



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

What makes your child laugh?

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.

It is fun to laugh. From the time they are babies, children are developing their sense of humor. Humor is different for everyone, but most preschoolers laugh at things that look or sound silly. Preschoolers think it is very funny when something goes wrong because they are learning about how things are supposed to be. They aren't being mean when they laugh or giggle; they are reacting to something they didn't expect to happen.

A good sense of humor is an important life skill all children should be encouraged to develop. Humor can be a great tactic to use during an argument, or when you're feeling a lot of stress. Some research even shows that people who laugh often are healthier than those who don't!

Try some of the following tips to help your child learn to laugh and be playful every day:

- Let yourself see the funny side of life! Letting things go and using humor and laughter is a great natural way to relieve stress and anger. If you can take a step back and laugh, both you and your child will benefit!
- Be silly with your child just for fun! Make weird faces, sing silly songs, and giggle a lot!
- Find something to laugh about every day. Even in the most stressful times, you can often find something funny to laugh at, especially with young children around.
- Encourage your child to laugh. They may laugh sometimes when they shouldn't (like if someone gets hurt), but if you explain when it is okay to laugh and when it is not, they will catch on.
- Teach your child the difference between laughing *with* someone and laughing *at* someone. Explain that making fun of other people hurts their feelings and is never okay.
- Be a good example by being able to laugh at yourself. Let your child know that it is okay to laugh when you make a mistake or do something silly.
- Write down the funny things your child says and then go back and read them together later. Your child will enjoy hearing how funny they are!
- Avoid sarcastic humor and put-downs. Humor should be something that makes people feel happy, not sad or bad about themselves.

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.

Parenting the Preschooler: Social Competence and Emotional Well-Being © 2021 Michigan State University Board of Trustees. The fact sheets in this series may be copied for purposes of 4-H and other nonprofit educational programs and for individual use with credit to Michigan State University Extension.