

Tips To Help Your Preschooler Thrive

STRIVE FOR AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING: Research indicates that authoritative parenting — characterized by both high responsiveness (demonstrating warmth, love, and support) and high demandingness (enforcing clear, consistent expectations and boundaries) — leads to positive outcomes for kids.

- Uphold clear and fair expectations and rules.
- Encourage discussion and questions about reasons “why.”
- Show affection, warmth, and love (even when your child is being his or her most difficult self).

CULTIVATE AUTONOMY: For preschoolers, autonomy is about doing things for themselves, and developing independence and confidence. Autonomy is associated with lower anxiety, increased creativity, intrinsic motivation, persistence, and self-regulation in children.

- Give children choices and real age-appropriate tasks (like setting the table or helping to put away groceries).
- Offer meaningful rationales for “why” (and not “because I said so”).
- Provide “scaffolding”: first model a skill or task, then support the child to practice and build competence, and finally, allow the child to perform the activity by him/herself.

SET AND HONOR CONSISTENT SLEEP ROUTINES: Good, consistent sleep is correlated with better physical and mental health, emotional regulation, and improved learning. Preschool-aged children need 10–13 hours of sleep each day. Naps count!

- Avoid media at least 30–60 minutes before bedtime. Screen light affects sleep.
- Wind down with calming activities before bed each night (like reading and bath time).
- Encourage physical activity every day.

PRESERVE FREE PLAY: Free play — when children are doing (non-media) activities that are freely chosen, self-directed, and internally motivated — is associated with increased creativity and problem-solving skills, empathy, conflict resolution skills, emotional regulation, and academic skills.

- Protect unstructured playtime.
- Let children self-direct playtime with friends and resolve challenges without adult interference.
- Encourage imaginary play.

LIMIT MEDIA/SCREEN TIME: Too much screen time can interfere with healthy child development.

- Set and follow clear ground rules and limits.
- Preview or co-view content.
- Avoid media in the bedroom, during mealtimes, and before bedtime.
- Model healthy media use. When spending time with your child, put phones away or on do not disturb.

PRIORITIZE PDF — PLAYTIME, DOWNTIME, AND FAMILY TIME: Join other parents nationwide who are prioritizing PDF and broadening the definition of success for their children and families. Embrace your child’s unique interests and strengths and resist pressure to push early academics or overschedule structured activities for your child.

Challenge Success is a non-profit organization affiliated with the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. We partner with schools, families, and communities to promote a broad definition of success and to implement research-based strategies so that all kids are healthy and engaged with learning. Join our growing community:

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