

Social Distancing and Distance Learning for Toddlers, Preschool and Pre-K Kids: A few thoughts from a pre-k teacher and a mom of a toddler - written by Shayna Tivona

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## Welcome

I originally created much of this document for my preschool/pre-k classroom, but I have had a lot of interest from friends, and requests for more toddler focused things, so I'm going to keep adding to it for as long as we're asked to social distance ourselves. I've been a teacher of 2-5 year olds for nearly a decade, and my son is two. My husband is teleworking from home right now, and I am distance teaching my preschool class.

I started this document on March 15th, and it's grown considerably since then. Skip to the bottom for toddler-focused information and a summary of my favorite resources. I've committed to updating this regularly (daily for the first few months, but now it's a weekly update) until schools reopen, so keep checking back for more. I highly recommend using the "outline" feature to help navigate this document.

## Contact Me

If you have questions or ideas to add to this document, please let me know. You can contact me at [distancelearningpreschool@gmail.com](mailto:distancelearningpreschool@gmail.com)

If you want to share this with others, here's an easier link: <http://bit.ly/2x2uADm>

## Spread Love

Love this? Consider donating to some local DC organizations:

-[Bread for the City](#) - wraparound supports include food, clothing, legal and medical assistance

-[Miriam's Kitchen](#) is still working to end chronic homelessness

-[Hook Hall](#) is helping support restaurant and food service workers who might need assistance

## Favorite Resources of the Week:

Looking forward to August 17th: Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood has a [special episode](#) to kick off the new season, all about wearing masks and social distancing.

## Importance of Social Distancing

Yes, this means everyone. Yes, this includes your kids. We can all be feeling just fine and still be spreading COVID-19. No, do not go to the playground. No, do not set up a playgroup right now. I'm not going to say a lot more about this right now. It is really hard. It is also really important! So do it.

A few articles about this:

- [Washington Post](#), 3/17/2020 - Coronavirus looks different in kids than in adults
- [Medium](#), 3/13/2020 - Social Distancing: This is not a snow day
- [Washington Post](#), 3/14/2020 - Why outbreaks like coronavirus spread exponentially, and how to “flatten the curve”

## Explaining COVID-19 to Kids

### -COVID-19/Pandemic Specific Resources:

- [Coronavirus: A Children's Book](#) - illustrated by Axel Scheffler (The Gruffalo, Room on the Broom, etc.) - Probably best suited to ages 5 and up
- PBS - [Meet the Helpers: Coronavirus](#)
- [Suzie Learns About Coronavirus](#) - downloadable story with translations in Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese
- [Why Do People Wear Masks?](#) (song) - by Jack Hartmann
- [Tips for Families: Coronavirus](#) - Zero to Three
- [Don't Forget the Sprinkles](#) - written by Sarah Beller and Max Toth, the proceeds of this book written for 4-8 year olds goes to a public DCPS school

### -Isolation resources:

- [Reassuring Kids During Covid-19 Isolation](#) post by Books for Littles, includes book suggestions
- [The Invisible String](#) by Patrice Karst

## Distance Learning is Both Temporary and Inferior

Before we begin this whole distance learning adventure, you need to remember a few things: Kids need to socialize. Kids learn through play. Please don't read any of my advice here and think that I'm suggesting we switch to online preschool when all of this is over. My kid can learn a lot from me, but he learns even more from his peers and teachers. These suggestions are meant to help everyone get through this time, and in no way support the idea that distance learning is a highly effective or developmentally appropriate way of learning. It's just how we have to cope right now.

By the way, I'm not homeschooling my child right now. Homeschooling involves focusing fully on your child's education for several hours a day. What I'm doing is trying to keep my kid engaged, happy, and learning, while my partner and I telework.

## Structure and Routine

Kids love it. Parents love it. Spend some time deciding your routine and then write it down. This part is key. If your kid can't draw recognizable shapes, draw your own pictures to go along with it. If your child can, congratulations, here's their first activity during social distance learning time! And you thought this would be hard. Once you have a visual schedule, refer to it often: “first we \_\_\_\_\_, then we \_\_\_\_\_.” I have created a schedule here that closely resembles

the one we have at my preschool school (plus a few extra hours), in case that is a helpful starting place for you. My personal toddler schedule is in the toddler section down below.

Resources:

-[Panda Speech](#)

-[Teaching Mama](#)

## **Potential Schedule for PS/PK**

6:30 wake, quiet play, breakfast

8:00 morning meeting - discuss daily activities, review schedule

8:15 focused project work - creating a dramatic play area, science experiments, designing a small world play set up, etc.

centers and small groups (academic learning and learning through play)

9:00 morning walk, bike/scooter ride, soccer

10:00 read aloud, journal writing

10:30 academic work (name tracing, sight words, ABCmouse.com, etc.)

11:00 independent play

12:00 lunch

12:30 read aloud/audiobook, nap or rest time

1:45 snack

2:00 puzzles or board game

2:30 afternoon walk, bike/scooter ride, soccer

3:30 academic work (name tracing, sight words, ABCmouse.com, etc.)

4:00 arts/crafts activity

5:00 gross motor yoga/brain break videos, cook dinner

6:00 dinner

7:00 call a friend, bath

8:00 books/bedtime

## **Stuff. As in, all the stuff in your house**

If you don't already practice a system of rotating books and toys, I highly recommend you hide half your kid's stuff right now in the closet. This will make everything much easier! As your child's interest wanes in the activities you have out, you can switch things around and re-engage them with "new" stuff. And as your interest in reading the same book 5000 times wanes, you can hide it away and find old favorites to enjoy.

## **Movement**

Any parent knows their kid is going to move around A LOT. If you live in your own house, this might not be such a big deal. For those of us in apartments who care about our downstairs neighbors, this might be more of an issue. Make sure you are adding in plenty of time for your kid to run and move. The more proactive you are, the more likely they will be able to sit and

focus at other times. My family will be avoiding playgrounds, but we plan on going for walks, kicking a soccer ball around, and going for scooter rides. I anticipate a few rainy days when we might practice walking up and down the stairs in our apartment building, or taking an extra-long bath. We also plan to take movement breaks using the resources linked here.

Resources:

- [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#)
- [Go Noodle](#)
- [Salsa with Silvia](#), a dance studio in Petworth (DC) is offering online classes for only \$5 each. This is a great way to support a local business and provide your child with a movement and music opportunity

## Art Inspirations

I'm a sucker for awesome art projects, so here are a few that I loved doing or that I want to do one day soon!

- [Recycled Bottle Bubble Art](#)
- [Shaving Cream Marble Art](#)
- [Process Art](#)
- [Bubble Painting with Oil Pastels](#)
- [Frozen Paint](#)
- [Fizzy Painting](#)

## Music for Kids

A great way to get in some movement -- put on some music! Music is a fantastic way to connect with others while working on important literacy skills. It helps with identifying letter sounds, rhyming, vocabulary, and is just plain fun. Songs with starts and stops also help a child build self-regulation skills.

Resources:

- [Laurie Berkner Band](#), Facebook livestream, 10am weekdays
- [Patty Shukla](#) songs on youtube
- pajama dance party (daily, your own living room)
- [google doc](#) with various livestreaming musical performances and shows
- [Singing with Ari](#) - livestream kid songs (preschool and toddler fun!)
- [Zoo Movements](#) by Dr. Jean
- [Animal Freeze Dance](#)
- [Sleeping Bunnies](#) - I like to use a range of animals in this song. Depending on the age, I might name the animal or I might ask them to think of an animal in a specific category ("can you think of another animal that flies in the sky?"). We might work on making the animal sounds, movements, or both.
- [Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes](#) -- with missing words! For kids who need more of a challenge

## Fine Motor Activities

Fine motor skills are critical, and often the most fun. Make sure you include fine motor activities in your daily routines.

Some of my favorites: playdough, using scissors, Legos, stringing beads, tying shoes, blowing bubbles, using eye droppers and so much more. Bonus points if these fine motor activities are also sensory experiences!

Another excellent way to work on fine motor skills is to change the plane in which you're working. Instead of drawing at a table, tape paper to the wall, a fridge, or a window for an upright writing surface. Challenge kids to extend Magna-Tiles or Squigz horizontally instead of vertically. Tape a piece of paper to the underside of a table and have your child draw on his or her back. Get creative!

Resources:

- [Play to Learn Preschool](#) ideas
- [Teaching Mama](#) ideas
- [Fun Learning for Kids](#) ideas
- The Best Play Dough - [Play to Learn Preschool](#)
- [30 Day Lego challenges](#)

## Sensory Experiences

I'm not an occupational therapist, but I can tell you that sensory play is incredibly important. Especially as we socially distance ourselves and keep to our homes, it is vital that we find ways to provide our children with sensory experiences. Some of Henry's favorite sensory experiences involve being outside in nature, bath time and playing with dough (playdough or helping to bake bread).

Sensory play is also easy to incorporate into academics. Writing in shaving cream is delightfully messy for kids and really easy to clean up; challenge your child to draw shapes, letters, numbers, etc. [Oobleck](#) is the ultimate science experiment for preschoolers. Just set them up with a container for mixing, a small amount of cornstarch, and a small amount of water. Let them discover what happens as they add different amounts.

We bought an [IKEA FLISAT](#) table for Henry to use as a sensory/storage/art area, inspired in part by blog posts like [this](#). We also have two TROFAST storage containers, one [large](#) and one [small](#), which uses the same containers. I label everything with visual signs and words to make clean up easier.

Because our apartment is small and the table is very close to our rug, we have very strict rules about the table and sensory play. Actually, i But if you've spent more than five minutes here, you probably have guessed that I tend to have pretty strict rules in general when it comes to stuff like this. When you teach in a classroom, clear and consistent rules make managing toys, noise, and tots much easier. The same holds true when at home.

When I bring out a new sensory toy, I am very clear about the rules: the materials stay in the container, and absolutely do not go in one's mouth, on the floor, etc. I repeat those rules

every single time I bring out the toy, with just a quick prompt: “remember, the \_\_\_\_\_ doesn’t go (he fills this in), it stays in the (he fills this in too).” Even the most careful of toddlers and even preschoolers are likely to spill, especially stuff like sand or water. The moment Henry intentionally throws something or puts it in his mouth, it goes away. I say: “Oh no! You forgot our important rule: we keep all of our sensory toys in the table. You can try again tomorrow. I’m sure you’ll do a better job of remembering tomorrow.” I then quickly give him a choice of two different activities and that usually heads off any meltdown. I keep a close eye on him when he’s playing in the sensory table too. Sometimes he’s just in a throwing kind of mood and I’ll ask him if he wants to play with beanbags or throw a ball to get out some of that throwing energy. I tend to have two sensory options available for the table each day, and we will continue to use those two until he’s pretty bored of them. The first few days, he did lose both options, but after a week of consistent rule-enforcing, Henry rarely loses sensory table privileges for one, let alone both options. The trick here is repetition, consistent reinforcement, and constant vigilance. :)

Resources:

- [Pocket of Preschool](#) ideas
- [Little Bins for Little Hands](#) - easy sensory recipes
- [Pinterest](#)
- [Water Beads](#) (careful supervision required)

## Rest Time

This is just as much for you as for your child. Even if your kiddo does not usually nap at home, build in this time for quiet rest. Play gentle music or audiobooks, perhaps even check out a guided meditation for young children. Keep in mind that if you have an older child who is active during this time, it’s going to be harder for your younger kids to actually rest. Make it a rest time for everyone. Henry LOVES the [Calm meditation app](#) sleep stories for kids (Sienna the Sleepy Sloth is his favorite).

## Independent Work Time

This is another thing that is just as much for your benefit as theirs. It is important for children to have time to work independently. Depending on your child’s age and temperament, this might look like several shorter sessions during the day, or it might be a whole hour chunk of time. Henry and I both sit down for both independent coloring and reading time. I sit at the table with him and focus on my work, and he manages his for short periods. Having me nearby and modeling the same activity helps him maintain his own focus for longer amounts of time.

## Dramatic Play

Children love dramatic play and the benefits for children are unlimited. It helps with vocabulary and communication skills and allows children to try out new ideas and imitate the world around them (this is a great, safe way to experience themes of good/bad, and play with strong emotions or events). Students could work on literacy skills if you add labels to items or

have them write as part of the play (sign in/out of a doctor's office, write a prescription, etc.). Math could be involved if you use money or a cash register, or have students measure or compare items (e.g., in a construction site or looking at moon rocks). Dramatic play also helps with cognitive skills, making sure students remember/recall events, make personal connections, show flexibility and inventiveness in thinking. Oh yeah, and it's FUN.

Benefits for adults: your kid gets all the benefits listed above. Plus, long-term, creative projects will hold kids' attention for longer periods of time. And make your kid a more interesting person with whom to spend time.

Some adults find playing on a toddler or preschool level easy. But I think most of us find it more challenging. We'd like to just be able to say "go play," and take a break. Unfortunately for parents trying to work full-time from home,, kids do better when they have someone who can help model play for them, or someone to order around during play.

The good news for busy parents is that we don't actually have to spend hours and hours of playing, if we put in some serious energy at the beginning to get things up and running. After that, you can get back to your own work and check back in at regular intervals. A toddler might need you to pop back in after every ten minutes, whereas a 3 or 4 year old might be able to keep the play for a solid half hour.

If your child does not have another kid with whom to play, I highly recommend building in some turn-taking during your play so it won't be such a shock when we can socialize again. ("First Henry uses the truck, then Mama uses the truck. Vroom vroom vroom...") Here are a few easy ideas to help step up your dramatic play game. You can only pretend to talk on the banana phone for so long...

### **Start with books**

-[Jessica Spanyol's board books](#) featuring Rosa and Clive, two gender non-conforming kids and their friends, are among Henry's favorites, and they are both excellent at playing. Perfect for toddlers.

-[Doctor Ted](#) (and the sequels) are a great example of what can happen when the imagination extends past play time.

-[Clancy and Millie and the Very Fine House](#) by Libby Gleeson

-Act out a favorite story using toys

### **Think about your specific kid**

-Is your child obsessed with dinosaurs? Create a jungle. An animal-lover? Create a zoo. Love pirates? Designate a laundry basket or box as a boat and let the good times roll.

-Where do they wish they could go right now? Have them make all the things they would need – props, background, etc. You could make your own beach and have them think about what we used in our class for that. The possibilities are endless. The key here is to help them think of ideas but then challenge the kid to do most of the work in actually making and/or labeling the objects. And then let them play.

### **Ask questions to deepen play**

Asking questions is incredibly powerful, and it can help open up dramatic play in tons of different directions. This can help keep the momentum going, or allow for the opportunity to

incorporate a math or literacy aspect to the game. For example, if you've turned your laundry basket into a pirate ship, you might ask: "what happens if we see another pirate ship sailing towards us?" or "what can we do to make sure all of our treasure gets hidden safely?" You will be amazed at what your kid thinks up!

Resources:

- [Pocket of Preschool](#) - fantastic learning through play (especially dramatic play!) ideas
- [Play to Learn Preschool](#) - dramatic play ideas and behind the scenes videos of the classroom set up
- Pinterest. Seriously.

## Books

The easiest and best activity. All day every day. As much as you can! Read to your child, have your child read to you, have them act out the story, watch stories online, write your own stories together. Don't forget to ask questions (who, what, where, why, when, how, etc.) - this helps your child make connections between books, knowledge, and the world.

Resources:

- Vooks – [www.vooks.com](http://www.vooks.com) - parents can sign up for 1 free month
- Epic! – download the app, involves audio and visual stories that emphasize each word as it is read aloud
- Storyline Online – [www.storylineonline.net](http://www.storylineonline.net)
- DC Public Library – while DC libraries are physically closed, the Libby app lets you check out books (including picture books for children) electronically. All you need is to download the app and enter your library card number
- A booklist curated by Books for Littles on [separation anxiety and parting grief](#)
- [Audible.com](#) - for as long as schools are closed, some of their collection is free. Stream audiobooks in six different languages

## Story Times for Kids

- [Flamingo Rampant](#) - feminist, inclusive, culturally-diverse - daily at 10:30am
- [DC Library Storytime](#) - Facebook live, weekdays at 10:30am
- [Big List of Authors](#) Reading Book
- [Mondays with Michelle Obama](#) on PBS Kids
- [Black Lives Matter Instructional Library](#) - click each book for a read aloud
- [Virtual Bookshelf: People Power](#) - click each book for a read aloud

## Social-Emotional Skills

There are so many feelings to navigate, even without the pandemic and stay-at-home safety measures. Kids might be feeling scared, worried, angry, confused, sometimes all at once.

Build in time to talk about feelings, call or video chat with friends and family, draw pictures for or about loved ones. Seek connection, even while we are asked to self-isolate.

Be sure to check out the “Explaining COVID-19 to Kids” section for specific COVID-19 resources. Understanding and naming what is happening is the first step in helping a child process what is going on.

## **-Calm Down Center**

It's normal for toddlers and preschoolers to get frustrated and overwhelmed by their emotions. When they're in full swing, you just have to ride it out-- there's no reasoning with them. However, there are things you can do as they're ramping up or coming down from the peak emotions to help them work through them. With enough practice, kids learn to move quickly through their emotions without trying to suppress or change them. The situation happened, the kid thought a certain idea, that thought created a feeling, the feeling caused actions, and whatever happened because of the actions happened. Your job is to help your kid recognize all the parts of that: the circumstance, the thought, the feeling, the actions, the results, and a plan for what to do or think next time. With younger kids, I focus on labeling their feelings and recognizing that feelings change (we aren't always happy or always angry or always sad, we all feel a range of feelings every day, week, month, etc.) With older kids, I try to get them to think about the choices they have in feeling how they do. For example, if their friend doesn't want to play with them, a common reaction is to feel sad or angry. “You're feeling sad? I bet you're thinking that she doesn't want to play with you. But that feeling and that thought are a choice. You could also choose to make a plan to play together later and think about what you'll do together, and feel excited. Or you could feel curious about who else in our classroom might want to play with you in art right now.”

I've found that the most important thing here is matching the kid's emotional energy. If they're angry, make your voice a little more stern and powerful. If they're sad and teary, be a little softer. This is about meeting them where they are. Once they understand you really do get how they're feeling, they're more willing to listen to what you have to say.

### **Managing Emotions Progression:**

- uses adult support to calm down
- calms self using special object/place/person
- delays gratification or looks at a situation from a different point of view
- controls strong feelings most of the time

My first suggestion is to create a safe place for your child to calm down. This could be a specific room or corner; some families prefer creating a small fort or using a tent. Include comfort objects and visuals for calm down suggestions, with the objects nearby. Pick strategies that fit your family and your child. If you're not comfortable with physical aggression, don't put a visual of punching a pillow as a calm down strategy. If you know your child likes to draw, make sure your writing materials are handy. Pocket of Preschool has a great post about the [importance of this safe space](#) and a cheap printable with plenty of calm down strategies. I occasionally tell a kid that it's time for them to go to the calm down center (and I will go with them and sit together),

but more frequently I ask them if they need to take a break. The goal is to get them to recognize when they need to use one of these strategies independently and to regulate themselves emotionally.

Teach the calm down strategies one at a time to kids and practice when your kid is already calm. I like to tie it into read alouds: "This character is so upset! She could take a few deep breaths to calm down. Let's try it with her." You can also practice a strategy or have your kid brainstorm calm down strategies before a high stress situation occurs: "Remember, you're going to be playing at so-and-so's house all afternoon. If you miss your family and feel sad, what can you do?"

Some Favorite Calm Down Strategies:

- deep breaths
- count to 10
- read a book
- draw a picture
- turn a sand-timer or sensory bottle
- squeeze a ball
- blow bubbles

Some people don't love the idea of blowing bubbles as a way to calm down, because they feel like it's rewarding a kid for having a temper tantrum. However, I've learned that the quickest way to have someone calm down is to focus on the breath leaving the body, not the breath coming in. Deep breathing means slow deep breaths coming in and out. Blowing bubbles is a perfect way to focus on breathing out in a slow, measured way. Of course you can and should discuss what happened after the child is calm. They don't get handed a bottle of bubbles and can run off and play. But it can be an effective tool to get them to a place where they can talk. Another phrase I picked up from other preschool teachers is "smell the flowers, blow out the candles." This gives children an imaginary action to do with their hands to help them remember how to take a deep breath in (smell the flowers) and let out a nice deep breath (blow out the candles).

A quick note about gender: we are socialized from infancy to react (or not react) to circumstances based on our gender. Boys are told "don't cry" at much higher rates than girls. When talking children through their feelings after the exact same situation occurs, even experienced teachers may have a tendency to assign feelings like "sad" to girls vs. "mad" or "angry" to boys. By being a little more aware of this, we can work to encourage and allow a full range of feelings for everyone. Take a pause before you ask your child if he's feeling a certain way. Ask her how she feels, or if she's not at a stage to tell you herself, give her room to correct you: "I think you're feeling angry, because I see your hands are balled into fists at your sides and your mouth is turned down and your eyebrows are pulled together. Is that right?" Provide examples of all children expressing a range of emotions.

Resources:

- Pocket of Preschool [Calm Down Center](#)
- [Calm Down Strategies](#) from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations
- [Exploring Big Emotions](#) with Sesame Street

### **-Big Feelings Books:**

- [The Rabbit Listened](#) by Cori Doerrfeld
- [When Sophie Gets Angry-- Really, Really Angry](#) by Molly Bang
- [Sometimes I'm Bombaloo](#) by Rachel Vail
- [The Day You Begin](#) by Jacqueline Woodson
- [Glad Monster. Sad Monster](#) by Ed Emberley and Anne Miranda
- [Even Superheroes Have Bad Days](#) by Shelly Becker
- [In My Heart: A Book of Feelings](#) by Jo Witek
- [The Feelings Book](#) by Todd Parr
- [Have You Filled a Bucket Today?](#) By Carol McCloud
- [Tough Guys Have Feelings Too](#) by Keith Negley
- [Cool Down and Work Through Anger](#) by Cheri J. Meiners

### **-Anna Dewdney's Llama Llama Series:**

- [Llama Llama Mad at Mama](#)
- [Llama Llama Misses Mama](#)
- [Llama Llama Red Pajama](#)

### **-Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman's Bear Series**

- [Bear Feels Scared](#)
- [Bear Feels Sick](#)

## **-Social Problem-Solving**

For kids without siblings older than two, social problem-solving is going to be even harder to practice without including other kids in whatever social distancing you're doing. For kids with siblings close in age, this is the PERFECT time to practice. Every day. All day long.

### **Social Problem-Solving Progression:**

- expresses feelings (non-verbally, then verbally)
- physically "solving" the problem independently
- seeks adult support
- suggests solutions to problem (often uses visuals to do so at the beginning)
- negotiation and compromise

The first part of the social problem-solving is what you've already been working on with managing emotions -- basically, the ability to name your feeling and express it to another person. Seeking adult support is better than physically "solving" the problem independently, but instead of "she hit me!" you now get to deal with "she won't share!" Just like with calm down strategies, visuals are an easy way to help encourage your kid to work through it on his or her own. Create the strategies that work for you and your family, draw or print out a visual for each one, and have a place to put them. In the classroom, I like to have them all printed on a poster in our calm down center. I also have another set laminated on a ring that students can physically bring to a center. Definitely make sure it's on hand in whatever designated play space you have. For kids who can

actively use the visuals and apply the strategies on their own, I challenge them to try three strategies before asking me to help.

#### Favorite Social Problem-Solving Strategies:

- use a timer ([sand timer](#) or visual timer that is kid-operated is preferred)
- walk away
- trade
- ask
- ignore
- say “please stop”
- get help from someone else
- wait
- play together
- take turns

#### Kid Apologies

It's inevitable that at some point in this process of helping a kid solve a social problem, (s)he's going to need to apologize for something. The knee-jerk reaction from 99.9% of people is to tell a kid “say you're sorry.” I have this impulse too. But there's a better way, a more effective way, one that helps both kids involved and models how an adult ought to apologize too.

For older kids, especially kids who don't seem to get why what they did was wrong, I'm a fan of the four-step apology:

1. I'm sorry for...
2. It was wrong because...
3. In the future, I will...
4. Will you forgive me?

But for most of my students, the language of “I'm sorry” and “forgive me” are too advanced. We think kids are sorry because they say the words, but as the third out of four kids, I promise you that sometimes kids just say it so the adult will leave them alone.

My apology method goes like this:

1. Are you ok?
2. What do you need to feel better?
  - a. Space
  - b. Kind words
  - c. A hug
  - d. Help fixing it
3. Next time, I will...

I love that this reinforces the idea that we can recognize and respond to someone else's feelings, whether or not we were involved. A good friend does steps 1 and 2, regardless of whether or not they were at fault. This apology provides the opportunity for the second kid to say “I'm fine” or to figure out exactly what s/he needs to make it better. It isn't just on the first kid to guess, the second kid has to take some ownership of their feelings and express their own needs. I usually prompt this with younger kids: “Do you need a hug or kind words?” And “kind words” does typically mean “sorry,” potentially the entire four-step apology, depending on the

kids involved. But it also opens up other solutions. For some kids, the last thing they want is a hug or help from someone who just knocked down their tower. They just want to build without worrying the other kid will do it again, and I can make sure they get that space. Other kids could care less about the words, but once they get a hug, they know that they are friends again. It's critically important that the first kid asks for consent before giving a hug or help, because otherwise they're just adding further pushing themselves on someone who wants nothing to do with them.

If you only have one kid to work through this stuff on, be sure to go through this process as needed yourself, and pick different options after they ask what you need. That way they're forced to listen and respond to your needs instead of just giving an automatic reply the way some kids are taught to say "sorry" as they blow right past you on the playground. You can also model this between two adults, or talk through it while reading books.

We started this apology process with Henry this past month, because he has recently decided he likes to test boundaries by hitting things (and sometimes his parents) with sticks when we go for our walks. He says "you're ok" instead of asking "are you ok," and imitates the way we help support him by patting the injured leg or foot with his hand. Right now, we're sticking with "do you need a hug?" for the second step, though we will tell him "I need space" if that's what is needed.

#### Resources:

- Pocket of Preschool [Social Problem-Solving Techniques](#)
- Learning to Get Along series by Cheri J. Meiners
  - [Talk and Work It Out](#)
  - [Share and Take Turns](#)
  - [Join In and Play](#)
- [Big Friends](#) by Linda Sarah and Benji Davies
- [Llama Llama Time to Share](#) by Anna Dewdney
- [Want to Play Trucks?](#) By Anne Stott
- [Strictly No Elephants](#) by Lisa Mantchev
- Elephant and Piggie books by Mo Willems model a great friendship
  - [My Friend is Sad](#)
  - [Should I Share My Ice Cream?](#)
  - [A Big Guy Took My Ball](#)
  - [Can I Play Too?](#)
- [How Do Dinosaurs Play With Their Friends?](#) By Jane Yolen and Mark Teague
- [One](#) by Kathryn Otoshi
- [Red: A Crayon's Story](#) by Michael Hall
- [Will Ladybug Hug?](#) By Hilary Leung - a book about consent that is perfect for toddlers

## **-Turn-Taking and Sharing**

I don't think kids should have to share. Before you yell at me, take a moment and imagine if adults had to act the way we expect kids to act!

Adult 1: What are you reading?

Adult 2: It's this great new mystery. I just got it! I've been waiting months for it to come out.

Adult 1: Let me have it.

Adult 2: Um, no, I'm reading it right now.

Adult 1: I'm getting the boss.

Boss: Give the book to Adult 1. You can read it later.

Say what!? No wonder kids get so upset! I don't even like when people try to talk to me while I'm reading, let alone ask to take my book before I'm done! That said, the abilities to share, take turns, and work together are valued by all cultures (some way more than ours), and I'd much rather spend time with a kid who likes to share than a kid who doesn't. It's just more pleasant.

Turn-Taking Progression:

- responds appropriately to other people's wants and needs
- takes turns
- initiates sharing
- cooperates and shares materials in group settings appropriately
- completes cooperative projects

So what strategies do I have? I rely on the visuals I talk about in the social problem-solving section. There are plenty of ways to share, and they don't always look like kids playing together.

With babies and toddlers, I use my language to describe what they need and what others need: "you're so hungry right now! You want your milk right now. But mommy needs to make sure she has her waterbottle before she nurses you."

With toddlers, I always recommend saying "yes" instead of "no," but make sure you add a "when" to your sentence:

-yes, we can go to the park when it's safe

-yes, you can eat a muffin the next time we bake some. Should we look at the calendar and find a day to do that?

-yes, you can watch another episode tomorrow afternoon

I find that writing the request down is incredibly reassuring for kids. Put it on the calendar, a post-it, add it to the grocery list, whatever makes sense. And again, label those feelings as much as possible when you're talking to them.

With bigger kids, the easiest way to get a kid to take turns is to say they can have a turn... later. I teach kids to add the words/phrases "later" or "maybe next time" or "when I'm finished" to all of their negotiations:

Kid 1: Can I have a train?

Kid 2: Maybe later

Kid 1: I want a turn.

Kid 2: You can have it when I'm finished.

Kid 1: Can I play?

Kid 2: Maybe next time.

It might seem mean to adults, but as long as you follow through, kids don't mind. In fact, it's good for their development to learn how to wait for things. The key is to make sure it actually happens at some point. In the classroom, we create waitlists and use visual turn-taking strategies like sand timers to make sure everyone gets a turn (and that the kids can monitor it themselves, without it becoming another job for me). Or I might ask Kid 1 to choose which center to play in before other kids get a chance, so at least that kid gets the opportunity to play with the preferred object. I have kids make plans if they aren't ready to play now ("let's play on the playground together later").

Another strategy I use is to let the kids decide the sharing system. For example, we might say each kid gets a play session (morning or afternoon) with a toy, or we can use a 10-minute timer when someone else wants a turn, or everyone gets to play for as long as they want (but no more than one full day) before it becomes the next person's turn. When kids are involved in setting the rules, there tends to be less fuss about following them. And if it doesn't work out, you can always bring everyone back together and say "I'm noticing a problem. We came up with this system for sharing, but it doesn't seem to be working out. What's going on? What can we do to fix it?" This is my recommended system for siblings. Sometimes their solution isn't one that you would have thought of at all. It might be a total disaster, but it also might be wonderful. And either way, it's a chance to model thinking through a problem, trying a solution, analyzing the result, and thinking of a new solution to try.

Given strategies, tools, and follow through, most kids learn to share fairly well in these circumstances. At home, I would suggest that if a kid isn't ready to share a toy with a guest, that toy be put away prior to a playdate. Talk before and after about that decision, and emphasize being a good friend throughout: "I'm so glad you made the decision to put Teddy away. Last time Teddy was out during a playdate, you didn't want to share and got really upset. This time, you put him away and were able to focus on sharing other toys. I bet your friend is thinking 'wow, I had such a good time! What a kind friend. I love sharing with him.'" Keep in mind that if you don't follow through, eventually the kid is going to wise up and you'll lose their trust and respect. Don't make promises to kids you can't keep.

I model fair-share set ups for kids, which makes it easy for them to suggest them. The visual strategies come to mind, but so too does simply counting out the number of people at a table and passing one object to each one. Or having one person divide something and have the other person choose which pile they want. Include the child in the thinking process by asking "does that look right? Is that fair?"

To help build cooperative play, I try to make or play as many cooperative games as possible. If it's a competition, it's kids versus grown ups, never kid versus kid. My students love playing Hoot Owl Hoot and Monkey Around in the classroom, and I've heard great things about the other games listed in the resource section. I also use the language of partnership: "thanks for helping me put the laundry away, we make a great team. *High five!*" "It's so much fun to build together. I love working on this project with you. Sometimes I like to build things by myself, but sometimes I like to work together."

Resources:

- Check out the social problem-solving list for books and visuals
- Cooperative Games by Peaceable Kingdom
  - [Hoot Owl Hoot](#)
  - [Count Your Chickens](#)
  - [Monkey Around](#)
  - [Feed the Woozle](#)

## **-Makes Friends**

One of the hardest things to teach is how to be friends with someone else. It's heartbreaking when a child wants that connection and is shut out of it. The truth is, kids can be really mean. All babies care about is getting their own needs met, and this self-centered approach continues into toddler and preschool-hood. The best we can do is provide strategies, help kids talk through it (before, during, and after), highlight the kinds of behavior we would like to see, and empathize.

Friendship Progression:

- plays near other children; uses similar materials or actions ("parallel play")
- seeks preferred playmate
- shows pleasure when seeing friends
- uses successful strategies for entering groups ("can I play too?")
- plays with one or two preferred friends
- initiates, joins in, and sustains positive interactions with a small group of two to three children
  - establishes a special friendship with another child but only lasts a short while
  - maintains special friendships over months and years
  - interacts cooperatively in groups of four or five children
  - works with group towards a group goal
  - participates in games with rules

What does it mean to be a good friend? This is a conversation we have in the classroom all year long, and you can have it with your kids at home as well. Write the ideas down and refer to them often. Make connections between books you've read, situations in your own life and what your kid is experiencing.

Good friends (a brief list):

- think about what the other person wants/needs/feels
- take turns, share, and compromise
- check on you when you're hurt (physically or emotionally)
- use gentle hands and words
- celebrate with you
- play/spend time with you
- apologize and make things right when they've made a mistake
- manage their own feelings/needs/wants
- don't just say "yes" to everything because you want it-- they stay true to themselves
- are dependable, reliable, and consistent

- listen
- help you make safe choices that are good for everyone

I don't think you have to start at a specific part on this list. Pick one thing that your kid is struggling with and focus on that. It's important to model good friendship behavior and talk about your own friendship problems with your kids. Use a close friend or relation and talk about how you've resolved issues together, and what it felt like to go through that process. You can also talk to them about how you'd handle specific situations that they're dealing with, but ultimately they should have the freedom to make their own decisions. "If my friend only wanted to play with me when Kid X wasn't around, and then ignored me whenever Kid X showed up, I wouldn't think that they were really being my friend. I would feel confused by their behavior and sad that they kept doing that. I think I would tell them that it bothered me, and if they continued to do it I would find other people to play with instead."

Most three-year-olds and some four-year-olds go through a "you can't come to my birthday party" or "you're not my best friend" phase. They're trying to figure out what it means to be a friend. It can be confusing. What if my best friend doesn't want to give me something they have? Are we still friends? Are best friends allowed to play with other people? What if we don't want to play with them too? The switch from playing with one person to playing with two or more is tough. I love the book [Big Friends](#) for showing how it feels to be a third wheel, and the wonderful ways our friendships can change and grow when we add more people into our circles.

Social problem-solving tools are needed to navigate friendships. Sometimes it feels like you've literally had the same conversation over a thousand times. And you just might have. But maybe it's conversation 1001 that helps make everything click. At the beginning of these friendship-navigating problems, I will often help students work through the problem in detail. As we return to the same problem again and again, I might just jog their memory: "Remember, we talked about this before. We came up with three solutions: you could talk to your friend about how you're feeling, you could go to the calm down center and feel those feelings, or you could decide to play with someone else. What would you like to try today?" For kids who love to draw, journal writing is a great way to express feelings and figure out what you'd like to happen.

Naturally, we spend a lot of time reading books about friendships and discussing the various choices the characters make. I ask lots of questions to prompt self-reflection: how would you feel? What would you do if this happened to you? Have you experienced something like this? What happened? Do you have any ideas of what the character say right now

#### Resources:

- [The Rabbit Listened](#) by Cori Doerrfeld
- [Have You Filled a Bucket Today?](#) By Carol McCloud
- [Join In and Play](#) -by Cheri J. Meiners
- [Want to Play Trucks?](#) By Anne Stott
- [Strictly No Elephants](#) by Lisa Mantchev
- [Big Friends](#) by Linda Sarah and Benji Davies
- [Jamaica and Brianna](#) by Juanita Havill

## **-Empathy**

A huge part of being a good friend/human is having empathy for others. I tell my students that “empathy is feeling how someone else is feeling in your own heart.” Like the other social-emotional skills mentioned, it is best taught by discussing real events during and after they happen, modeling from your own life, and pointing out the concept in books. And, like other skills, it can be encouraged and nurtured by emphasizing how important it is for everyone.

Empathy Progression:

- notices other people’s feelings and reacts to it
- demonstrates concern over their feelings
- is able to identify the reasons behind the feelings accurately
- recognizes that we all have different feelings
- recognizes that we can experience more than one feeling at a time

Resources:

- [Those Shoes](#) by Maribeth Boelts
- [I Walk with Vanessa: A Story about a Simple Act of Kindness](#) by Kerascoët
- [Jamaica Tag Along](#) by Juanita Havill
- [The Day You Begin](#) by Jacqueline Woodson
- [The Last Stop on Market Street](#) by Matt De La Pena
- [The Big Umbrella](#) by Amy June Bates
- [My Princess Boy](#) by Cheryl Kilodavis
- [Not Quite Snow White](#) by Ashley Franklin
- [Red: A Crayon’s Story](#) by Michael Hall
- [My Two Blankets](#) by Irena Kobald and Freya Blackwood
- [You, Me, and Empathy](#) by Jayneen Sanders
  
- [Proud to be Primary](#) - lots of information and ideas about teaching social-emotional skills

## **-Follows Limits, Rules and Expectations**

There are times to act up, question, challenge and change the rules. But there are also plenty of times, usually safety-related, where rule-following is necessary for preschoolers and toddlers. In fact, rules and limits help kids feel safe and secure. They test them to check to see if their adults can still keep them in that safe space, and the best way I know how to do that is be clear and consistent about my expectations.

In the sensory experiences section I discuss in detail how I set, monitor, and enforce the expectations for that specific area, so be sure to read that if you want another example.

Following Limits, Rules and Expectations Progression:

- changes behavior based on adult tone of voice and expression
- accepts redirection

- follows most rules with occasional reminders
- applies basic rules to new situations
- understands and explains reasons for rules

### **Rule-Creating:**

- Use visuals:** print, draw your own, or have the kid draw them
- Involve the kid** in determining the rules before you start something new: “What ideas do you have to play with these safely?”
- Return with the kid to **modify or add to the rules** as necessary: “yesterday, X kept happening. I’m worried because of Y.”

### **Rule-Enforcing:**

- Give **rule reminders** before the activity starts: Yes, every single time. Look at the visuals you made, or have the kid tell you verbally what the rules are
- Explain why the rule exists:** “to stay safe” is a good catch-all, but be as specific as possible. For example, “we don’t stand on books because the book’s spine might break and then we wouldn’t be able to read it anymore. We have to take care of our books.”
- Praise** your child for specifically following the rules: “I love that you’re walking so safely with me outside! It’s so fun for me when I’m not worried about you getting hurt. You’re listening and holding my hand when we cross the street.”
- Explain exactly what will happen** if the rule isn’t followed: “If you hit me again with your toy, the toy will go away and you will have to play in your room by yourself. I don’t like being hit. When you’re ready to use gentle hands, you can play with me again.”
- Provide choices** (and make sure you don’t offer a choice you’re not 100% comfortable with)
  - “Do you want to use the toy properly or should we read a book?”
  - “Do you want to do it by yourself or would you like me to help you?”
  - Let your kid make a choice: Sometimes we have to learn the hard way. Let your kid pick the “bad” choice and help them through their feelings to understand why it wasn’t such a great idea.
- Enforce consistently** (which is why if you aren’t going to follow through, you shouldn’t tell your kid that X is going to happen): “You hit me, so now the toy is going away for the rest of the week, and you can take some time in your room to play by yourself. When you’re ready to use gentle hands, you can play with me again. I see that you’re upset. I’m upset too. Let’s take some deep breaths and give ourselves a minute before we talk.”
- Explain some more**, both during and after you have enforced the rule why it was enforced: “You hit me, so then you had to go to your room. Only people who are using gentle hands can play with me. I don’t like getting hurt. Once you decided to use gentle hands, you checked on me and said ‘sorry.’ I’m so glad that you did that, it made me feel better. Please make sure you use gentle hands with me all the time!”

### **Resources:**

- Pocket of Preschool [Red and Green Choices](#) - visuals, costs under \$5

Some books on following rules...

- Any of the "[How Do Dinosaurs...](#)" books by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague
- Any of the "[Pigeon](#)" books by Mo Willems
- [No, David!](#) by David Shannon

And a couple books on why we sometimes have to break them...

- [Library Lion](#) by Michelle Knudsen and Kevin Hawkes
- [The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet!](#) by Carmen Agra Deedy and Eugene Yelchin

## **-Independence and Responsibility**

Part of growing up involves taking care of one's own needs and wants. We call these daily living skills. We often think about social emotional skills in terms of feelings and sharing toys, but it's also important to make sure kids have the ability to take care of their own physical basic needs as well. When kids learn to take care of their own needs, they gain confidence and self-reliance.

Bonus: the more they're able to take care of independently, the less you have to do as a parent!

As parents, we often feel pressed for time and do not have the patience we always need for our children to practice independent living skills. It is just so much faster to tie their shoes for them, or help them with the zipper on their coat. It requires a LOT of work to potty train your kid. But then you can say goodbye to diapers, so I think the effort is worth it! Timing is important though. Starting potty training when you need to be putting 15 hour days into your work schedule isn't a good idea. That said, be honest-- if you're the kind of person who always has something like that going on, prioritize teaching your kid a life skill. And now is the perfect time to work on one of those skills. I challenged every one of my PK-4 students to be able to tie their own shoes independently when schools reopen. What does your child need to work on? Build in plenty of time to practice it.

Independence and Responsibility Progression:

- indicates needs and wants (cries, points to things)
- begins to participate while adult takes care of needs (moves arms out of shirts, pulls off socks)
- seeks to do things for self (wants to use utensils while eating, or wash hands "by myself")
- demonstrates confidence in meeting own needs (takes care of using the toilet, including flushing, washing and drying hands, without any reminders)
- takes responsibility for own well-being (takes care of personal belongings, explains how to be healthy and why it's important)

Even before Henry was able to actually take care of his own needs, I would explain the steps as I did them: "Ok, let's get you into pajamas. First we're going to take off your clothes and put them in the hamper. Then we will change your diaper, then we have to put the dirty diaper in the trash and wash hands. Then we can put on the pajamas."

Next, I would start finding ways he could help: ""Ok, let's get you into pajamas. First we're going to take off your clothes and YOU put them in the hamper. Then we will change your diaper,

then we have to put the dirty diaper in the trash and wash hands. Then YOU can pick out pajamas and I can help you put them on.”

We usually have up to three independent life skills that we are actively helping Henry with at any given point in time. Any more than that and simple tasks get frustrating for everyone. Getting dressed/undressed is a perfect example. There are things he can do all or most of the time, and things he can't do at all. Once he can reliably do the ones we are working on now, we will add more. Before he could do the on/off actions, his job was to go find his socks, shoes, etc. before we left the house and bring them to an adult for help. Whenever we can find a way to add in a little responsibility, we do.

To get a sense of how I categorize it, here's his clothing breakdown at 2 years, 3 months:

ON:

- underwear and pants/shorts, often with grown up help or coaching
- jacket/coat
- arms through his shirts after we put it on his head

OFF:

- underwear, pants/shorts
- socks
- shoes (with some help depending on the kind of shoe)
- t-shirt (over the head after we help with his arms, 50% success rate)
- hat

Ways to help your child bridge from total dependence to independence:

- model it with books
- model it physically
- hand over hand
- teamwork, AKA you start/I'll finish
- verbal cues
- visual cues
- full mastery: your child can help others and/or teaches other kids how to do it

Resources:

- Easiest shoe-tying [technique](#)
- [Jacket Flip](#)
- [Little by Little](#) by Amber Stewart and Layn Marlow
- [Those Shoes](#) by Maribeth Boelts
- What to say [instead of be careful](#) to help build a kid's independence and self-awareness

## **-Social Emotional Skills for Grown Ups**

Don't forget to work on your own social emotional skills! The best way you can help your child to grow these skills is by demonstrating them yourself.

Resources:

- [Mindfulness is a Parent Superpower](#) from Zero to Three
- [25 Simple Self-Care Tools](#) from Psychology Today

-[The Most Powerful Tool](#) video from Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood Education

## Race and Racism

**It is never too early to talk about race.** Kids start using race as a way to determine who to play with [before they turn 3](#). Which means we have to start these conversations long before that.

But what do we say?

Here's how I, a white woman, talked about the George Floyd protests with my kid, who isn't yet 2.5 years old: "When people do good things, it's important to say 'thank you.' When people do bad things, it's important to say 'that's not ok.' Some people do that by marching in the streets and making signs. We call that protesting. And we can help the people protesting by listening to them, by sending money to support their work, and by making our own protest signs that say that Black Lives Matter."

It's not a perfect response. It's not enough of an action. It certainly doesn't fix our racist society. But it's a start. It's an opening. It's a chance to amplify and advocate for a better world in a kid-focused way. If you've been wondering where to start in this conversation with your own kids, it's as simple and as complicated as what I said to my son. We participated in the [Wee Chalk the Walk: A Family Day of Action](#), and wrote our own protest messages in chalk on the sidewalk. It was a way our whole family could be involved. Find your own ways to take action, and continue to learn more, by people who can articulate themselves far better than I can:

Start Here:

-[Anti-Racism for Kids 101: Starting to Talk About Race](#)

-[Anti-Racism for Kids 102: Why Not All Racial Discrimination is "Racism"](#)

More Resources:

-[Ending Police Brutality: At-Home Family Action Toolkit](#)

-[National Museum of African American History and Culture: Talking About Race](#)

-[EmbraceRace](#)

-[Anti-Racist Resource Guide](#) (for adults)

-Parent Toolkit: [How to Talk to Kids about Race and Racism](#)

-A Striving Parent: [The Top 5 Reasons Well Meaning White Parents Do Not Discuss Race](#)

[With Their White Children](#) (hint: read this, talk about it anyway)

-[21 Anti-Racism Videos to Share with Kids](#)

-[SEEDS Resource List](#)

-[PBS Kids Advice for talking to kids about racism](#)

-[CNN/Sesame Street Town Hall on racism](#)

-[Scaffolded Anti-Racist Resources](#)

Keep Learning!

# Books

If you've read a few of the sections here, you'll know that I turn to books to teach everything: social-emotional skills, literacy, math, etc. It is also a rich resource for learning about race and racism. There are two main ways to do that: the first is to **read books that specifically discuss race and racism** (e.g., children's books about melanin and skin tones, children's books about the civil rights movement). The second way is to **make sure our bookshelves reflect the diversity that is in the world**. [Diversity in children's books](#) has been a hot topic in recent years, and though tiny improvements have been made in this area, most children's books still center white kids (usually boys) and animals. This step is also something you can do with babies and toddlers. Just be sure that these books don't become decoration -- for them to really help facilitate these conversations, you have to actually name difference. And books and knowledge alone aren't enough in terms of doing the work to counter white supremacy. You'll have to actually take action and get used to being uncomfortable. But books are as good a place to start as any other.

In my home, we started by critically examining our child's bookshelf. In some cases, that meant saying goodbye to childhood favorites because of racist or sexist imagery that we (and our parents) hadn't picked up on 30 years ago. Other books we have decided to keep, but we ask questions or point things out as we read: "do you notice that all the firefighters are white men? Who is missing in this picture?" We might switch genders for different characters or try to make the book gender-neutral (e.g. "firefighters" instead of "firemen"). We also attempt to counter the emphasis on the white, cis, heteronormative, able-bodied, middle-class, Christian male viewpoint by increasing the number of books we have that feature people of color, ability, sexual orientation, religious background, socio-economic status, etc. We do this by participating in different book subscriptions, and also using my classroom books as an extension of our home library (bonus: this gives me an excuse to buy even more books for my classroom). It can be hard saying goodbye to a favorite book that you have fond memories of reading, because books are like friends. But boy, bye. We don't have time for racism/sexism/ableism/all-the-isms anymore. Go make some new friends (hint: there are some FANTASTIC new books out there that you're going to love). Here are a few examples of book swaps you can make:

Miss Rumphius → [The Curious Garden](#)

Dr. Seuss → Andrea Beaty and David Roberts' Questioners Books

-[Ada Twist, Scientist](#)

-[Rosie Revere, Engineer](#)

-[Iggy Peck, Architect](#)

-[Sofia Valdez, Future Prez](#)

Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler Books

-[The Gruffalo](#)

-[Room on the Broom](#)

-[The Spiffiest Giant in Town](#)

The Thanksgiving Story → [We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga](#) by Traci Sorell

[May We Have Enough to Share](#) by Richard Van Camp

A (very short list) of some amazing books for kids on race and racism:

- [All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Skin Color](#) (English/Spanish) by Karen Katz
- [Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story about Racial Injustice](#) by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard -- check out the [animated version](#) here
- [Don't Touch My Hair!](#) By Sharee Miller
- [The Day You Begin](#) by Jacqueline Woodson
- [Not Quite Snow White](#) by Ashley Franklin

A few books for adults:

- [Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust America](#) by Jennifer Harvey
- [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#) by Michelle Alexander
- [Between the World and Me](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](#) by Robin DiAngelo
- [Me and White Supremacy](#) by Layla F. Saad

Places to find more great books:

- [Books for Littles](#)
- [Black Lives Matter Instructional Library](#)
- [Virtual Bookshelf: People Power](#)
- [Social Justice Books](#) - now features a BLM at School section, broken down by principle
- [Black Books Matter](#)
- [Mahogany Books](#)
- [The Conscious Kid](#)
- [African American Literature Book Club](#)
- [A Mighty Girl](#)
- [31 Children's Books to Support Conversations about Race, Racism, and Resistance](#)
- Brittany Smith's [book list](#)
- [The Brown Bookshelf](#)
- [Kids books about the police](#) (curated by Books for Littles)
- Teaching for Change created [Freedom Reads: Anti-Bias Book Talk](#) series for parents, teachers, and librarians. Each video is quick and helps demonstrate how to use a specific book with young kids.

Subscriptions/monthly boxes that focus on being anti-Racist, diverse, and/or Black-focused

- [Sankofa Kids Club](#)
- [Little Feminist Book Club](#)
- [Little Justice Leaders](#)
- [Our Shelves](#)

## Academics

Of course it will be important to continue to work on academics over this distance learning time. You will have to figure out how best to do that, depending on your family and your child.

At a minimum, your child should be counting, writing, and reading EVERY DAY. They can do this while they are helping out around the house, washing hands, or playing. This can be focused learning with an adult, an older sibling, a worksheet or with an app. Your child will need more or less supervised help, based on their abilities. I recommend that in addition to the daily activities above, you pick one academic goal to work on multiple times a day and nail it. It will be so exciting for both you and your child to see progress during this time! This goal might be to name all the colors or all the basic shapes, recognize and write all the letters in their name, or count to 100. It could be making sure they draw a picture and write a few words about a book they read every day.

When talking about child development related to academics, especially young children, it's important to recognize that not every child learns at the same time or in the same way. Learning is on a continuum, and it isn't always linear. I had a student who could recite all the letter sounds but could only recognize the first letter in his name. Your child might be more advanced in literacy and a little behind in math, and that's ok. Recognizing letters might have been a breeze, but now they're having trouble matching letter sounds to letters, and that's ok. It is all ok! The key things to remember are exposure to more advanced concepts, regular practice of current skills, and learning in different ways (especially if it's a difficult idea for your child to grasp). I'll be outlining the typical continuum and then linking ideas and resources as I add to it. Be sure to check back for resources related to what your child needs to focus on.

**Exposure to more advanced concepts:** this means that if your child can't do something yet, you should plan to regularly incorporate it into their week. This doesn't mean you have to buy flashcards. But until your kid can tell you what rhymes with "cat," make sure at least a few of the books you read have rhymes in them. Sing some rhyming songs. That's really it. If it's a skill they should master by the end of the year, make it an every day, or every other day exposure.

**Regular practice of current skills:** exactly what it means. If you want your kid to be able to write his or her name, finding the letters isn't enough. They actually have to practice forming the letters. The fun comes in how they form them... with toys, in shaving cream, with colorful markers, chalk, on an easel, in sand, etc.

**Learning in different ways:** one great way to help kids learn is to vary the way they're learning. See above for the regular practice of current skills. Everyone's brain is wired a little differently. But here's an example of how I might practice letter recognition with a child who has trouble remembering a new letter: read a book featuring that letter, sort objects that start with the letter, practice writing the letter on a worksheet, find the letter several times in a bin of letters, and form the letter using legos or pattern blocks. Each of these activities require the brain to make the connection between the shape, sound, and form of the letter in slightly different ways. They all help cement the knowledge for the child.

Resources:

-A [free assessment page](#) by PreKinders to help track academic progress

# Literacy

## -Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness has to do with one's ability to hear, identify, and manipulate units of language. This includes rhyming, blending onset and rime, alliteration, syllables in words, and more. The best way to develop it in your child is to talk, read, and sing with them every day.

### -Rhyming

English is a language with lots of rhyming words, so most English-native speakers will pick up this skill quickly given regular exposure. It sometimes requires more work for children growing up speaking a language where the conjugation leads to rhyming words being embedded in the sentence, instead of at the end. Make sure you sing songs and read books with plenty of rhymes, and your kid is likely to pick up this skill quickly. In fact, sing all the songs, especially simple, silly nursery rhymes and fingerplays. Read funny books. Once your child knows the rhyme, leave the rhyming word blank and ask your kid to fill it in. If they master that, give them a set of three or four words that rhyme and one that doesn't. See if they can identify it. From there you can move onto deciding whether or not two words rhyme, and generating rhyming words from a list.

#### Resources:

##### Songs and Fingerplays:

- [Two Little Birds](#)
- [Bubble, Bubble, Pop!](#)
- [Open, Shut Them](#)
- [10 Little Fingers](#)

##### Books:

- Andrea Beaty and David Roberts' Questioners Books
  - [Ada Twist, Scientist](#)
  - [Rosie Revere, Engineer](#)
  - [Iggy Peck, Architect](#)
  - [Sofia Valdez, Future Prez](#)
- Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler Books
  - [The Gruffalo](#)
  - [Room on the Broom](#)
  - [The Spiffiest Giant in Town](#)
- Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman's Bear Series
  - [Bear Feels Scared](#)
  - [Bear Feels Sick](#)
  - [Bear Snores On](#)
- [Rhyming Dust Bunnies](#)
- For toddlers, anything by Sandra Boynton

-This Reading Mama put together a list of [singable rhyming books](#)

Practice:

-The Measured Mom [Rhyming Clip Cards](#)

-The Measured Mom [Rhyming Memory Game](#)

-This Reading Mama [Rhyming Bingo Boards](#)

-This Reading Mama [CVC Rhyming Word Blackout](#)

## **-Alliteration**

This skill is basically just the ability to hear the initial sound when it repeats frequently. The theory goes, if your kid can hear it when it's repeated frequently, they'll soon be ready to identify it when it's all by itself, moving your child one step closer to reading. Read some books, practice saying some tongue twisters, sing some songs, but relax -- this isn't one I've ever worried about.

Resources:

Books:

-[The Absolutely Awful Alphabet](#)

-[Jamerry](#)

-[Clara Caterpillar](#)

Tongue Twisters:

-[She Sells Seashells](#)

-[Woodchuck](#) tongue twister set to music

-[Pronunciation Guide](#), animated, not really geared towards little kids but they might like it anyways

Practice:

-check out the section on beginning sounds

## **-Alphabet Knowledge**

### **-Uppercase Letters**

I love when kids start to discover that letters have meaning! It's so fun. I always start by what's relevant to them -- the first letter in their name, their parents/siblings/friends names, etc. With Henry, who just turned two at the beginning of March, all I did was point out the capital letter "H" when we were reading books featuring the alphabet, once or twice a week. He just started identifying letter H in print on his own this week. This is an example of how a little bit of exposure goes a long way! Kids really do pay attention and make connections all the time.

For preschool kids, I like to have them build their names as much as possible (with gems, rocks, legos, mini erasers, stickers, etc.), or write it in fun materials (shaving cream, sand, chalk). The physicality of these activities help make the learning exciting and help students really master the skill.

Resources:

- [The Measured Mom](#) very simple letter find
- [Pocket of Preschool](#) mini eraser letter mats
- [The Measured Mom](#) find the letter worksheets
- [PreKinders](#) alphabet printables
- Free [board game template](#) to create your own game

## **-Lowercase Letters**

I always teach lowercase letters at the same time as uppercase. I introduce the letter sound as well. As students master uppercase, it's easy to have them practice matching the upper and lowercase letters. I like to do this with puzzles. I start with splitting the alphabet in half or even in quarters, depending on the child. I'll have a mix of easy letters (like O, where the lowercase looks the same, only smaller) and harder letters (like D, where it could look like an entirely different letter if it is flipped around). As students get better at this challenge, I'll have them work more independently and add in more letters. I like using physical puzzles because they self-correct. It means I can really let the student grapple with it for a little and they can't just randomly matching letters and say "I'm done!" Even kids who are primarily focusing on the puzzle shape for matching will get some lowercase letter exposure. If I'm working one-on-one or in a small group, I make sure to review all the letters before and after the puzzle matching.

Another excellent activity for students who struggle with remembering the lowercase is to have them trace and name the upper and lowercase and identify the corresponding picture and sound for each letter. This requires more assistance from the adult, but it also helps expose kids to letter formation and letter sounds.

And of course, the same activities you did to introduce uppercase letters will also work for lowercase letters.

Resources:

- [Upper/Lowercase Alphabet](#) puzzle
- [The Measured Mom](#) alphabet tracing book
- [Confessions of a Homeschooler](#) dot to dot alphabet

## **-Matching Letters and Letter Sounds**

This is the skill your kid needs to master before they actually start to read. For 90% of my students, the easiest (and the most fun) way to learn is to listen to a letter sound song. In the classroom, we listen to a letter sound song every day before we start our read aloud. We point to the letters as we go. For students who need more practice, we read simple alphabet books (one letter at a time) and sort toys based on letter sound. I'm a fan of tying activities into routines you already do. For example, a letter sound song is just about the right length for brushing your teeth in the morning. If your kid is still learning to recognize the alphabet, just play a letter sounds song or talk about matching letter sounds once or twice during the week ("Mama starts with M. Mmmmmm. Macaroni starts with mmmmmmm too. Mmmmmmacaroni and mmmmmama. /m/ Mama gave you macaroni for lunch today. I wonder what other words start with /m/?")

If you are ready to focus on letter sounds, here's the progression I usually do (though I have yet to get to r-controlled vowels with any PK students):

A-Z Letter Sounds

-letters in child's name

- s, a, t, l, p, n

- c, k, e, h, r

- m, d, g, o

- l, f, b, q, u

- j, z, w

- v, y, x

CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words (Short Vowels) – a,e,i,o,u

Digraphs – ch, sh, th, ph, wh

Initial Blends – sp, sl, br, pl, sk, cl, gr, tw, bl, st, sn, spr, dr, cr, fr, gl, br, pr, fl, tr

Final Blends - -ck, -mp, -nk, -sp

Long Vowels – o-e, i-e, a-e, -are

Long Vowels Diphthongs – ai, ea, oa, igh, ow, alk, ow, oi

R-Controlled Vowels – ar, or, ir

Inflections - -ing, -ed (t), -ed (ed), -ed (d), -p/ped, y to i + es, drop e

Resources:

-[Jack Hartmann](#) letter sound songs on youtube

-[Dr. Jean](#) letter sound songs on youtube

-[PreKinders](#) beginning clip cards (two choices)

-[The Measured Mom](#) beginning clip cards (three choices)

-[The Measured Mom](#) simple alphabet books

-[Alphabet Sounds](#) teaching tubs (take a look at the product and then take a look around your house. Better yet, have your child try and collect toys that start with the same letter sound)

-[KinderCraze](#) - Alphabet Sound Chart (beginning sounds)

-[This Reading Mama](#) - Alphabet Sound Chart (more advanced)

-[This Reading Mama](#) - free alphabet worksheets

## **-CVC Words**

CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words, along with beginning sight words, are the first taste of real reading your child will do. In my school, we use Foundations to teach reading in Kindergarten and up, so students are taught to tap out words. I teach my preschoolers the same thing so they aren't learning an entirely new concept when they become kindergartners. Check out [this video](#) to see how to tap out words.

One thing that is really important when mastering CVC words is to be able to both identify the word from reading it AND be able to spell the word from looking at a picture. This requires the brain to really get to work. In order to be able to do this, kids need to know all of their letter sounds easily, and be able to hear the beginning, middle, and ending sounds of words. Start with the picture and have your kid identify each part of the word. Write each sound down, and tap it out together. As your kid gets better at this, have them write or build the word by

themselves, and then check it with them. If that is easy for them, they're ready to start practicing to read CVC words.

Again, in preschool, I think it's important to have fun and practice as opposed to drill kids with flashcards. Playing a CVC board game a few times a week is plenty of practice. If it takes more than 15 minutes to play the game, it's likely your child isn't quite ready for these words yet. Take a step back and work on really getting letter sounds mastered. The quicker the child can say the sound when seeing the letter, the better.

Resources:

- [The Measured Mom](#) CVC board games
- [The Measured Mom](#) CVC and CVCE clip cards (words to pictures)
- [Build-A-Word! Magnet Board](#) - I like the frame of this board; segmenting beginning-middle-end helps young readers make sure they've added each sound
- [Montessorium Intro to Words app](#) - useful in practicing CVC words, though I wish they had a bigger range of pictures
- [This Reading Mama](#) CVC Blackout Bingo
- [The Measured Mom](#) Short A worksheets
- [The Measured Mom](#) Short O worksheets

## **-Digraphs**

Digraphs are an extension of regular letter sounds. In English, there are certain letters that when paired with another letter, make a specific sound each time. Examples: sh, th, wh, ph, ch. I don't bother teaching digraphs until beginning sounds are well and truly mastered and students are beginning to put CVC words together. I like to have students sort picture cards or color in the digraph sounds.

Resources:

- This Reading Mama [Digraph Sorting Picture Cards](#)
- Make Take Teach [Digraph Sorting Picture Cards](#)
- The Measured Mom [Digraph Say and Color Sheets](#)
- This Reading Mama [Digraph Puzzle](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers Costs \$ - [Digraph Coloring Pages](#)

## **-Initial Blends**

Initial blends are two consonants together at the beginning of a word - cl, br, gr, etc. You have to blend the sounds together quickly to form the word, as opposed to a CVC word, where the sounds are more distinct.

Resources:

- The Measured Mom [Four in a Row Blends Game Boards](#)

## -Print Knowledge

### -Print Concepts

This is a bucket name for all the things a kid has to know about books before they can actually read a book. For example, how to hold a book, which direction we turn pages, which way we read the words across the page, etc. You're teaching this every time you read a book and point to the words or refer to a book by its title. Some kids pick up on this on their own; other kids need a little help. These resources are for them.

Resources:

-The Measured Mom [Nursery Rhyme Pack](#) - costs money, but I love the way she talks about print concepts and helps make the connection for kids that words on the page match what we say aloud. The [Humpty Dumpty book](#) is free.

-The Measured Mom [Voice to Print Packs](#) - like the nursery rhyme pack, these printables feature clear pictures and a dot underneath each word. It's a harder jump for a lot of kids, because the words in the print packs aren't usually the first sight words I would teach a student. However, these are free and the patterned text helps with confidence and mastering the concept

### -Answers and Asks Questions

In order to make sure children comprehend what they are reading, it is important that they can ask and answer questions about the text. We do this with older babies and toddlers by pointing and asking children to repeat what we say. We might ask simple questions like "can you find the cat on this page?" or "do you think this kid is feeling happy or sad?"

I encourage parents to **ask 5W questions (who, what, where, when, why)** when reading. This doesn't mean there's a quiz at the end of every book. In fact, I usually only ask two or three questions throughout a story. It's more about getting in the habit of asking and answering questions. The 5W questions are listed in order from easiest to hardest, and I don't recommend jumping to "why" when your child is still struggling to identify "what."

Another important strategy is to **model thinking** while you read. This can take some practice, but once you get the hang of it, it's really easy. Here are a few suggestions for how to do a "think-aloud:"

-know what you want the kid to be able to do and highlight that. If you want them to think about what they already know on a related subject before reading, say "before I start, I'm going to take a moment to think about..."

-admit when you don't know something - a new word, an idea, etc. and model how they can look closely at the picture to check to see if the idea makes sense or ask a grown up to help explain the word

-if you want your kid to make a connection to another text, say "this makes me think of another book we read, I'm trying to remember what it was... oh yes, \_\_\_\_\_! Because \_\_\_\_\_ reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_."

-find little phrases (underlined) you can use frequently. For example: “I wonder how he’s feeling? I bet she’s feeling happy, because I see her smiling and I smile when I’m happy.”

As students become more comfortable with asking and answering questions, I make sure to **ask open-ended questions**: What might happen if this story kept going? If you were the main character, what would you do? Does this scene or book remind you of something in your own life?

Resources:

-Read aloud interactions are definitely the most effective in terms of building this skill, in part because of modeling thinking. Here’s a nice example of [modeling thinking in terms of reading comprehension](#) for slightly older students

-[Reading A to Z](#) has leveled books with mini quizzes at the end and it is free right now

-[Bloom’s Taxonomy](#) - For parents looking for a big picture visual, Bloom’s Taxonomy shows how we can help students become better critical thinkers by moving them up the triangle. Remembering and Understanding requires less critical thinking than Applying and Analyzing something, while Evaluating and Creating takes even more critical thinking skills than the other four categories. You won’t be successful if you jump to the more advanced thinking skills without building a base of knowledge for your child. But if you model thinking that is slightly more advanced than where they are currently, they will soon begin to imitate that type of thinking.

## **-Emergent Reading Skills and Retelling Stories**

Children are natural storytellers, so this is another skill that your kid is going to pick up on quickly if you make it a practice to read daily (which you obviously should!) Most retelling and emergent reading skills develop like this:

- pretend to read while looking at books
- remember what is happening in a story by looking at pictures
- recite some language from the text (“but he was still hungry!”)
- can fill in the blanks while you read (“in the light of the moon, a little egg lay on the \_\_\_\_\_”)
- remember what is about to happen next
- remembers stories in sequence without visual prompts
- retells with lots of details
- starts to match oral words to written words

The best way to encourage this skill is to read and read often. Ask your child to tell you what is happening and what is going to happen next. Some kids love to read to younger siblings, stuffed animals, or dolls. Set aside some time each day for your child to read independently. We like to do this before or after nap or bedtime. We also like doing this together, with grownups reading their own books.

Sequencing stories is a fun way to retell them, and helps kids make connections and recall information. In the classroom, I sometimes break the story down into beginning, middle, and end by drawing a box for each part of the story and having the students tell me what to draw to represent each moment in time.

For a more active, hands-on story retelling, physically act it out with your child. I always take the time to write out the different steps of the story. [We're Going on a Bear Hunt](#) is an ideal entry-level book for this, because the language is consistent, there's a clear action for each part of the story, and there aren't a lot of roles or dialogue. Even better, use props to really make the story come alive: a cave can be made under a table or with a few couch cushions, a blue towel or blanket on the floor makes a good river, etc.

Fairy tales are also great for this type of story re-enacting and telling. They have plenty of repetitive text ("Papa Bear's porridge was too hot. Mama Bear's porridge was too cold. Baby Bear's porridge was just right."). Reading [multiple versions](#) of the same fairy tales are also fun to compare, and help model how we can play with stories. You can create your own sequence cards based on these stories with your child's help.

#### Resources:

- Four-card [story sequence cards](#) by The Wise Owl Factory - some of these sequence cards are easier to follow than others, but it gives you a good idea of how they're done, and you can always make your own
- Play to Learn Preschool - [Virtual Preschool, Week 2: Fairy Tales](#) - you can watch all the episodes from fairy tale week on facebook. The link takes you to all the games and toys Ms. Jamie used as well as ideas for extending the learning at home

## -Writing

Writing is a literacy skill that relies heavily on fine motor skills and mastery of literacy concepts. The best way to teach it is to incorporate lots of fine motor skills, model writing in daily life, and make writing feel special.

If your child does not have the **fine motor skills** to hold a pen properly, writing is going to be frustrating for everyone. Children start with a closed fist around a marker, jabbing and grasping at the paper. Instead of forcing them to hold the marker correctly, I provide lots of finger-strengthening opportunities (playdoh and anything involving tweezers are my favorites for this). Shorter writing utensils (think: golf pencils) are going to naturally help your child adjust his or her fingers. I'll model the proper grip at the beginning of a writing session, but unless my student is over five years old, I won't interrupt them to change their grip. I want my students to love writing, and being frequently interrupted isn't helpful in getting them into the writing flow. I also provide upright writing activities as much as possible, especially to reluctant writers. An easel or paper taped to a wall or fridge engages shoulder and arm muscles differently than writing at a table. Be sure to check out the pre-writing resources under the "Name" section.

**Modeling writing** in daily life is incredibly important for inspiring your child to want to write:

- ask children about their drawings and write down what they say
- make lists with them about things we need
- say "ohh, great idea, let me write that down!" when someone is feeling upset because we can't do something right away
- incorporate writing opportunities in as many areas/activities as possible
- sketch building designs after creating something with blocks

- when involved in dramatic play, make grocery lists, sign in at the doctor's office, write a prescription for a sick pet, or navigate a rocket ship
- conduct research and put our discoveries in writing

Besides modeling, we can encourage writing by providing interesting and beautiful writing materials and prompts to **make writing special**:

- fancy pens or markers
- different type of special paper
- writing in different materials (shaving cream, salt, sand, flour, etc.)
- writing on an easel or on top of a light table or against the window
- writing for a specific, special purpose (birthday cards, thank you cards, wish lists, etc.)
- writing on a clipboard to conduct research (take a survey, investigate something, etc.)

### **-Name**

Naturally, the first word your child is going to want to be able to write is his or her own name. If your child isn't able to draw straight lines on purpose, I recommend focusing on fine motor skills and adding in tracing templates. In the classroom, we practice writing our names every day as part of our morning routine. I also encourage name writing in many other parts of the classroom: on every piece of artwork we do, signing up for a waitlist in a popular area, writing letters to each other, etc. If this is a skill your child needs to work on, I recommend setting aside ten minutes of time each day. Build it into the routine of your day however you can!

When I teach the alphabet to preschoolers, I introduce upper- and lowercase letters at the same time. The same is true for writing the letters. However, I only provide uppercase name templates for students to practice on. Uppercase letters have more straight lines, which are easier to write. Once a student can easily write her name from memory, I provide a lowercase template.

Learning letter formation involves writing skills as well as letter recognition. Make this more fun by focusing on BUILDING the name before learning to WRITE it. Build using any small materials you have: legos, mini erasers, cheerios, pom-poms, playdoh.

Templates are important scaffolds (a way to help make it easier but still challenging). Start with one uppercase letter at a time, and then take them away. For Henry, his progression would look something like this:

H  
E  
N  
R  
Y  
HENRY  
\_ENRY  
\_\_NRY  
\_\_\_RY  
\_\_\_\_Y

## Resources:

- 15 [Pre-Writing](#) activities to inspire you from We Are Teachers
- Stay at Home Educator [Pre-Writing Practice](#) - I love the photo showing a person tracing these lines with a gem instead of with a marker. That's a great way to start!
- [Pre-Writing Penguins](#) by Early Learning Ideas
- Pocket of Preschool's [Editable Name Mats](#) - we use something similar in the classroom. At home, you could create one for each important person in your child's life

## -Writing Progression

Writing progressions are best shown with images. Here's a chart by HeidiSongs that helps illustrate how a child developmentally progresses with writing:

HeidiSongs' Chart of the Developmental Progression of A Child's Writing			
 <p>1. Pictures</p>	 <p>2. Random Scribbling</p>	 <p>3. Scribble Writing (Written in linear fashion to mimic real writing.)</p>	 <p>4. Symbols That Represent Letters</p>
 <p>5. Random Letters (No relationship between sounds of letters and what the child is trying to say.)</p>	 <p>6. Letter Strings (Progresses from left to right and top to bottom when the child "reads" his writing.)</p>	 <p>7. Letter Groups (The groups have spaces in between to resemble words.)</p>	 <p>8. Environmental Print (Child copies print found in the room, often without knowing what the words are.)</p>
 <p>9. Beginning Sounds (Child begins to write simple sentences using sight words and just the beginning sounds of words.)</p>	 <p>10. Early Inventive Spelling (Includes the same elements as the previous level, but with more consonant sounds represented and spaces between words.)</p>	 <p>11. Inventive Spelling (Has the same elements as the previous level, but with more sounds per word written, including the vowels. Some conventional spelling patterns may appear.)</p>	 <p>12. Transitional Writing (Includes all of the previous elements, plus some real spellings of words with silent letters and other spelling patterns. Punctuation is beginning to appear.)</p>

To encourage more writing, ask your kid: “tell me about what you wrote” or let them know “you should write that down so you remember later.” If you act like their writing is meaningful, it will help them understand that it is important. Praise their hard work and ignore any urge to correct their writing.

As students form more letter-like words, they will attempt to write for themselves. An incredibly important step to helping a writer grow is **invented spelling** (#10 above). Invented spelling isn’t just cute, it’s how a child shows us he or she is making connections between letter sounds and words on a page. If a kid can hear the sounds easily, this will translate to more nuanced spellings. If you provide the spelling for the kid, you’re letting your kid avoid the work of making those sound-letter-page connections. Encourage them by saying “just try your best” or “let’s start with the first sound” or “let’s see how many sounds we can find in this sentence.” I recommend providing strategies or helpful visuals for spelling, like a [letter-sound chart](#), a [word wall](#), or [word cards](#) for common words can help your child feel confident and proud about what they’re doing without having them rely on an adult to spoon-feed them all the answers.

When it comes to writing, I always say less is more when it comes to teaching it. Pick one and only one thing to work on with your kid. For many kids, that means I just ask a question or encourage them to draw one more detail. For older preschoolers, I’ll pick an actual writing skill to teach. For example, if they like to write sight words (#8 above) but all their words runs together, I help show them how to make a line for each word before writing the beginning sounds (#9). If they’re ready for punctuation, I show them how to draw a period at the end of the sentence. The important thing is to make writing a regular practice. I highly recommend listening (or reading the transcript) of Triple R Teaching’s [writing workshop secrets](#) if this is an area you want to help your child develop.

Here are a few ideas for regular journal practice:

- feelings journal - have your child pick a feeling and then draw a time he or she experienced that feeling
- daily life journal - illustrate one thing that happened during the day (if you keep a journal yourself, this is an excellent time to model nearby while your child focuses on his or her own work)
- reading journal - maybe you pick a different book to read and reflect on each day, or perhaps your kid draws a page for each chapter in a longer book
- dreams or wishes journal - draw what you dreamed or what you wish would come true
- play plan - ask your kid to decide ahead of time what he or she is going to play and encourage them to draw as many details as possible
- connect it to their interests: if you have a budding architect, have your kid draw the design and a few words about it. If you have a scientist on your hands, write all about your special investigations

Resources:

- Pocket of Preschool Writing Center ideas and [word cards freebie](#)
- Triple R Teaching- [Podcast episode #7](#): 5 Secrets to giving strong writing workshops

Podcast

- This Reading Mama - [Advanced Alphabet Sound Chart](#)

## General Literacy Resources

-Learning A to Z has two free products for the rest of the year: [Reading A-Z](#) (Raz Kids, an online leveled library) and [Headsprout](#) (a literacy curriculum). I'm excited for my students to have access to these excellent resources.

-ABCmouse.com - <https://www.abcmouse.com/> - Individualized, differentiated activities. No printing necessary!

-[The Measured Mom](#) - tons of free games and ideas

-Teaching Mama - <https://teachingmama.org/product/preschool-alphabet-packet/> - 245 pages of printable pages for preschool students, as well as tons of other free games and ideas

## Math

### -Number Sense

For preschoolers, number sense is divided into two parts: counting and quantifying. Check out the toddler section for suggestions on counting in daily life, easy ways to work on "pre-math" skills, and favorite books for building number sense and numeral recognition.

#### -Counts

The ability to rote count is important, and I find the best way to encourage this is to incorporate it into daily life. Slowly increase the number to which you are counting. Keep in mind that it is typical to be able to rote count to a higher number than one can accurately count and match objects. We call this one-to-one counting. As kids grow the ability to rote and one-to-one count, they also develop the ability to tell what comes before or after a number.

An easy way to tell what number comes before/after a specific number is to have kids work on puzzles where the numbers are in a line on the bottom of an image. They order the images and the puzzles at the same time. With my three-year-olds, I give them puzzles with 5-6 strips. My four and five-year-olds usually have 10 strips per puzzle. This could also work for practicing counting by 10s, 5s, or 2s.

Toddler/Preschool Counting Progression:

- says numbers while counting, out of order
- counts to 5
- counts to 10, one-to-one counts to 5
- counts to 20, one-to-one counts to 10
- counts to 30, one-to-one counts to 30, tells before/after to 10
- counts to 100 by 1s and 10s, tells before/after to 20

Resources:

- figure out regular ways to count at home and do it daily

- while brushing teeth
- while washing hands
- while cleaning up toys
- you get the idea
- incorporate counting into play activities
  - play hide and go seek regularly
  - rocketship blast offs
  - car race countdowns
  - kisses for the baby doll
  - part of an obstacle course
  - jumping rope/fitness activities

-as a limit for something - In my house, each parent will only read 10 books to Henry in a given hour; after that he has to read on his own or find something else to do. This rule was created after I read 30 books to him before 9am with only a few sips of tea to fortify me. But basically this means we count to 10 (and reference how many more we need to get to 10) frequently

-This Reading Mama - [Grid Game 1-20](#) - I have students touch each number as they count, then place a mini eraser on each number as they count. They then count each eraser on the grid. Next, they count the erasers as they put them away one at a time. Finally, they touch each numeral as they count again. Works great for counting practice and numeral recognition.

-Shelley Lovett - [Number Sequencing 1-10 Cars Printable](#)

-Shelley Lovett - [Number Sequencing 1-10 Under the Sea Printable](#)

-Teaching that is Special - [Number Sequencing 1-10 Animals Printables](#)

## **-Quantifies**

Quantifying is the ability to look at a set of objects and understand how they relate in numbers without counting. It starts with understanding the concepts of one, two, and more. The easiest way to teach this is through food. It's amazing how quickly babies catch onto the idea of "more!" Later quantifying skills include the ability to subitize numbers (most commonly, to recognize the pips on dice without having to count them individually) and create and break down sets into numbers (e.g., recognize that you have 10 marbles, four that are red and six that are blue). This is a necessary skill before you can learn addition and subtraction.

Like counting, quantifying is a skill that I think is best taught by incorporating it into regular daily life. Play dice games regularly to practice subitizing. Help your child recognize sets by talking about them: "you have two tigers and one lion. That makes one, two, three animals. Will you give me one? How many do you have now?"

The Measured Mom's [Roll and Cover games](#) are my favorite dice printable. My students use mini-erasers to cover the numbers (this is great numeral recognition as well as practice subitizing). I typically have them use the same printable 2-4 times, letting them choose the mini-eraser of their choice. Students work individually or in teams. It's simple enough that after the first introductory round, most students can complete the game independently.

## **Resources:**

-The Measured Mom [Roll and Cover games](#)

-The Measured Mom [Monster Dice Match game](#)

-The Measured Mom [Ice Cream Count and Match game](#)

## **-Numeral Recognition**

Numeral recognition is simply the math version of learning the alphabet. You're not going to be able to read without knowing your letters and letter sounds automatically, and you won't be able to do any mathematical problems without knowing your numbers and how many objects each number represents.

Because it is so similar to learning letters, I use the same techniques: build the number, write it in fun materials, play matching games with numeral and quantity. See the literacy section for more details.

Resources:

- Tot Schooling - [Cookie Matching Game](#)
- The Measured Mom - [The Buggy Board Game 1-5](#)
- The Measured Mom - [Number Worksheets 1-10](#)
- The Measured Mom - [Number Worksheets 11-20](#)
- Teaching Mama - [Number Formation Rhymes 0-10](#)
- Latoya Reed - [Number Practice Worksheets 1-10](#)
- Latoya Reed - [Number Practice Worksheets 11-20](#)
- A Dab of Glue Will Do - [Snowman Number Match Printable](#)
- Free [board game template](#) to create your own game
- Shoots and Ladders - this classic game incorporates numbers, which is especially helpful for students learning numbers 31-100

## **-Number Operations (adds and subtracts)**

In order for students to actually do number operation problems, where they add or subtract quantities, they have to have good number sense, be able to recognize numerals and quantify amounts instantly. Once they have these skills firmly in place, you can begin to teach them number operations. To begin, keep sums within five. After that is mastered, you can expand to 10, and then 20. These are all KINDERGARTEN level skills, and I don't recommend spending a lot of time on them at the preschool level. However, if your child is ready for it, these math ideas can be turned into fun games.

The best way to introduce and reinforce the idea of five is through songs and fingerplays. There's a reason there are so many songs about "five little \_\_\_\_." You can fit all of them on one hand and they help build a strong number sense! Check out the toddler pre-math section for songs and fingerplays.

I encourage you to start with the concepts of "adding" and "taking away" through play. Tell your child you want to build a tower of five blocks. Put three together. Count them, restate the goal, and then say "we need to add more blocks! I wonder how many? Let's count them." Teach your child to "count on" by starting with any number greater than 1 and continuing to count from there. For example: "we're trying to find five cars. You have three right now. Three, four (hold up one finger), five (hold up a second finger). (Show child your two fingers). We need to find two more cars." Another easy way to count on is to pretend to have a number in your hand (even better,

actually have them in your hand). Close your hand into a fist, and tap your fist as you say the number. For example: "I'm going to pick up three marbles. One, two, three. Ok, I have three in this hand. Let's see how many are on the floor and in my hand. (Tap fist) three, (begin counting the ones on the floor) four, five, six..."

Once your child is familiar with both counting on and adding/taking away while counting physical objects, you can introduce Kindergarten-level representation tools, like ten frames and number bonds.

Five or [ten frame](#) grids are used in Kindergarten to help students quickly visualize numbers. They're easy to draw by hand (or print) and use. My first introductory game tends to be a simple five or ten frame addition game. I put out two objects: two different types of mini erasers, two colors of unifix cubes, or anything else I have on hand. The child rolls a die, counts out that many of one color/object, figures out how many more (s)he needs by counting the blank spaces, and then fills it in using the other color/object. This helps students begin to recognize the hidden partners within a number (e.g., hidden partners within five:  $0+5$ ,  $1+4$ ,  $2+3$ ,  $3+2$ ,  $4+1$ , and  $5+0$ ).

Another way to help reinforce number operations is to refer to numbers as parts and wholes. By talking about the numbers in this way, we emphasize the concept that big numbers can be broken up into smaller numbers, or small numbers added together to make larger numbers. We can talk about all the different combinations we can make within a single number. For example, you could tell your child you're giving him or her four books. How many different ways can (s)he share them with a friend? The friend could get 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4 books. And for each choice, how many would your child still have?

This type of word problem can be drawn as a [number bond](#), which is a physical representation of parts to whole. To teach your child about number bonds, start by using physical objects to put into the different circles of a number bond. Have your child use objects (Legos work great for this) to sort parts and whole together. Then have your child practice drawing the number bonds, using a physical drawing to represent each part or whole. Finally, show your child how they can use numbers to represent each part or whole. I just recently started teaching number bonds to the PK-4 students in my class who were ready to learn about them, and I think we all really enjoyed it!

Again, at a preschool level there really isn't a need to progress past 10 when adding and subtracting. We want to really make sure students understand these concepts automatically, and it's better to spend more time on them in different ways, through different games, than to rush ahead to bigger numbers.

#### Resources:

- Free [Five Frame](#) (you could easily just draw five boxes on a piece of paper)
- Free [Double Ten Frame](#) (or just draw ten boxes)
- Free [Number Bond template](#)
- The Measured Mom [Race to 20 Game](#)
- Liz's Early Learning Spot - [Quick Number Stories](#) (to 10)
- Free [Addition within 10 Cards](#) - I like to teach students to count out the first number in one color of cubes or Legos, and the second number in another color, and then add them together
- Free [Subtraction within 10 Cards](#)

## **-Shapes and Spatial Relationships**

I have a lot of great resources in the toddler section for shapes, because I lump basic shape recognition with visual discrimination skills, and therefore count it as a “pre-math” skill. Check out the toddler shape section for ideas on materials, books and songs to help teach basic shape recognition. I combine shapes and spatial relationships here because once you get beyond naming shapes, the skill is all about recognizing how shapes fit together in a space and how they can be added to form new shapes. It also involves recognizing more advanced shapes. With 3D shapes, I introduce the proper names, but the goal is really for students to be able to recognize and name the shape in their own words, within the natural environment (e.g., calling a cube a “box” or a sphere a “ball.”)

My favorite activities that involve the intersection of shapes and spatial reasoning involve Magna-Tiles, pattern blocks and tangrams. I have a lot of template resources below for the tangrams and pattern blocks. Start by letting students explore the materials however they’d like. See if they can form different shapes using what they have (a square or larger triangle by adding two triangles together, for example). Encourage students to match colorful templates, then black and white templates, and eventually challenge them to take a blank outline and manipulate shapes inside. This last challenge will also provide a good idea of how your child does with persistence and problem-solving.

Spatial reasoning also has to do with using words that indicate location, distance, and direction, as well as understanding and making maps. Use these words in daily life by asking your child to find objects you’ve hidden using clues (“I see something green that’s hiding under the table”). Once I’ve read all the books in the resources section with students, I like to check their map-reading and map-making abilities by having them draw maps of hidden treasure around the room. I use the map in [Are We There Yet, Daddy](#) and ask them to tell me where the car is at different points in the map, and how they know. If they can do both of these things, I create a fun map-reading activity with a simplified map of the room or several nearby rooms. I use copies of the same map and mark each with an X to indicate where the next map can be found. Eventually, there’s a prize at the end. Kids love this!

Progressions/What to Learn:

### **-Basic 2D Shapes:**

- circle
- triangle
- square
- rectangle
- heart
- star
- oval
- diamond

### **-Advanced 2D Shapes:**

- trapezoid
- hexagon
- octagon
- rhombus

### **-3-Dimensional Shapes:**

- sphere
- cube
- cylinder
- prism

### **-Spatial Reasoning Progression**

- up/down
- in/on/under
- proximity words - between, next to, beside
- words indicating location, direction, and distance - behind, backwards
- using and making maps

### **Resources:**

#### **-Pattern Block Templates**

- Pre-Kinders [Pattern Block Templates](#)
- Life Over C's [Uppercase Alphabet Pattern Block Templates](#)
- Life Over C's [Lowercase Alphabet Pattern Block Templates](#)
- Lakeshore Learning [Pattern Block Design Cards](#) - \$15 - you could always create this for yourself. The set has different levels - basic design cards in full color, design cards without color, designs that are half done in color and half empty, and fully empty outlines of cards
- [Mega Activity Pack Book](#) - \$25 - the cool thing about this pack is that it has three levels of cards, including a blank outline shape, and questions that prompt students to think about which blocks are being used in each design

#### **-Tangram Templates**

- One Mama's Daily Drama - free set of [tangrams \(printable\) and puzzle cards](#)
- Lakeshore Learning [Tangram Picture Matching Cards](#) - \$13 - two levels of cards - some with an outline for each shape and some blank for a more challenging puzzle
- File Folder Fun - Free [tangram printable](#)

#### **-Shapes**

- A Dab of Glue Will Do - [2D Shape Sorting Printable](#)
- Playdoh to Plato [Shapes Activities](#) list and links
- Playdoh to Plato [2D Shape Graphs](#)
- [Assorted Shapes](#) for sorting curved vs. straight-line shapes - keep scrolling until page
- Every Star is Different - [3D Shape Activities](#)

-The Measured Mom - [3D Shape Sorting Printable](#)

### **-Map Books**

-[Me on the Map](#) by Joan Sweeney

-[Are We There Yet, Daddy?](#) By Virginia Walters

-[The Lost Ball/La Pelota Perdida](#) by Lynn Reiser

### **-Measures**

Measuring is usually thought of in terms of size, length and weight, perhaps because those are the easiest things to teach and learn in terms of measuring. But besides measuring objects, measuring standards involve measuring time and measuring money, though money is typically a first grade standard, so I won't be discussing it here.

I don't usually talk to preschoolers that much about the volume a container can hold, though I do provide them with plenty of measuring cups and spoons to play with in the sensory table, and make observations about the different amounts each object can hold.

Once students understand how to order, I introduce the balance scale and we compare a variety of classroom craft objects. This is so fun, and in my opinion, easier to understand than using multiples to measure, which is the next thing I introduce, using unifix cubes. They're easy to fit together and count. When there are so many fun ways to learn, and so much value in learning through a variety of experiments and activities, I don't limit myself to the progressions below. I just use that as a frame of reference, and I wouldn't expect students to be able to do all the things on the lower half of the lists before they could do the first half.

For helping students understand time, I use a [linear calendar](#). I also refer to time frequently, especially in relation to our day and other events ("we're going to go outside at 10:30, then we will come back in for read aloud, journal writing, and lunch.") I use pictures to help students remember the order in which we did something, and to reflect on all the steps. At the end of the day, we discuss all the things we did together. I do this with Henry at lunch and at night a few times a week- we verbally walk through all the things he did, all of his feelings, what excited or surprised us, what we want to do again, what we learned, what we'll do tomorrow, etc. It's such a sweet time to spend together, and helps him understand time and our routine.

### **-Objects**

Progression:

- simple comparisons between two objects (big/small, tall/small, more/less)
- ordering a small set of objects in terms of length, weight, size, area or volume
- uses multiples of the same unit to measure (unifix cubes, legos, markers, etc.)
- uses numbers to compare ("I have four, he has four. That's the same!")
- knows the purpose of standard measuring tools ("a scale measures how heavy something is")
- can use standard measuring tools accurately (scales and rules tend to be easiest)

-measures length accurately and can use whole numbers to express the measurement

## **-Time**

Progression:

- knows usual sequence of events (“we have nap after lunch”)
- relates time to daily routines (“I brush my teeth every morning before school”)
- uses some measurement time and tools (“when the clock says 8:00 that’s bed time”)

Resources:

- The Measured Mom - [Fun Activities for Ordering and Measuring at Home](#)
- Confessions of a Homeschooler - [Elephant Ordering by Size Printable](#)
- The Measured Mom - [Kite Ordering](#)
- The Measured Mom - [Human Body Measuring with Unifix Cubes Printable](#)
- The Measured Mom - [Measuring with Yarn](#)
- My Teaching Station - [Measuring Printables](#)
- Liz’s Early Learning Spot - [Length Measurement Challenge Cards](#) and Printable
- Little Dot’s Education - [The Very Hungry Caterpillar Ordering Cards](#) and Printable
- Pre-Kinders - [Measuring with Goldilocks and the Three Bears](#)
- Pre-Kinders - [Mini-Pumpkin Math](#)
- Early Learning Ideas - [How to Compare Weight With a Balance Scale](#)

Books:

- [Inch by Inch](#) by Leo Leonni
- [The Enormous Potato](#) - Retold by Aubrey Davis
- [Me and the Measure of Things](#) by Joan Sweeney

## **-Thinking Visually**

So much of math is about thinking visually, and this is absolutely true when it comes to graphing and analyzing data, classifying, and making patterns.

## **-Classifying**

Full disclosure: I love classifying stuff with kids! I love to sort and organize my own things, and it’s fun to share that with kids. I also think kids naturally love order. I know that may seem silly when kids spend so much time creating a disaster in every space they enter, but when you look closely at a toddler playing, a lot of it has to do with lining things up in one direction or another.

Just like with all preschool learning, we start with concrete objects, then move on to physical representations, and finally to more abstract images.

### Classifying Progression:

- matches objects
- puts objects into two or more groups based on a single characteristic (color, size, shape)
- groups by one characteristic, then regroups by another characteristic and explains why
- groups similar objects by more than one characteristic at the same time (creates sub-groups)
- switches sorting rules when asked and explains the reasons

When I was teaching Henry colors and shapes at home, I used foam sheets to make circles, squares, triangles and rectangles in each color. We then practiced matching by a single attribute (either shape or color). I would demonstrate putting things in piles by sorting by color, then resorting by shape. Think about what your child is interested in. How can you create a sorting challenge to help her learn even more? Perhaps she wants to learn about animal habitats, or things that go. There are so many ways to incorporate classifying into learning in fun ways.

Henry gets real-life application practice when we clean up toys - visual labels on toy bins make it easy for him to know where everything goes. He also sorts the laundry with me and matches all of his socks. We talk about sorting when we put the groceries away too.

A lot of kids pick up on this really easily. Others struggle, especially when it comes to learning to regroup by a second characteristic. I find that regular practice and explaining your thinking is really helpful. When I taught Henry with shapes and colors, I was talking the whole time like this: "ok, this one is a red circle. We're sorting by color, so we need to find the red pile. Where is red? Great, you found it. We'll put the red circle there. This circle is blue. Hmmm. Do I put it with the blue pile or the red pile? I have to put it with blue, because we're sorting by color." You don't need to do this the whole time, every time, but it is an important scaffolding tool to help your child figure out how to think when classifying.

There are plenty of toys you can sort around your house, but you can also purchase math counter toys for this purpose. Henry loves playing with all the counters I bring home from school, and they can also be used for counting, graphing, and all kinds of dramatic play. Lots of possibilities!

When sorting, I find it helpful to delineate the space, especially when starting out. If we're sorting by habitat, I might have a picture of each habitat that we physically sort the animals onto. If we're sorting transportation vehicles into land, water, and sky, I might have a brown or green, blue, and white piece of paper to represent each type area. Sometimes I just draw two or three circles on a piece of paper, to get kids started.

As students get into more advanced classifying, you can really see their flexibility in thinking. Again, it's all about talking kids through it as you demonstrate it, and giving them opportunities to make their own connections. One recent advanced sort I did in my preschool class was with musical instruments. We had been talking about the musical families (percussion, brass, woodwind, and string). Some kids could only sort the instruments into the families they had learned, but a subsection of kids independent of each other put woodwind and brass instruments together, because you play them with your mouths, not just your hands. Others sorted by size or shape, or instruments that they knew and ones they didn't. The categories

themselves don't matter too much, it's all about having the kid learn to sort and explain his or her reasoning.

#### Resources:

##### Math Counters:

- [Little Family](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Jungle Animals](#)
- [Farm Animals](#)
- [Dinosaurs](#)
- [Fish](#)

##### Printables:

- The Measured Mom [Flower Printable](#)
- Pre-Kinders [Bug Jar Math](#)
- Pre-Kinders [Sorting Templates](#)

## **-Patterns**

Kelli Vogstad has a great, [short article](#) on the importance of patterning. In summary: patterns help us make predictions based on our observations; they help create order out of chaos; they help create generalizations and see relationships between objects. Patterns are everywhere - in math, nature, music, art, and literature. They're important.

If a child can't sort items into two groups, patterns are going to be a real challenge. But once some basic classifying skills have been built, your kid is ready for patterns. Remember: start with physical objects, then written representations, followed by more abstract representations. Make sure your child can match a pattern before extending it. When teaching patterns, I help scaffold the extension step by offering two choices. For example, if we're making a car/boat/car/boat pattern, I'll show the kid a car and a boat and ask which one goes next. I won't have the entire transportation bucket out. The same is true for worksheets - I would start with a worksheet that has the student color in a picture of what comes next, rather than draw one.

This is another time when doing a Think Aloud really helps your child understand why patterns are important. If a student is struggling, I make sure to work on pattern matching, talking through the patterns we are creating and have the student touch and name each object. If the activity is a match and then fill in what comes next one, I will have the child match, then touch and name, and finally guess what comes next. Often naming the objects aloud will help the child identify what comes next.

I find pattern work is easy to fit into waiting periods. A few body pattern movements (clap, stomp, jump, shake, etc.) helps get the brain engaged and some of the wiggles out. It's also a good review or introduction tool to other things, because it's easy to make patterns using colors, shapes, letters, numbers, vocabulary or whatever else your child is learning. It's also easy to create from what your kid is already working on. If Henry's playing with cars and trucks, I can easily create a pattern from those toys.

### Pattern Progression:

- shows interest
- copies simple repeating patterns (this is the order I teach them, but others prefer slightly different orders)
  - ABAB (black, white, black, white)
  - AABB (black, black, white, white)
  - AAB (black, black, white)
  - ABB (white, white, black)
  - ABC (black, white, yellow)
- extends and creates simple repeating patterns
- recognizes, creates and explains more complex patterns (like a staircase)

### Resources:

- Kelli Vogstad article - Why is my kid building patterns again? [The Importance of Patterning](#)
- The Measured Mom [Patterns Overview and Printables](#) - the bear counting strips are a huge hit in my classroom!
- My Teaching Station [Worksheets](#)

## **-Graphs and Analyzes Data**

Graphing isn't a hard skill to learn if the kid really understands counting. In the classroom, we graph student choices frequently, such as when asking questions during our morning meeting (Which is your favorite fruit? How did you get to school?), or voting on books to read or center ideas (What should we build in dramatic play next?). Bar graphs are definitely the easiest to learn. We count each column, write down the number and compare quantities. We talk about more/less/equal to. As with everything in preschool (especially with math), we start with concrete objects, then representations of those concrete drawings, and finally more abstract symbols.

As students get comfortable with graphs, they begin to use numbers to compare. Eventually, they will use simple numeric summaries, such as tally marks, as well as ordinal numbers (first, second, third, etc.) to describe the findings. I emphasize height in graphing once we get to the representation stage: "we know something is more if that column is taller, and we know something is less if it is shorter."

One of my ways to check for understanding is to give students a small set of items, and have them graph it. I ask them to describe their findings, and then I ask them to try graphing it a different way. This also checks for classification skills. For example, a student might sort a group of transportation counters by type (bus, car, plane, boat, etc.) and then resort and graph by color. The findings are going to be different based on how the counters were sorted.

In order to understand graphs, and especially to create and then recreate graphs as described above, students must have abstract thinking skills. To use tally marks or make graphs, kids have to know that a line on a paper or a colored-in box on a graph represents an actual object. This is why I will demonstrate making physical graphs before asking a child to complete a worksheet about it. It should go without saying the kids think the best graphs are the ones they can taste (M&Ms, colorful goldfish crackers, nuts, etc.)

Once physical graphs are mastered, I have kids practice making tally marks by surveying their classmates on simple questions: Which color do you prefer? (limit two choices), Do you want to play with the dollhouse?, etc. With each answer, we physically mark a single tally in the proper column. This helps reinforce the idea that the marks on the page represent actual people, ideas, or objects. Because we bundle tally marks in groups of five, it's important that kids know how to count by fives if they're actually learning to use tally marks.

Resources:

### **-Graphs**

- Play to Learn Preschool discusses [Bar Graphs](#)
- Food Graph Templates
  - Ducks N a Row [M&Ms](#)
  - The Measured Mom [Nuts](#)
  - Keeping Life Creative [Goldfish Crackers](#)
- I Can Teach My Child [Transportation Graphing](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers [Bar Graph Transportation Worksheet](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers [Bar Graph Pets Worksheet](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers [Bar Graph Unifix Cubes Worksheet](#)

### **-Tally Marks**

- Worksheet Fun [Printables](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers [Truck Tally Marks and Bar Graphing Printable](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers [Winter Themed Printable](#)
- Teachers Pay Teachers [Tally Worksheet](#)
- Book Read Aloud: [Tally O'Malley](#) by Stuart J. Murphy

### **-Grid Games**

Keeping in mind that there is a lot of overlap between math skills and cognitive skills, I finally decided to put grid games in the "thinking visually" section. Like patterns, grids can help us organize data and help us understand the relationships between objects. Using math grids, we can work on counting and one-to-one correspondence. Other versions, like Play to Learn Preschool's color/picture grids, can help us focus on logic and problem-solving. Give them a try!

Resources:

- Play to Learn Preschool [Grid Games](#)
- Pre-Kinders [Math Grids](#)
- Pre-Kinders [More Math Grids](#)
- The Measured Mom [Math Grid Games](#)

## **General Math Resources**

- [Khan Academy Kids](#) app - great app, fun games, easy to change levels, free
- [ABCmouse.com](#) - Individualized, differentiated activities. No printing necessary!
- [The Measured Mom](#) - tons of free games and ideas

-[ST Math](#) - you have to have a Flash player, but I love the logic and problem-solving component of ST Math. Really builds number sense.

## STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)

Kids are scientists by nature. They are curious. They aren't afraid of failure. They like to learn about the world around them. I have specific areas in my classroom that are devoted to science and STEM (like the discovery center and the construction zone). In my home, our science teaching mostly involves thinking like a scientist. In order to do that, we talk through the steps of the [scientific method \(kid friendly\)](#).

### -Scientific Method For Kids

- Ask a **question**
- What **background information** does your kid have? (help make connections)
- Make a prediction that answers the questions (this is called a **hypothesis**)
- Test it (**experiment**)
- Make close **observations**
- Draw a **conclusion** - what did you find out?
- What did you **learn**?
- What do you want to find out next?

Toddler Example: (Can also summarize by sticking with "what do you see/think/wonder?", which helps [make thinking visible](#) for kids")

- What's going to happen when we put the tenth block on the tower?
- Last time we did this, the blocks fell down
- Do you think the blocks will fall down again?
- Let's try it
- It's wobbling, but I think it might stay. I wonder if that's because we have such a sturdy base at the bottom this time.
- Sometimes we can make a tower with ten blocks.
- Do you think we can add one more block? Two? Three?

Preschool Example:

- Why do you think some things float and some things sink?
- What types of things float in the bathtub? What are those toys made from?
- Here's a small collection of household supplies. What do you think will float and what will sink?
- Test (have preschooler sort or draw results)
- Make observations as you continue the experiment
- What do the things that float have in common? What about the things that sink? What is different about them?
- What did we find out?
- What other things do you want to test in the water?

## **-Close Observational Drawings**

I like to have students make close observational drawings about things they see in nature. In the classroom, we use science tools such as magnifying glasses, but kids like to put on imaginary “science eyes” too. This can be especially fun for kids when they are looking at something change over time, such as growing seeds. We often return to our journals and draw every two or three days to record plant growth. Leaves, pinecones, and interesting sticks or rocks also make great case studies for observational drawings.

## **-Science Tools**

You probably have a lot more of these items at home than you think, and introducing them as “science tools” can help encourage your child to think like a scientist.

- Science eyes or magnifying glasses
- Measuring tapes or rulers
- Scales - [balance](#) or digital
- Pipettes or eye droppers
- Clear containers
- Thermometer
- Measuring cups
- Tongs
- Funnels
- Safety goggles
- Binoculars
- Sorting trays
- Journal and pencil

## **-Favorite STEM topics**

- growing seeds
- sink/float
- [oobleck](#)
- building (with wooden blocks, Magna-Tiles, Blockaroos, legos, etc.)
  - how tall can you make it?
  - how long can you make it?
  - can you build a rooftop?
  - how large would you need to build in order to enclose \_\_\_\_\_?
  - bridges
- magnets
- ramps and balls/cars
- baking
- mixing colors (liquid water colors and eye droppers/pipettes)

## **-Book Resources**

- Young Scientist Book Series:
  - [Building Structures with Young Children](#)
  - [Exploring Water with Young Children](#)
  - [Discovering Nature with Young Children](#)
- Andrea Beaty and David Roberts' Questioners Books
  - [Ada Twist, Scientist](#)
  - [Rosie Revere, Engineer](#)
  - [Iggy Peck, Architect](#)
  - [Sofia Valdez, Future Prez](#)
- [A Pedagogy of Ecology](#) - beautifully written article on the importance of nature in young childhood. The "learn the names" section inspired my nature-themed scavenger hunts

## **-Website Resources**

- Pocket of Preschool [Science Center Ideas](#)
- [Fun Learning for Kids](#) - science ideas
- [Hands on as We Grow](#) experiments
- [The Stem Laboratory](#) experiments
- Pocket of Preschool [Being a Scientist](#) pack \$5

## **-Nature Scavenger Hunts**

- Created by yours truly!
  - [Flowers](#)
  - [Birds](#)

## **-Favorite STEM Toys**

- Nature (rocks, sticks, acorns, etc.)
- [Blockaroos](#) (magnetic building toy that can also be used in water. Henry loves playing with these in the bath!)
- [Marble Run](#) - careful supervision with marbles, if your kid has a tendency to put things in his or her mouth
- Balls of any kind - the ultimate cause/effect toy

## **Cognitive**

Cognitive skills as a category can be difficult to separate out from academic areas, mostly because your brain is essential no matter what you're doing. In this section I'm going to focus on building memory and recalling abilities, problem-solving skills, and persistence. Some of these ideas live in other sections, but I'm highlighting my favorite activities and games here.

## **-Memory and Recall**

Building memory and the ability to recall information starts with asking your child to really think and stretch themselves.

### **-Ask Questions**

There are so many questions just waiting to be asked: who, what, where, when, why??? By asking questions aloud, you also model for your child how to do the same thing.

I often start by asking questions about schedule and routine: What happened earlier? What's going to happen soon? I make sure to ask questions while reading books: What happened a few pages ago? What's going to happen at the end? Special moments are great to relive with your child: What special person did you see? Where did you go? This is also easy to scaffold. Maybe they don't remember who they ran into on the way home from their walk, but once you remind them and ask "and what were they carrying?" you might prompt them to remember more details.

Questioning your kid doesn't have to be an interrogation. You can ask open-ended questions too, questions that prompt them to share their own opinions and views. What did you like best about today? What was a time today that you felt frustrated? What strategies did you use? What do you think you could try next time? What's one way you were a good friend today?

### **-Play Memory Games**

-The classic game of memory involves using sets of cards with matching pictures. You mix up the cards, lay them face down, and take turns flipping over two pictures. If your pictures match, you get to keep the pair. Whoever has the most number of pairs at the end, wins. I personalize my memory games based on student interest, what we're studying, or vocabulary I want my kid to know. To make it easier, only use a few card pairs. To make it more challenging, add more.

-Play to Learn Preschool has an entire post on [Memory Games Post](#). Ms. Jamie focuses on memory trays, sets of five, and grid games. I have never used memory trays in my classroom before, but I'm definitely going to do so now! For small sets, I recommend starting with things that go together that they know well (e.g., the characters and one of the main objects in a fairy tale: Big Billy Goat Gruff, Middle Billy Goat Gruff, Little Billy Goat Gruff, Troll, bridge). You can make it more challenging by adding more pictures connected to the story (field of grass, empty field, river, horns). Or you could add several things in a much broader category (e.g., dolls dressed at various community helpers).

### **-Model Memory Strategies**

What do I mean by memory strategies? The stuff we do everyday to make things easier to remember. For example, I might say "oh, you really want some strawberries? But we don't have any. We can write it on the grocery list so we remember tomorrow when we go to the grocery store! That's a useful strategy. Writing things down helps us remember." This can sometimes help eliminate the temper tantrum that was about to take place.

Another strategy is to use a physical chart to help us in some way. A letter sound chart could help us while we're writing. A number chart can help us figure out what number comes next when we're counting. It's definitely ok to use these visual aids, and in fact, it's a great way to model for kids how they can independently figure stuff out. This is also true for visuals related to routine (schedules) or social problem solving (calm down techniques, fair-share ideas with siblings).

Songs are another useful way to help prompt children. They're going to need a lot of modeling to pick up on these techniques, but it's exciting to see it actually click. A good example of this is singing the alphabet song to help a kid figure out what letter comes next in an alphabet train puzzle. "Which letter comes next? Let's sing the alphabet song to figure it out. A, B, C, D...E! We need to find letter E. Where is it?"

## **-Problem-Solving Skills**

Problem-solving doesn't necessarily mean solving puzzles, but that's an easy way to provide your child with a challenge without having to wait for one to emerge naturally. You build this skill by working through problems together and reflecting on them afterwards, so it's important to approach them regularly. At an advanced stage, problem-solving involves the ability to look at something from multiple perspectives, with creativity.

Problem-solving also provides the opportunity for you to help your child build positive self-talk, by saying aloud the stuff you want your kid to think to herself: "that's ok, I can fix it." "Maybe I should take a break and try again in a little bit." "This is really tricky, but if I keep trying, I know I'll figure it out eventually."

Modeling solutions to common problems that your kid can take care of on his own is also really helpful. For example, Henry knows exactly where the washcloths are kept, and any time someone spills water, he runs into the bathroom to get one.

Typical Problem-Solving Progression:

- expresses strong feelings when a problem occurs
- solves simple problems by watching how others solve it
- asks for help when needed
- solves problems without having to try every solution
- utilizes a visual aid or strategy to
- thinks problems through, considers and analyzes possibilities

Puzzle Progression:

- large knob
- small knob
- matching shadow templates
- 6-8 interlocking pieces
- 8-12 interlocking pieces
- matching pattern block templates
- long jigsaw puzzles (trains)
- floor puzzles
- matching tangram templates

- create an image using pattern blocks, tangrams, or other manipulatives with a visual aid but without matching items onto a template
- pattern blocks - figure out how to reflect puzzle over a line
- pattern blocks and tangrams - fit the puzzle pieces into an empty silhouette

#### Resources:

- Empowered Parents Problem Solving [article](#)
- [Usborne Young Puzzle Adventures](#) - for 5 and up, puzzles are built within the book
- [What Do You Do With a Problem?](#) By Kobi Yamada
- [The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear](#) by Don and Audrey Wood

## -Persistence

I believe it's important for all kids to learn character traits like persistence, self-control, and curiosity. At the same time, I want to be clear that I don't think character trait teaching can overcome the racism, sexism, ableism, etc. that form our society. It's equally important to teach critical thinking, civic engagement and the power of grassroots organizing.

Persistence ties in naturally with problem-solving and puzzles. For preschoolers, this means there is a concrete challenge ahead of them, and usually only one or two correct solutions. They can keep working or they can give up.

Why are some kids persistent and others give up easily? In my years as an educator, I've seen plenty of different reasons. There are kids who simply want to play -- they aren't interested in a grown-up created challenge, but will stay focused on a challenge that is important to them. Some kids find a lot of things come easily to them, and when they are faced with a real challenge, they are afraid of failure. Some kids expect some kind of punishment if they do the wrong thing. Other kids aren't interested in stuff or products as much as they care about people and social relationships -- they're only invested in the problem if the people they care about are equally invested.

I guess what I'm trying to get at here is that there are lots of reasons why your kid might not be persistent. And there are a few things you can do to encourage this trait:

### **-model the behavior and provide positive self-talk**

This means that when you make a mistake or run into a problem, you verbalize it for your kid and then address it. "Oh no, I dropped the cereal all over the floor! That's ok, I can pick it up. Sometimes that happens. All clean now."

### **-talk aloud before/during/after problems**

"I'm going to try something new. I've never done it before. I'm going to try to paint a picture of an owl. I wonder what I should do before I get started? I could do some research to learn more about owls. I can put a dropcloth down before I get started so I don't spill. I can wear a smock. I can push up my sleeves. I can try drawing my picture with a pencil first. Ok, I think I'm ready. Let's do it. Oh no, this paint was too drippy! It is on my shoe. That's ok, I can clean it up quickly and get back to work. I'll wipe the brush on the side of the cup so I don't have so much paint on it next time. This is fun. Oops, got a little on my hands. That's not a problem, I'll just wash my hands when I'm done painting." And then after you're done cleaning up... "I wonder what I could do next time to

make that even better? Well, I had an idea for my painting but I didn't love how it turned out. Maybe next time I'll draw a picture with markers first so I will know if I want to use those colors or try something else. And now I know that this paint is drippy so I should be careful about that too."

-help your child think through problems when they are calm (if they're still upset, they aren't going to be able to participate or be receptive to problem-solving)

"You were so upset during your playdate with Abby. You both wanted to have the doll. I wonder what we could do next time? We could think about all the toys we have and decide which ones we want to share and what to put away in the closet before she comes over, if we aren't ready to share something. We can read and talk about sharing before she comes over. We can take turns with toys instead of fighting over them. We could use a timer so we both have the same amount of time with the toy." If the problem comes up a lot, I recommend that you draw the solutions you come up with together so they have a visual to reference before/during/after the problem comes up again

-read lots of books dealing with persistence!

Books Books Books:

### **Feelings about Problems:**

Sometimes kids just need their feelings validated before they can try again. There is a range of feelings someone might have when faced with a tough situation, and these books can help

-[The Rabbit Listened](#) by Cori Doerrfeld

-[What Do You Do With a Problem?](#) By Kobi Yamada

### **Persistence and Doing Stuff that Scares You:**

-[After the Fall: How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again](#) by Don Santat

-[Whistle for Willie](#) by Ezra Jack Keats

-[The Most Magnificent Thing](#) by Ashley Spires

-[The Thing That Lou Couldn't Do](#) by Ashley Spires

-[Jabari Jumps](#) by Gaia Cornwall

-[JoJo's Flying Side Kick](#) by Brian Pinkney

-[Rosie Revere, Engineer](#) by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts

-[Ada Twist, Scientist](#) by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts

## **Scaffolding Learning**

This is a really important education concept, and if used correctly, it will help your child become more independent while you scale back your time and attention. A scaffold is a support. In education, that refers to the support the teacher is giving the student. When students are just learning a new concept, they need a lot of support, through modeling, repetition, and practice. As students become more and more independent, you back off the support you're giving them.

It's important to remember that kids can do a lot more than you think they can. They're especially good at playing their parents, and acting like they can't do something. As an adult, you have to decide the expectations for your child, convey it clearly, and then help your child get there.

Think about what skills or activities you want your child to be able to do. What supports do you need to give them? How will you scaffold it?

**Toddler example:** putting laundry in the hamper

- put the laundry in the hamper for the child while describing what you're doing

- your child puts some laundry in the hamper while you do the rest

- you ask your child to put the laundry in the hamper, then walk away, showing your belief that your child will take care of it

- your child takes care of putting their own laundry in the hamper with few reminders

**Preschool example:** writing name

- you write your child's name while naming each letter and explicitly saying "this is your name"

- you help your child find the letters in their name all over the place: in books, street signs, etc. Start with the first letter, then add the rest

- you have your child build his or her name with alphabet blocks or other manipulatives

- your child practices writing the first letter (uppercase) using hand-over-hand practice

- your child can trace his or her first letter

- your child can write his or her first letter after watching you model it

- your child can write his or her first letter as you verbally remind them how to do it

- your child can write his or her first letter independently

- then you work on the rest of the name, in uppercase form, following those same steps

- after uppercase, you work on lowercase letter formation

## Tips for Supporting Kids with Special Needs

- Utilize your school resources (specialists, counselors, teachers, etc.). Ask them for help. Really. They have plenty of resources to share with you.

- Noodle Nook [tips](#)

- Book rec: [Raising a Sensory Smart Child](#) - has fantastic information and worth reading whether or not you have concerns about your child

## Behavior

First, let me assure you that even though I'm going to talk about behavior and kids, my kid isn't perfect and neither am I. In fact, my kid has the same superpower I bet your kid has: the ability to push my buttons. While my "teacher voice" works on my students, it has never worked on Henry. And yes, I have resorted on occasion to asking him what *his* teachers would say about his behavior.

Key points:

- your kid is going to be a **terrible coworker**

- your kid will **drive you bananas** (this might be the same point as above)

- if you **plan for this behavior** ahead of time, you'll probably manage things better

- use visuals** (see the section on schedules)

-**provide forced choices** (make sure you're happy with either choice; limit the choices to two; often the choice can just be "do you want to do \_\_\_\_\_ by yourself, or do you want my help?")

-**if the kid doesn't choose anything**, say "if you don't make a choice, you're choosing to \_\_\_\_\_" or "when I count to three, I'm going to choose for you..."

-**use proximity** (this means being on their level or even lower, if you can manage it)

-**teamwork is your friend** (c'mon, you don't really need your kid to pick up every single toy, it would just be nice if he were cleaning up alongside you)

-**use logical consequences** ("no dessert for dinner if you throw a block at me" makes no sense. "If you can't be safe with your blocks, we will have to put them away for the rest of the day" is crystal clear.)

-**be consistent** (If the rule is if you misuse toys, they go away for the rest of the day, then be sure to stick with it, no matter how they mess up)

-**label those feelings** ("I think you're feeling angry right now. You're throwing your toy and your lip is pointing out and you're waving your hand like you want to hit something. It's ok to be angry. We don't hit, we use our words to say 'I'm angry. You wanted that toy right now!'" It feels good to be seen. Your kid will appreciate this.)

-**focus on the positive** ("No hitting" emphasizes hitting. Describe for the kid what you expect or want to see. Be specific.)

-**distract when possible** (not every moment has to be a teachable one. If your kid is melting down because they want more food, get them out of sight of the food and involved in something else)

-**address basic needs first** (if your kid is hungry, tired, or emotionally distressed, they aren't ready to talk it out. Respect that and deal with the immediate need. You can always address it later: "remember when \_\_\_\_\_ happened? You were feeling \_\_\_\_\_ and you \_\_\_\_\_. Next time, \_\_\_\_\_.")

-**repetitive actions have a reason** behind them. Put on your detective hat. Is your kid wanting to avoid something (like the bath, having to clean up, etc.) or wanting to get something (positive or negative attention, food, a toy, etc.)? Anticipate the need and make a plan ahead of time.

## Parenting and Education Books

I love reading books about parenting and education. I love when they challenge my thinking and when they remind me of things that I've forgotten. Here's a short list of my all time favorites:

-[How to Talk so Little Kids Will Listen](#): A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 2-7

I read this book, or the precursor to this book ([How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk](#)) every single year. They are both easy to read. I guarantee that if you use these suggestions, you will have more positive interactions with your child.

-[NurtureShock](#): New Thinking About Children

Easy and understandable explanations of recent parenting research, including chapters focused on the importance of creating a growth mindset, sleep, talking to kids explicitly about race, sibling rivalry, and pretend play.

-[\*The Importance of Being Little: What Preschoolers Really Need From Grownups\*](#)

Smart, funny, well-written. Discusses everything from environment to standards to importance of free play to adult-child relationships. Describes the history of how we got to current ideas of education, as well as important considerations. Includes first-person stories from her years as a teacher, as well as other perspectives. Useful for educators as well as work-minded parents.

-[\*Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Processing Issues\*](#)

Sensory processing refers to how we use the information provided by all the sensations coming within our body and our external environment. Fantastic handbook, great suggestions, tips, and checklists.

## More Free Resources

-Check out this [great doc](#) compiling free education resources

-[Lunch doodles](#) with Mo Willems! Brought to you by the Kennedy Center

-[Virtual field trips](#) doc

-[Virtual morning meeting](#) - Livestream a complete 30 minute preschool morning circle time, hosted by Jamie White of Play to Learn Preschool on Facebook. She sings, reads, and teaches a lesson. Every weekday at 11am.

-[The Kids Should See This](#) website - curated, kid-friendly videos

-[Oliver Jeffers](#) reads aloud one of his books and talks about it on Instagram (livestream), at 6pm GMT/2pm EST/11am PST

-[Tinker Ball](#) - preschool intro to coding online game, perfect for challenging kids with a problem-solving activity. One of my favorites!

-[30 Day Lego challenges](#)

## Favorite Apps

-[ABCmouse](#)

-Epic!

-Vooks

-Count, Sort, and Match

-Starfall ABCs

-Montessorium - Intro to Letters, Intro to Words, Intro to Math

-ParkMath

-[Shapes Toddler Preschool](#) - handwriting for shapes, letters, and numbers

-Peekaboo Barn (for Toddlers)

-PBS Kids

-[Khan Academy Kids](#)

# TODDLER SECTION

I've had so many requests from people about toddler-specific schedules and activities, so I'm adding in more things here, so you can see what I'm doing at home. I will continue updating it with more. I highly recommend you read the stuff up above for preschoolers, there are still a lot of great ideas and resources that you can use for toddlers.

## **Our Telework Schedule:** (I'm parent 1)

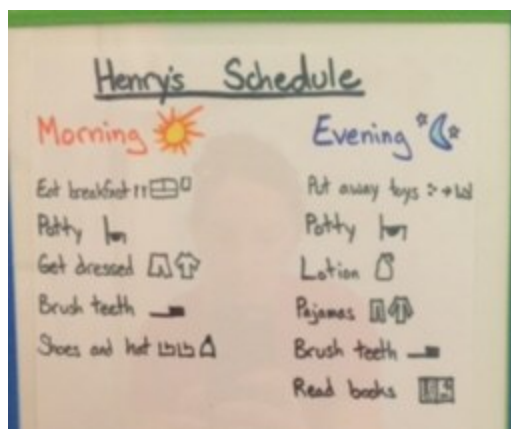
6:00 Wake, quiet playing/reading  
7:00 Breakfast (Parent 1 goes for a run!)  
7:30 Independent Play  
8:30 Focused Activity (Parent 2 starts teleworking, Parent 1 office hours - 8:30-10:30)  
9:30 Snack  
10:00 Walk with Parent 2  
11:00 Focused activity  
11:15 Independent Play  
12:00 Lunch with Parent 1  
12:30 Books (Parent 1 office hours 1-3pm)  
1:00 Nap with Audiobook  
3:00 Snack  
3:15 Focused activity  
4:00 Outdoor time  
5:00 Play to Learn Preschool - virtual [preschool class](#) with Ms. Jamie  
5:30 Independent Play  
6:00 Dinner time  
6:45 Bath  
7:30 Books/bed  
8:00 Asleep (Parent 1 lesson planning 8-10pm)

## **Scheduling a Toddler**

You can do this however it suits you! I find the best way for me is to offer Henry multiple choices where I'm happy no matter what he chooses. For example, when he was learning color names and it was morning focused activity time, I'd ask "do you want to play the muffin matching game or color with markers?" Either way, I was able to practice naming colors with him during this time, which was the skill I wanted to focus on with him. I make sure that over the course of the day, I give Henry opportunities for independent play, working on a pre-academic skill (e.g., colors, visual discrimination, matching or sorting objects), fine motor skills, and contributing to the family in some way. When we were potty training, I would also prompt him hourly to use the potty and read 1-3 books each time. Now that he's fully potty trained, we usually spend an hour reading in the morning and half hour in the afternoon, in addition to pre-nap and bed read alouds. I try to save playing on the Tablet and video activities for when they're absolutely necessary (e.g., parent 1 has a phone call at the same time as parent 2) and otherwise trying to

find other ways to take breaks. However, we plan a half hour of scheduled screen time every day for my sanity (he watches Miss Jamie of Play to Learn Preschool, as she sings songs, plays games, and reads stories).

I also find that Henry doesn't need the full schedule I listed above in visual form. It's helpful for his parents, but too much information for him. What he does like/need is a more simple version for his morning and evenings. We've referred to it enough times now that he can "read" it himself. One night he threw a fit when we said it was bedtime, because he wanted to keep playing with his cars. I told him to take the cars with him and check the schedule. He put his finger on the first line and said "put toys away!" and then put his cars away. Certainly not every tantrum can be diverted so easily, but it's worth trying it out! Another popular trick involves asking if he wants to check the schedule with parent 1 or parent 2.



Another important thing to think about is what to do when your perfect schedule doesn't exactly work out as planned. While we greatly prefer if Henry naps, if it seems like he's not going to, we signal to him that nap is over but it's still rest time (we turn on the light, turn off the nap music, remind him that he can read or play quietly in his room, but make it clear that he is to remain there until we come get him). This tends to lead to a whiny afternoon, which is made tolerable by an hour of collecting rocks, acorns and sticks followed by an hour of bath time before dinner and then a 6:30 bedtime. This plan works most of the time. However, we recently experienced three straight days of no-nap, which led to inconsolable crying and screaming. A bath wasn't going to help. We needed a new plan.

If you've ever had a conversation with your partner in these circumstances, you'll know just how frustrating it can be -- do yourself (and your significant other) a favor and have the discussion ahead of time. Or after the kid falls asleep and you've had a moment to yourself. Your plan should take into account that social distancing is stressful. Toddlers are stressful. Give yourself a break! This is hard work, and it doesn't always happen according to plan. We decided that three no-nap days in a row means one of us takes him for a walk in the stroller. We get fresh air, he falls asleep for half an hour, and we're all able to hold it together until bedtime. I highly recommend that you write out all the steps in your plan. This takes some of the mental load off when emotions are running high. So take a few minutes to make a plan, hope for the best, and if all else fails, remind yourself that there's always tomorrow.

## Independent Play with a Toddler

I talked about this more above, looking at preschoolers. The same is true for toddlers, but even more so-- every kid is different, and each kid is going to need a different level of support. Your kid might do really well if you're working on the floor, but not if you're on the couch or table. Your kid might be able to entertain themselves independently for long stretches, or they might need a lot more help. I recommend starting with focused attention. I like to model a pretend play activity for Henry (e.g., the firefighters are putting out a fire, or the tow truck needs to help a broken-down bus). Once I model that for him, he's usually happy to play that by himself for 10-15 minutes. If it looks like he needs more help, I'll provide another idea, or ask if he wants to clean up and bring out a new toy.

## Toddler Skills

Every toddler is different, but they wouldn't be toddlers if they didn't want to be as independent as possible. You might be familiar with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire -- all students who attend HeadStart schools are required to complete an ASQ, and many pediatricians ask parents to complete them as part of their wellness checks. I'm a data person, so when thinking about Henry's development, I pick one thing from each category to work on at a time: communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem-solving, personal-social.

Please note: when I say "work on," I don't mean drilling the poor kid in each area for hours at a time. It means thinking about our day, his current interests and abilities, and figuring out how I can add these things into what we're already doing. For example, since Henry only sometimes jumps with two feet off the ground, I make it a point to add in a little hopping when we are on a walk, explicitly showing him that I'm jumping with both feet together. He laughs hilariously at me, says "hop hop hop," tries a few times, and we move on.

For communication skills, it's often enough to simply echo back what they're saying properly and expand on it:

Kid: "Me go sleep."

Adult: "You are going to bed now. You are feeling tired. It is bedtime!"

Kid: "Nana pweese."

Adult: "Banana, please. You sure love bananas."

If you have a developmental concern, please talk to your pediatrician. Early intervention is incredibly important!

Henry is working on the following things during the first few months of social distance learning time:

-potty training (We are using the [Oh Crap! Potty Training](#) method. UPDATE: This is amazing. After a few days of naked time at home, we decided to jump in fully and get rid of diapers at nap and at night. This led to a lot more laundry, but after about a week he was only

having one or two misses per day. After about a month, he has 0 or 1 misses per day. Highly recommend this method!)

- pulling pants on and off by himself
- naming colors
- counting five objects accurately
- jumping with both feet in the air at the same time
- naming shapes
- naming letters (this wasn't originally on my list, but Henry is SUPER into it, so we're doing it)
- 6-8 piece connected puzzles
- walking up and down stairs without holding onto the railing

**Toddler Life Skill Suggestions:** (AKA, if your kid can't do all of these yet, pick one to work on. If your toddler can do all of these, send me an e-mail immediately and tell me all your secrets!)

- Drinking from an open cup (pro tip: have washcloths at kid level so your child can independently clean up spills)
- Use fork and spoon while eating
- Putting on a jacket (AKA the [jacket flip](#))
- Pulling up/pushing down pants
- Potty training
- Putting on/off shirt
- Putting on shoes
- Snaps
- Zippers
- Buttons

Resources:

-[ASQs](#) (links to ALL the Ages and Stages questionnaires, which range by date, English and Spanish forms)

**Focused Activities** (see the schedule above):

## Visual Discrimination and Pre-Literacy

Kids need to be able to visually discriminate before they can learn letters and numerals. The easiest way to teach this is by making sure kids can name colors and shapes. If they can't distinguish between black and yellow, or a triangle and a circle, they aren't ready to learn the alphabet. Of course you can and should still expose those kiddos to the alphabet, but you can do that by reading daily and pointing to words and letters as you read.

Resources:

- [Visual Discrimination](#) worksheets from Pre-Kinders
- [Visual Discrimination](#) printable from The Measured Mom
- [Visual Discrimination](#) bundle printables from Just Teachy

# Colors

Colors might be the easiest thing to teach to a typically developing tot, because kids are attracted to color and color is everywhere! To teach Henry colors, I would name the colors he used as he was drawing (“oh I see you drew a squiggly line with the yellow marker. Now you’re using the red marker.”) I would also name colors while playing games and building. This was also a great opportunity to sort and count (“let’s add two more blue blocks, can you find them?”). Throughout the day, I would try and focus on colors in three different books (“this kid is wearing green pants, and you’re wearing green pants too! You match.”) Total time added up to 20 minutes a day on average.

## -Possible Materials

- [The Mini Muffin Match Up Game](#)
- [The Sneaky Snacky Squirrel Game](#)
- duplos
- squigz
- pom poms
- Magna-tiles
- wooden blocks

## -Activities

- sort/count/match
- scavenger hunt (indoors or outdoors)
- flower find - can your child find a flower of every color? Fun for a walk or in the stroller
- relay race - especially great for multiple children

## -Books

- [Mouse Paint](#)
- [Baby Bear Sees Blue](#)
- [Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?](#)
- [One](#) by Kathryn Otoshi

# Shapes

After kids can visually discriminate between colors, I like to teach shapes. This is a natural link towards learning the alphabet, and kids like to spot shapes within letters (an O is a circle, the letter A has a triangle, etc.).

## -Possible Materials

- Magna-tiles
- wooden blocks
- popsicle sticks
- ribbon
- cookie cutters/playdough and dough tools
- stickers

## **-Activities**

- sort/count/match shapes (e.g., Magna-tiles)
- trace large shapes and put in a plastic sleeve for durability
- trace shapes with dry-erase markers
- build shapes with art supplies or toys
- place stickers on shape outlines (but not if you want to reuse it...)
- tape enormous shape outlines on the floor
- balance walk
- drive cars
- bean bag toss
- scavenger hunt (indoors or outdoors)
- relay race - especially great for multiple children
- favorite [simple shapes printable](#) from preschoolmom.com

## **-Books**

- [Friendshape](#)
- [Shape by Shape](#)
- [Shape Spotters](#)
- [The Shape of Things](#)

## **-Songs**

- [The Kiboomers](#) Shapes Song
- [The Singing Walrus](#) Shapes Song
- [Oh My Genius](#) Shapes Song
- Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star (two shapes - star and diamond)

## **Pre-Math Skills**

Math skills for toddlers involve exposure to ideas, repetition and problem-solving. Shape recognition and visual discrimination are part of building math skills, as are counting, pattern awareness, sorting and measuring. To build these skills, I count with Henry as part of our daily life, reference numbers throughout the day, and make comparison observations. For example: "You have one piece of bell pepper left. Would you like one more piece or two more?" "You stacked three blocks. Do you think we can add one more block?" Adding in math to our daily routine means that I don't have to spend a lot of time thinking about it, and I make sure we're working on the concepts.

## **Counting in Daily Life**

- brush teeth (each small section of the mouth is a count of 10 or 15)
- wash hands and count to 20 before eating food and when returning from outside
- while cooking (I often will use a smaller measuring cup so we have a larger number to count)
- when putting toys away ("I'll put these two away, can you find two \_\_\_ as well?")

## Easy Ways to Work on “Pre-Math” Skills

- building with blocks, rocks, and other materials
- measuring
- making comparisons -- talking about what is the same and what is different between two objects
- using basic measuring words - big/small, tall/small, heavy/light
- using spatial awareness words (up, down, behind, between, forward, backward, etc.)
- building patterns with musical instruments, while stringing beads or with blocks
- sorting objects by shape or color (matching socks while putting away laundry is also a great and easy way to practice this)

## Favorite Books to Help Build Number Sense and Numeral Recognition

- [Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons](#) by Eric Litwin
- [1-2-3 Peas](#) by Keith Baker
- [Chugga Chugga Choo Choo](#) by Emma Garcia
- [One Happy Tiger](#) by Catherine Rayner
- [Ten Black Dots](#) by Donald Crews
- [Chicka Chicka 123](#) by Bill Martin, Jr.
- [The Very Hungry Caterpillar](#) by Eric Carle
- [Over in the Meadow](#) by Ezra Jack Keats
- [Doggies](#) by Sandra Boynton
- [Hippos Go Berserk](#) by Sandra Boynton
- [Ten, Nine, Eight](#) by Molly Bang

## Favorite Songs and Fingerplays to Build Number Sense to Five

- Five Little Monkeys
  - [Teasing Mr. Alligator](#)
  - [Jumping on the Bed](#)
- [Five Little Ducks](#)
- [Five Little Muffins](#) - I sub student's names for this song
- [Five Elephants in the Bathtub](#)

## Fine Motor

- playdoh – with or without tools
- mini muffin game tweezers
- practicing zippers, buttons, and snaps
- large beads
- blowing bubbles

## Household Contributions

- putting away clean laundry (sorting, matching socks)
- baking/cooking
- putting dirty clothes in the hamper
- watering the plants

Resources:

- Things we like to bake together
  - [No Knead Bread](#)
  - [Scones](#)

## Stuff for Grownups To Do

Many of you will have more than enough to do just getting your hours in for work. Staring at a toddler who repeatedly says: “hello, goodbye” while he plays with two pretend phones can be cute\* for about two minutes, but two hours or weeks in and I’m going a little bananas (real life story and was incredibly cute). So if you’re looking for something else to do, here are a few ideas:

- Get [Sew Creative](#) with sewing. Support brick and mortar shops closed to foot traffic by ordering fabric or quilt kits
- Learn something by taking a [free online class](#)
- [Visit a museum](#) (virtually)
- Join an online [book club](#)

## Resource Breakdown (AKA the best of the best... so far!):

- [Guided Access](#): Limit what apps your child can use with Apple products

### Facebook:

- [Play to Learn Preschool](#) - virtual morning meeting -- Spring session (8 weeks) available on facebook; access to summer session costs money
- [Laurie Berkner Band](#), livestream, 10am weekdays

### Instagram:

- [Singing with Ari](#) - livestream, 11am weekdays
- [Oliver Jeffers](#) - livestream, 6pm GMT/2pm EST/11am PST

### Websites:

- [The Measured Mom](#)
- [Go Noodle](#)

- [Play to Learn Preschool](#)
- [Teaching Mama](#)
- [Pocket of Preschool](#)
- [Storyline Online](#)
- [Audible.com](#)
- [The Kids Should See This](#)
- [Tinker Ball](#)
- [Khan Academy](#)
- [ST Math](#)

### **Apps:**

- [Calm](#)
- [Vooks](#)
- [Epic!](#)
- [ABC Mouse](#)
- [Libby](#)
- [Starfall ABCs](#)
- [Count, Sort, and Match](#)
- [Montessorium](#) - Intro to Letters, Intro to Words, Intro to Math
- [ParkMath](#)
- [Shapes Toddler Preschool](#) - handwriting for shapes, letters, and numbers
- [Peekaboo Barn](#) (for Toddlers)
- [PBS Kids](#)
- [Raz Kids](#)
- [Khan Academy Kids](#)

### **Youtube:**

- [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#)
- [Patty Shukla](#)

### **More:**

- [Free education resources](#) google doc
- [Lunch doodles](#) with Mo Willems! Brought to you by the Kennedy Center
- [Virtual field trips](#) doc
- [ASQs](#) (links to ALL the Ages and Stages questionnaires, which range by date, English and Spanish forms)
- [Time for Kids](#) - digital library available for free until the end of the school year
- Scavenger Hunts
- [Primary Preschool](#) has 13 premade scavenger hunts for \$2, but you can always create your own. Or have your kid make up the scavenger hunt independently.
- [Teaching Mama](#) has two free Spring-focused scavenger hunts
- Free [board game template](#) to create your own game