



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you help your child make friends?

Ages & Stages

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

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

Minding Our Language

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

Preschoolers often start picking a few special friends they like to play with more than others. Usually they choose friends who are like them and who like to play the same games or with the same toys they do.

Some children seem to have many friends, while others may have just a few. Children only need a couple of friends to practice the social skills they need to develop, but many parents worry that their preschoolers don't have enough friends. As long as preschoolers have one or two friends and enjoy playing with other children some of the time, they are doing fine.

Try some of the following ways to help your child build friendships:

- Let them pick their friends. Just as adults do, children will like some people more than others.
- Introduce your child to other children if you notice they do not have one or two children they like to play with.
- Let your child have alone time and friend time. It is normal for preschoolers to like spending time alone, too.
- Help them be the kind of friend that others want to have. Teach them to be kind, thoughtful, caring and fun!
- Take your child to places where they can be around children their age like a preschool, playgroup, or playground.
- Anticipate that your child's friends will change as their interests change.

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/38XW4KI>) – 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.

Parenting the Preschooler: Social Competence and Emotional Well-Being © 2021 Michigan State University Board of Trustees. The fact sheets in this series may be copied for purposes of 4-H and other nonprofit educational programs and for individual use with credit to Michigan State University Extension.