

## Parenting Skills for the Busy Parent of Preschoolers

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**W**hen you have to also get yourself ready for work in the morning, it may make being the parent of preschool-aged children seem harder than ever.

Working and raising young children is truly like having two full-time jobs! Sometimes there are feelings of being over-whelmed with job-related concerns. These concerns may cross over into how you get along with your child and his/her needs

Remember young children are most comfortable with a predictable routine. They may also have a hard time getting used to new child care settings and to being away from you for a long part of the day.



Photo by Luis C. Tejo

After a busy day, you may feel much more tired and have less time and energy to spend with your children.

There are many things you can do to make the transition into your new job easier for you and your children:

### Managing the morning (or "before work") routine

- Get ready for the morning the night before! Decide with your children what they are going to wear the next day, and lay those clothes out. If they have backpacks or lunch to be packed, prepare them the night before also.
- Have a morning routine. Try to have your children do the same things in the same order every day. For example: Get dressed, eat breakfast, brush teeth. This will help children know what to expect, so they can be confident and move more quickly.
- Make a game out of getting ready in the morning. Put on some music or clap your hands with each successful completion of a task (like dressing, brushing teeth).
- Give children a fun activity that they can do if they finish getting ready before they have to leave the house (coloring, reading, watching a special video).

### Coming home from work

- Even when you are exhausted and have had a bad day at work, try to spend at least 10 minutes with your children right after you get home. Your kids have been



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looking forward to seeing you, and they need your full attention for a few minutes just to make them feel more secure and loved. This will help keep them from getting upset later in the evening when you need to pay attention to other things, like cooking dinner or doing housework.

- Spend those first 10 minutes with your children on an activity that they choose, like reading, coloring, playing a game, or telling you about their day. Get down on the floor with them, and give them all of your attention. Kids won't be as satisfied if you are distracted or focused on something else.

- After you have spent a little time with them, help get them start activities that they can do themselves or with siblings. They
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may be able to just continue what they were doing with you. This will give you some time to yourself to rest or start household tasks.

- Let your children help you prepare dinner or do other chores, like cleaning up the kitchen or putting away dishes. This may take some time and patience from you, but it's worth it: your kids will have fun, feel good about themselves, and even learn skills that will help them be responsible and do well in school when they are older!

- Try to have an evening routine just like in the morning.

### Going shopping and doing errands.

- Bring a small activity bag with several of your children's small toys, books, or bite-sized snacks. Small children will be less likely to grab things if they already have something interesting in their hands. This will also help keep them from getting bored and cranky.

- Before you leave to go shopping, talk to your children about how you expect them to behave and what you need to do at the store.

- If you will be doing errands for a long time, add an extra stop that your kids would enjoy, such as going to the park or getting ice cream. Tell your kids before the trip that you will be doing this one fun errand. That way, your children will have something to look forward to and will be more pleasant and cooperative during your other errands.



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### Avoiding problems with your children.

- Set clear limits for your children, make sure they know exactly what you expect from them. Kids need guidance from you to help them learn what is good behavior. When they know what you expect, they will be less likely to misbehave.

- Give attention and praise to good behaviors.

- Listen closely when children tell you their feelings, and make sure your children know you understand and accept what they are feeling.

- Give children choices. They will learn better how to make decisions and control themselves if they are able to make choices about what they want.

- When children start misbehaving, give them a choice of two more appropriate behaviors. "We can continue shopping and you sit down in the cart seat, or we will have to leave." But follow through if you say you are going

to leave. Otherwise they will never believe you.

### Dealing with misbehavior.

- Physical punishment (spanking and hitting) has many drawbacks: it can lower children's self-esteem, it can increase their anxiety, and it may cause them to learn to hit others or act with anger. Besides that it makes onlookers uncomfortable if you are in a public place.

- When children misbehave, make it clear what you want them to do. Tell them exactly what a better behavior would be. Sometimes young children really don't know or can't remember how to act in a situation they need someone to tell them.

- After any action to correct children, explain exactly what happened. Tell them you love them, and explain how you can get along in the future.

- When children are being good, notice this and spend time telling them what things they have done instead of focusing on telling them what to do or what not to do.

- Offer alternatives and redirect their attention instead of using threats and bribes.

- Respond to children's body language when they are in a bad mood. Say, "It looks like you had a bad day" rather than criticizing their behavior.

- Listen and respond when the child is frustrated by saying supportive things like, "That is so hard." Then help them find solutions.

- Be sensitive to your children's moods so they learn to be, and act caring.

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<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/human/pubs/fcs4792.pdf>

## A Parents Guide to the Internet:

<http://www.familyguidebook.com/>

