



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you help your children build strong relationships with each other?

Ages & Stages

PRESCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

Having siblings can be wonderful for young children. Siblings can be live-in playmates, friends, teachers, students, and comforters for preschoolers. Siblings also help children learn to share, be patient, solve problems, take turns, and be kind. When children are encouraged to have good relationships with their siblings while they are young, the strong bond that develops often continues when they are adults. This is important, because sibling relationships usually last longer than any other relationships in children’s lives.

To help your children build good and long-lasting relationships with each other, try some of the following ideas:

- Catch your children being kind to each other and praise them for it. Praise the child who was being kind – and the child who received the kindness, if she tells you about it. This not only rewards kindness, but also encourages your children to talk about the nice things others do for them.
- Plan time as a family to do something fun together. Color pictures, sing silly songs, make dinner together, or just sit and talk. Help your children see that they can have fun together.
- Teach your children how to get along by being patient, supportive, understanding, and respectful. They will learn a lot by watching you.
- Avoid comparing your children. Each child is unique, with unique strengths and weaknesses.
- Encourage your children to do things together. Rather than giving them separate chores, ask them to pick up the toys, sort the socks, or clear the table together.
- Give them opportunities to help one another. Try having one child fetch an ice pack when the other is hurt or get down a book that is out of the other’s reach.
- Talk to each of your children about what makes them special in their own way. The more secure they feel with your love and attention the less they will feel they have to compete for it.
- Stop worrying about being fair all the time. Each child is unique and you have to make decisions based on each child’s needs at a given time.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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