



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you help your child learn to make choices?

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.

Letting children make choices helps them think things through and teaches them about what happens next. It also tells children that we trust them to make decisions, which builds their self-confidence. Making decisions gives children some control over their lives because *they* are choosing what to do, instead of following someone else’s orders. Preschoolers still need help making decisions, but starting out with small choices will help prepare them to make bigger decisions for the rest of their lives.

- Help your child make choices:
- Offer them the chance to make as many choices as you can. (“*Would you like the blue bowl or the pink?*” “*Do you want to wear shorts or pants?*” “*Are you going to pick up your toys before or after your bath?*”)
- When you make a choice for your child, ask yourself if it is something they could decide. If the answer is yes, let them make the choice next time.
- Give them only two options to choose from. Having too many options might make it too hard for your child to decide.
- Give real choices. Asking your child if they are going to come with you or stay at home by themselves isn’t a real choice because you can’t allow them to stay home alone.
- Respect your child’s choice. If you offer them a choice, let the decision stand even if it’s not the choice you would have made.
- Praise them when they make good choices!
- Step in when necessary. If your child can’t decide, say, “You choose or I will choose for you. You decide.” Set limits when they can’t decide. For example, if your child is standing on a chair you can say: “You can sit on the chair or stand on the floor. You choose.” If they stay standing on the chair, put them on the floor and say, “I see you chose to stand on the floor.”
- Think about what things your child is allowed to choose. They might get to decide what snack to eat or what color shirt to wear, but it may not be appropriate to give them a choice about things like their bedtime or being respectful to another person. Children need to understand that they do not always get to make decisions about everything in their lives.

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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