



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you teach your preschooler to be responsible?

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.

Preschoolers have a hard time separating between “doing” and “being.” If they do something bad, they think that they are bad. They have a hard time owning up to things because they do not want you to think they are bad. It is your job as parents to show your preschooler that you love them even when they makes mistakes. Teaching them to be responsible today will be with them for life.

Try some of the following to teach your child to be a responsible person:

- Make and keep rules. If toys must always be put away before snack, make sure they do it every time.
- Only offer real choices. They can choose the blue shirt or the green shirt, but not whether they wear a coat on a cold and rainy day.
- Be specific. Instead of telling your child to clean her room, break the job into chunks. For example, tell them to fold the clean socks, put the shoes in the closet, toss the dirty clothes in the basket, and put the books on the shelf.
- Give your child age-appropriate chores. Show them how to set the table, put toys away, or feed the dog. You’ll need to remind them to do their chores every day.
- Give them time to learn and practice new skills. It may bother you that they do not do things perfectly, but remember that you are helping them learn to work hard and finish what they start.
- Discuss feelings with your child using open-ended questions. (*“How do you think Tyrese feels after Jack hit him?” “How do you think Jack feels?”*) An open-ended question is one that requires more than a yes or no answer.
- Role play using open-ended questions. (*“What would you do if you found \$5 on the playground?” “What would you do if a stranger tried to give you candy?”*)
- Teach your child to take responsibility for their actions. There is an important difference between them saying “my doll got broke” versus “I broke my doll.”
- Discuss consequences. (*“What will happen if you keep kicking the ball in the house?”*)
- Praise your child’s specific act. (*“Thank you for folding and putting all your socks away in the dresser. What a great helper you are!”*) This is more than effective than offering a general, “Good job.”
- Use natural consequences. If your child breaks their favorite toy, they can’t play with it anymore.
- Realize that you’re not perfect. When you admit your mistakes and tell your child how you feel, you will be showing them that we all need to take responsibility for our actions.

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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