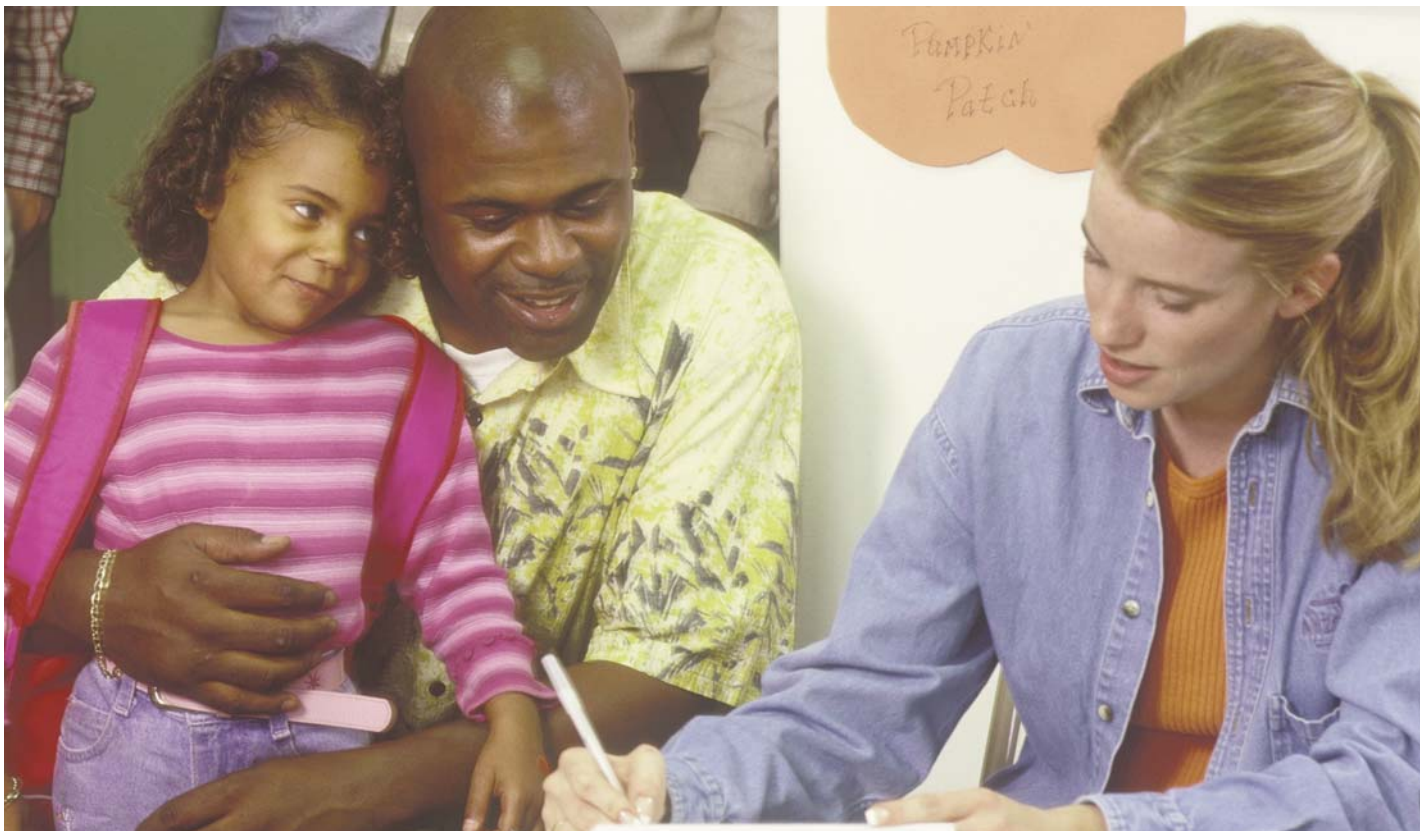
Building a Relationship

It's important to form a good relationship with your child's preschool teacher - for both you and your child. Approach your child's teacher with an open mind and clear, direct questions, so that you can be a part of your child's preschool experience and take pride in your little one's achievements.

Remember to also share praise - both yours and your child's - with the teacher, as well as his or her supervisor ("My child really enjoys story time," for example). This approach not only makes the teacher feel appreciated, but also creates a positive framework that makes it easier for teachers to receive negative feedback in a constructive way.

Think of yourself and your child's teacher as a united team whose shared goal is to help make your child's preschool experience a happy and productive one. ■

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Getting Involved at Your Child's School

Whether your child is just starting kindergarten, entering the final year of high school, or is somewhere in between, there are many good reasons and opportunities for you to volunteer at school. It's a great way to show your child that you take an interest in his or her education, and it sends a positive message that you consider school a worthwhile cause.

Many schools now have to raise their own funds for activities and supplies that would once have been considered basic necessities, and parent volunteers are essential in helping to organize and chaperone these fundraising events, as well as to participate in other school activities.

Why Should I Get Involved?

Parent volunteers offer a huge resource and support base for the school community while showing their kids the importance of participating in the larger community.

The school isn't the only one to reap the benefits of your involvement. By offering some of your time to the school, and by interacting with teachers, administrators, and other parents on a regular basis, you can gain a first-hand understanding of your child's daily activities and some insight into the trends and fads of school life that will help you

communicate with your child as he or she grows and changes (all without intruding on your child's privacy or personal space).

Even if you haven't been involved in the past, it's never too late to start; in fact, it may be more important than ever to get involved when your child reaches secondary school. However, some parents may experience "volunteer burnout" by the time their children enter high school or may decide that the schools don't need them as much when the child leaves the primary grades. But many parents who volunteered a lot of time during their children's elementary years may have returned to full-time careers by the time their children reach their teens, so there's often a shortage in the secondary schools.

Finding the Right Opportunity

One of the best starting points for getting involved is a parent-teacher conference or open house - these are usually scheduled early in each school year, and they provide a great opportunity to approach your child's teacher or principal about volunteer involvement. If you have something to offer, or if you just want to help out in whatever way you can, discuss the possibilities with your child's teacher. The teacher may arrange something with you personally or direct you to a department

head or administrator who can answer your questions and make suggestions. It's also a good idea to join the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or parents' advisory council.

Here are just some of the things your child's teacher and/or the PTA can help you to do as a school volunteer:

- act as a classroom helper
- mentor or tutor students
- help children with special needs
- volunteer in a school computer lab
- help organize, cater, or work at fundraising activities such as bake sales or car washes
- act as a lunchroom or playground monitor
- help to plan and chaperone field trips, track meets, and other events that take place away from the school
- help to plan and chaperone in-school events (i.e., dances, proms, or graduation ceremonies)
- organize or assist with a specific club or interest group (if you have an interest in an activity that isn't currently available to students, offer to help get a group started - for example, a chess club or cycling team)
- assist coaches and gym teachers with sports and fitness programs or work in the school concession stand at sporting events
- help the school administrators prepare grant proposals, letter-writing campaigns, or press releases or provide other administrative assistance
- attend school board meetings
- work as a library assistant or offer to help with story time or reading assistance in the school library
- sew costumes or build sets for theatrical and musical productions
- work with the school band or orchestra or coach music students individually
- help out with visual arts, crafts, and design courses and projects
- hold a workshop for students in trade or technical programs
- spend some time with a specific club or interest group (approach the teacher who sponsors the group)
- volunteer to speak in the classroom or at a career day, if you have a field of expertise that you'd like to share
- supervise or judge experiments at a science fair

Remember that not everyone is suited for the same type of involvement - you may have to "try on" a number of different activities before you find something that feels right. If you're at a loss for how you can help, just ask your child's teacher, who will likely be glad to help you think of something!

Questions to Ask

When you offer to help out, find out how much of a time commitment you'll be expected to contribute, and if you'll be expected to help out on an ongoing basis. Are you going to repair the costumes for the spring musical, or will you be expected to keep the drama department's supplies in good condition year-round? Are you chaperoning the track meet or coaching the whole season?

Be sure to ask if there are any financial costs associated with your volunteer activities. If you're chaperoning a field trip, for example, find

out if you'll be required to pay for transportation and admissions costs. Find out if you'll need to transport students in your own vehicle or if a school bus will be provided. If you're organizing or helping out with an activity that will take place off the school grounds, be sure to find out if there are any specific school regulations you need to keep in mind or any liability issues you should consider.

Getting Started

Here are a few tips to keep in mind once you've signed up for the volunteer opportunities of your choice:

- **Make it clear before you begin just how much time you're willing to volunteer.** Even stay-at-home parents don't have an unlimited amount of time to volunteer at their child's school - many parents have other activities and interests, as well as other children to care for. Don't be afraid to say no if you're being asked to do more than you feel comfortable with - just try to say it early enough so that someone else can be found to take your place, because many trips and activities can't be taken unless the school has a certain number of chaperones or supervisors.
- **Start small.** Don't offer to coordinate the holiday bake sale, the band recital, and a swim meet all at once! If you've taken on too much, find out if you can delegate some duties to other interested parents.
- **Don't give your child special treatment or extra attention when you're volunteering at the school.** Follow your child's cues to find out how much interaction works for both of you. Most kids enjoy having their parents involved, but if your child seems uncomfortable with your presence at the school or with your involvement in a favorite activity, consider taking a more behind-the-scenes approach. Make it clear that you aren't there to check up on him or her - you're just trying to help out the school.
- **Get frequent feedback from the teachers and students you're working with.** Find out what's most and least helpful to them, and get suggestions about what you can do to make the most of the time you spend on school activities. It's important to keep the lines of communication open among teachers, administrators, students, and volunteers, and to be flexible and responsive as the needs of the students and the school change.

When volunteering at your child's school, remember that the work you do not only benefits your child, but will enrich the classroom, the whole school, and the entire community by providing students with positive interaction, support, and encouragement. And don't underestimate the students - you may feel that what you have to offer might not interest them or might be above their heads, but you'll probably be pleasantly surprised. You'll be helping to build skills, confidence, and self-esteem that will last beyond their school days. ■

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Early Care and Education Rating Systems

Step Up To Quality is a voluntary rating system for early care and education centers in Ohio. Participating centers earn a one, two or three-star rating by meeting an extensive list of quality benchmarks that exceed licensing standards. Experts say these benchmarks improve the growth and development potential of children. The rating system also gives parents a useful tool for selecting quality early childhood programs.

The benefits of using a star rated program in Ohio are:

- **More teachers per child** – this allows a teacher to spend more time with each child
- **More qualified teachers** – more training in early childhood development

- **A commitment** to early learning and Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards
- **An outstanding work environment** – paid staff benefits mean staff is treated professionally, which goes a long way in retaining good teachers

Step Up To Quality was created by the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services – Bureau of Child Care and Development to improve the quality of child care in Ohio. Programs throughout Ohio are eligible and encouraged to participate. Parents can get more information about Step Up to Quality and find star-rated programs by visiting the Ohio Job & Family Services at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/stepupquality.stm> or by visiting The Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association at www.occrra.org. ■



Need Help Paying for Child Care?

Child care can be a big expense for families, especially those with very young children. Many child care programs offer discounts to families with more than one child in care. Few, however, are able to offer scholarships or fees on a sliding scale unless families meet eligibility requirements for public subsidy. Specific eligibility levels and the process for obtaining a subsidy vary by state but, help is usually available to low-income working parents.

Child care subsidy is available for low-income working parents or parents enrolled in approved work or training programs. Parents apply in the county where they live by contacting the County Department of Job & Family Services.

Parents may use licensed child care centers, Head Start programs, school age programs or large family child care homes. Parents may also select small family child care home providers that are certified by county departments of job and family services. Relatives may become certified to provide care outside the child's home.

Parents are required to pay for part of the child care fee, called a co-payment. The amount depends on family income and family size. Other eligibility guidelines may apply.

Effective July 2008, the income guidelines by family size are:

Family Size	Monthly Gross Income
2	up to \$1,750
3	up to \$2,200
4	up to \$2,650
5	up to \$3,100

For more information, or to apply for subsidy, please call the Department of Job and Family Services in the county where you live. Additional information and up-to-date eligibility guidelines may be found at the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services web site: www.state.oh.us/odjfs/cdc/.

You May Qualify for Ohio's Early Learning Initiative

Ohio now offers early learning programs for families that meet certain income eligibility and have children who are 3, 4 or 5 years old.

Early Learning (ELI) programs hire teachers that understand child development and how to help children get ready for kindergarten. Schedules are flexible to meet the needs of families. Some are part-time and others operate year-round. There is little or no cost to families.

For more information or to find an ELI program, contact your local Resource and Referral agency. ■

