



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

What do you do when your preschooler is bossy?

Ages & Stages

PRESCHOOLER 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 often act bossy. They know what they want, and they know what to say to get it. Other people have been telling them what to do and how to do it for their whole lives, and now they want a turn!

Preschoolers like to be in charge. They feel important when they make decisions for themselves and for others but they rarely think about what other people may want or need. As they get older, they will think about the feelings and needs of others more often.

If you are worried about your preschooler’s bossiness, here are some things you can try:

- Let them make appropriate choices as much as possible.
- Teach your child how to ask for what they want politely. Explain the difference between saying, “Can I please have some water?” and “Get me some water now!”
- Refuse to give your preschooler what they want when they make demands. (*“I might feel like doing that for you if you ask me nicely.”*)
- Teach them ways to express themselves while respecting other people and their ideas.
- Step in when your child takes over. Teach them how to make suggestions and compromises.
- Play make-believe and ask them to practice giving suggestions to others. Your child will learn a lot when they role-play with new ideas and words.
- Teach your preschooler how to interact safely and appropriately with animals, including family pets (no bossing them around). An MSU Extension News article titled “The benefits of a family pet” (<https://bit.ly/2NTgxbv>) offers advice on appropriate levels of contact with and responsibility for family pets for children under the age of 10.
- Avoid labeling your child as bossy. Calling children bossy may cause them to attach a negative label to themselves and can make them feel bad about themselves. Remember that sometimes young girls who show leadership skills like confidence, directness, and decision-making are unfairly labeled “bossy” while young boys who show the same skills are called “leaders.”
- Be considerate of others in front of your child! They will catch on to how to do it themselves over time.

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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