



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you support your shy child?

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.

Some children are comfortable in new situations right away, while others take their time to get comfortable. Children who take time to feel comfortable are often called shy. Shy children often dislike being around new people or in new places. They may be quiet or reserved and prefer to watch what is going on around them rather than joining in right away. Some children have learned to be shy and others are just born this way. Being shy is very normal for preschoolers and most children will outgrow their shyness as they get older.

Until they do, you can try the following tips to support your shy child:

- Give them time to warm up in new situations. Introduce new people, places, and things slowly.
- Talk with your child ahead of time about what is likely to happen in situations they may find difficult. Knowing what to expect can help ease their anxiety and make them more comfortable and confident in the situation.
- Pretend-play that you are the shy child and your child is the adult. This lets them act out some of their ideas and fears in a safe way.
- Talk with and listen to your child to help make sure you understand their feelings.
- Plan playtime with one or two friends that they like.
- Encourage their interests to help build their confidence.
- Regularly introduce them to new people and places. Remember that it’s okay for your child to take time to warm up to new places and people. Stay close by or hold your child’s hand if they feel uncomfortable about these introductions.
- Praise your preschooler when they do interact with new people in new situations. Praise will help give them confidence in similar situations in the future.
- Avoid labeling your child as shy. Calling children shy may cause them to attach a negative label to themselves and can make them feel even more uncomfortable in new places or around new people.
- Provide many opportunities for your child to play with other children, such as in playgroups and at playgrounds and parks.

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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