

Teach Me...Guide Me

Energetic, happy, excited are perfect words to describe four year olds. They learn constantly and have boundless energy. As parents and caregivers we still need to watch them closely, for they do not recognize their own limitations.

Preschoolers, (the term refers to children who are over the age of 3 years but not yet in formal school) are growing rapidly but seem to be growing the fastest mentally. They act like sponges absorbing every experience around them.

Preschoolers can tell you how they feel, are both independent and social, love being silly and playing pretend games.

Your preschooler likes boundaries and limits. Instructions such as "you can run as far as the tree" gives your 4 year old independence along with a limit. Rules help him to control his behaviour and predict what will happen next. In fact, he likes rules so much he might even invent some of his own, "I only wear blue socks on Tuesday!"

Preschoolers have strong needs for companionship and may have one special friend they enjoy playing with. Friends help your child to see the world is bigger than her immediate family.

This is also a time when your 4 year old collects some not so desirable behaviours or expressions. Often your preschooler is testing to see what kind of reaction or attention he will receive. Remaining calm and being consistent are important rules for mom and dad.

Remember, your preschooler still needs your attention, time and love, especially when he is being challenging. Teach him, guide him, love him.



If I Had My Life To Live Over

Adapted from a poem by Erma Bombeck

I would have talked less and listened more.
I would have eaten the popcorn in the "good" living room.
I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth.
I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains.
Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle.
When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, "Later. Now go get washed up for dinner."
There would have been more "I love you's." More "I'm sorry's"...But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute...look at it and really see it...live it...and never give it back.
Stop sweating the small stuff. Don't worry about who doesn't like you, who has more, or who's doing what.
Instead, let's cherish the relationships we have with those who do love us. Let's think about what we are blessed with.
And what we are doing each day to promote ourselves mentally, physically, emotionally, as well as spiritually.



My Behaviour

Turn On My Ears!

“Mom, my ears are not turned on right now!” Ever wonder if they really can't hear you or are they just tuning you out? There are many reasons why your 4 year old might not be listening; they could be tired or hungry, upset or preoccupied. They may also tune out because parents say too much stuff that doesn't matter to them. What can you do?

1. Check your own listening skills. Parents need to model respectful listening if they want their children to develop this.
2. Acknowledge their feelings. Say something like, “You sound angry with Tommy.”
3. Match your speaking style and expectations to your child's age and development.
4. Get down to your child's height.
5. Make sure you are not talking over the TV or a computer game.
6. Keep messages simple and clear “Please put your toys away. Someone might trip on them.”
7. Make sure you are understood. By asking your preschooler what he is to do, tells you how much he has understood.

Preschoolers are easily distracted and may have trouble doing things consistently.

Regardless of your child's age developing good listening skills takes time. You need to listen to your child, respect what they say and acknowledge their feelings.



That time of the Day...

When is the most frustrating time of the day for parents? Most parents would agree that the hours between 4 and 6 p.m. are the most straining. After a long day, parents and children are often tired, hungry and low on patience. Try these steps to make this difficult time more enjoyable.

- Give your child a small, nutritious snack. (Such as fruit and yogurt or raw vegetables and dip). Preschoolers often misbehave when they are tired, hungry or want attention.
- Spend some time talking with your child about his day. Listen to his responses.
- Ask your child to help you prepare dinner. He can set the table or tear lettuce for a salad. This will help him be involved in the meal preparation and allow you to spend some valuable time together.
- Most importantly, make dinner a family priority. Enjoy your meal together!

Family Time

We come from many different kinds of families. Some families have a Mom and Dad who live in the same house. Some families have Moms and Dads who live separately. Some families have no Mom or Dad – children may live with grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends or foster parents. Teach your child that every family is unique and special.

Children and Chores

In many households children are expected to help around the house. The process of teaching children what to do and how to do it can be easy. Getting the children to do the chores regularly and completely can be more of a challenge.

Teach children at an early age that it is important for all family members to contribute to make the household run smoothly. Chores are beneficial for children. Being responsible for an activity teaches children cooperation, responsibility, fairness and commitment. The skills and values learned will benefit children throughout their lives.

Here are some suggestions:

1. **Start Early.** Take advantage of your child's desire to help at this age. Small simple tasks to start, for example, feed the pet, put toys away, pull weeds.
2. **Show how to do the chore.** Children need to know what is expected.
3. **Teach one chore at a time.** Young children become confused if they are required to learn too much at one time.
4. **Explain.** Children need to know why helping is important.
5. **Change the nature of chores as children grow.** The chores can become more complex depending on what children can and can't do. A 4 year old can't clean his room but he can put his toys away neatly.
6. **Set up a chart or a reward system.** Parents or child marks chart when chore is done. Awards should not be food, rather a trip to the local park, or a longer story time.
7. **Don't nag,** instead provide logical consequences. If a certain toy is never picked up then it is not available for a reasonable amount of time.
8. **Monitor.** At first, especially with young children, they will need your guidance and support. Do not do the chore for the child, it allows children to learn their parents will eventually do it.



Feeding & Nutrition

Veggies and Vitamins

My Mom and Dad tell me to eat my vegetables, but I don't like them all the time. I've noticed they don't always eat their vegetables either. I have seen Dad leave his broccoli and Mom leave spinach on her plate.

I asked Dad why we couldn't just take a vitamin pill instead of eating our vegetables. He said, vitamin pills do not do as good a job as vegetables do in giving me important nutrients. Vitamin pills are not candies. Some children may need supplements – but only if they are prescribed by a doctor! Mom keeps vitamin pills up high in the cupboard because I can get sick if I eat them. Dad said it is good to have lots of different foods each day from the food guide so that I will get all the nutrients my body needs to be strong.

Thanks Mom and Dad, for teaching me the importance of healthy eating. Let's all eat our vegetables tonight.





Physical Activity

“Get the Wiggles Out”

Walk on tiptoes, balance on a beam, run, climb, gallop and jump. Let's play “follow me”. Building an obstacle course is great fun. We can climb on top of a bench, underneath a chair and run between two things. Include a beanbag tossing game in the obstacle course. I am learning to catch and throw. Although it is too early to sign a baseball contract, I like showing off my new skills! Let's frame some of my creative artwork. My drawings of our family are fun to make. When we read stories I enjoy talking about how the people feel in the story. There are so many things to talk about -- big and little, fast and slow, near and far. I can tell you my likes and dislikes and you can tell me yours.



My Mental Health

“Circle of Life”

Explaining to children about the end of life is just as important as answering questions about our beginnings. The death of a family member, friend or pet can be a difficult time for a child and their parents. Children mourn differently than adults and grieving should be encouraged. Here are some suggestions for helping children understand death.

1. Take advantage of opportunities to talk about the idea of death. For example, finding a dead bird in the park. Wanting to bury the dead animal is a common reaction, help your child to do this.
2. Don't talk too much. Use real words like dead and died and answer questions simply. Listen to your child.
3. Tell children what to expect with regards to your religious, social and family traditions.
4. Talk about the person who died. This shows their life had value and meaning.
5. Explain to your young child that death and grief are a normal part of life.

Some behaviours you may see in your child depending on their age include: demanding time from adults, wishing for the loved ones return, feeling anxious when a family member is late, regressive behaviour like loss of bowel or bladder control and temper tantrums. These are all normal. Younger children may play-act death situations. This too is natural and helpful for them.

Building My Confidence

I have building many skills; toilet training (although I may still wet the bed at night), feeding myself with a spoon, fork and knife, I can usually dress myself and I am speaking more clearly in fairly complex sentences. “The dog ate the broccoli when it fell on the floor.”

Helping to build my confidence is important, here are some suggestions which work:

1. Be positive; give hugs, give me compliments and remember to laugh with me.
2. Help me to understand it's okay not to be perfect and everyone is good at something and not so good at other things.
3. Give me your time; having you do things with me such as reading a book, watching TV and playing, all tell me I'm important to you.
4. Say “I love you”; you can tell me this and show me with smiles and hugs and kisses.
5. Stay connected, really listen to me when I tell you things.
6. Use positive discipline; make sure I understand the rules and consequences. Be consistent and make sure they are right for my age.
7. Criticize my behaviour only, not me. For example; you could say, “I'm upset that you wouldn't share with Sarah,” instead of “You're a mean girl for not sharing.”
8. Be patient and enjoy our time together.

The most valuable gift parents can give their child is a few minutes of their time each day.

Dysfluent Speech

Between the ages of 3-5, I may repeat sounds or words. This is called dysfluency. Dysfluent speech happens because I am learning many new words. I want to make my sentences longer and more complicated – like yours. You may notice that my speech is dysfluent or “bumpy” when I am anxious, excited or tired. Here are ways you can help me:

- Give me your full attention and listen to what I am saying.
- Give me lots of time to tell you what I want to say.
- Instead of saying “slow down”, talk to me slowly. This way I don’t feel rushed to express myself.
- Keep your sentences short. This will help me feel more relaxed.

When should we seek outside help? If I continue to repeat sounds or words and I am aware of it. If I am having difficulty saying what I want to say. Contact a Speech Language Pathologist, your Public Health Unit or your Family Doctor. You can also call 211 or visit www.211Ontario.ca for resources in your community.

Let’s LOOK into a BOOK!

I love it when you help me hold a book and turn the pages! Pick a special time to read books with me (it doesn’t always have to be before bedtime!) It’s fun to point to the pictures as we talk about them together. Libraries and resource centres are great places to find books. If I seem to always pick the same books over and over again, it’s OK, I remember the words, events and how the story begins and ends. We could make a special story about a trip or an “adventure” that we shared together. Let’s put our photos and comments in a book and tell the “story” again and again. Help me enjoy the wonderful world of reading and learning!

Play with Me

How does the cow jump over the moon? Why does Peter Pumpkin Eater live in a pumpkin? Be patient. I have endless questions that need answers. Let’s match pictures, shapes, and objects. You will be surprised at how well I play this game. My new playmate is very important to me. Let’s invite him over so we can play games with rules. My favourite game is “Simon says”. I love when we share nursery rhymes and sing songs. Learning is so much fun when we play together. It is time to drag out some of your old clothes so we can fill our dress-up trunk. I hope you are able to take time to help me make up a play or a puppet show. Let’s invite Grandma and Grandpa over. They will really enjoy watching us perform!





Getting Ready for School

Preparing for School and Separation

Full day, every day Junior Kindergarten is now available across Ontario. We are all afraid of the unknown. To help your child feel more comfortable about going to “school” reviewing what to expect will help him prepare for the change. Your child is aware of your attitude towards school, so being positive is important. Explain he will have other boys and girls his own age, there will be time for play, crafts, games and learning. Teachers make learning fun and you can tell your child to have fun, be active and look forward to making new friends.

Another way of preparing your child is attending an orientation event at his new school. This helps to remove fear and apprehension as your child gets a chance to “check it out”. These are often held in fall before the school year starts. Taking your child to the school playground on a weekend can also create familiarity and excitement. Answer his questions. Tell funny stories about when you were in school. Most of all, let your child know you are happy and excited about his next step. Visit the “parents area” of your local school board’s website for more information.

Routines

Children like routines, they like to know what to expect and when to expect it. Creating routines helps your child prepare for the day ahead.

Mornings can be a struggle in many homes as parents are trying to get out the door on time. Children may seek our attention in the morning for a variety of reasons; not wanting to leave you, not enjoying the program, or not feeling well. They learn that when they resist, argue or stall they get attention whether it is positive or negative. Such a routine can leave everyone frustrated, exhausted and discouraged.

Here are some tips which might help:

1. Before school starts, practice your new routine.
2. Encourage everyone go to bed a little earlier, stop daytime naps for your child and get up earlier. Have a healthy breakfast together.



3. Encourage more independence. Washing hands, getting dressed, and brushing teeth.
4. Do things the night before. Prepare lunch boxes and leave in fridge overnight. Set breakfast things out. Get clothes ready, place backpacks at door.
5. Scolding, nagging or criticizing does not speed up the process. Think of ways to provide positive reinforcement.
6. a) Time rewards – If your children are up and ready to go early, there would be time to read that next chapter in a book before you leave. (TV or computer games are not always good rewards as they are hard to turn off when it’s time to leave).
b) Compliments – “I really liked how well you got ready today.”
7. A bulletin board for putting up messages, pictures and reminders is a good way to keep everyone informed about family activities.
8. Don’t expect miracles. There will be days in spite of our best efforts things do not run smoothly. Remember, each day is a new opportunity.

Importance of Play for School Readiness

Play is how I learn about the world around me. I am now very creative. I let my imagination go. I might develop my own themes like dragons and knights. I like using things around the house like large boxes for a castle. Encourage me to play creatively. It develops my ability to problem solve and to use something familiar in a new way. My friends and I might pretend to be the knight, the dragon or the castle. Enjoy this special time of “performing” with me as I use make believe in so many wonderful ways. Let’s pretend we are riding on the dragon in the land of make believe and all we can see are the bright stars in the sky!



Medical Care

Sometime between ages 4 and 6 years, your child will need their next immunization. Make an appointment with your family doctor or call the local health unit. Immunizations are important. If you want further information your local health unit has plenty. Keep all your child's health records in one place as the school will ask to see the records on registration. Keep your local health unit informed of your child's immunizations.

It is also a good idea to have your preschooler's eyes tested before they start school. Vision testing is covered under the Provincial Health Plan.

If you have any concerns about your child's hearing, talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner. If necessary referrals can be made to a hearing clinic associated with an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist or you can make your own appointment with an Audiologist.

Remember to replace your child's toothbrush every 3-4 months or after he has been sick. If you get him a power toothbrush, make sure it is small and has soft bristles.



For More Information

Best Start Resource Centre:

<http://en.beststart.org/resources-and-research>

Ministry of Child & Youth Services - Early Childhood:

www.ontario.ca/children

Telehealth Ontario:

Call 1-800-797-0000 24 hours/day

Canadian Paediatric Society:

<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca>

Call 211 or visit www.211Ontario.ca

EatRight Ontario: Call 1-800-510-5102 or visit

www.ontario.ca/eatright

To find your local Public Health Unit:

Visit <http://bit.ly/eMtpaw>

Call the INFOLine at 1-866-532-3161

(Toll-free in Ontario only)

or TTY 1-800-387-5559



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