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4-h 325 4-H Child Development : The Preschooler

Connie M. Francis

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4-H CHILD DEVELOPMENT

THE PRESCHOOLER

Connie M. Francis
Extension Family Life Specialist
The Preschooler: 4-H Child Development

Project Planning and Evaluation Sheet

Name_____________________________ Age (Jan.1)_____ Year_______

Years in 4-H_____ Name of Club_____________________________________

Signature of Leader or Parent_________________________________________

I plan to do these activities: From this activity I learned: Comments:

1

2

3

4

5

6

Presentations or community service activities:
Welcome to the 4-H Child Development Project. This project is written in four separate parts:

The Infant (Birth to 18 months)

The Toddler (18 months to 3 years)

The Preschooler (3 to 6 years)

Middle Childhood (6 to 8 years)

You have chosen to study the preschooler. The objectives of this unit are to:

• Develop an understanding of how a preschooler grows physically, mentally, socially and emotionally.

• Learn how to care for a preschooler and promote feelings of security and safety.

• Choose types of play a preschooler enjoys.

The amount of responsibility you have for caring for a child in this project depends on your age. Your age also will determine how you will study the preschooler you are watching. The next page has some ideas about what you may do in this project.
9-11 years old
Because you are very young, we suggest you do not take a babysitting job to complete this project. You may choose to observe and help with your preschool brother or sister, or another preschooler you know. You will feel more at ease having an adult present while learning about the preschooler.

In this project you may choose some of these activities:

• Select a story a preschooler will enjoy. Make something to help tell the story. It might be a puppet, picture book, flannelboard, etc. Following the story, plan a simple art project that relates to the story you told.
• With a parent’s permission, take a preschooler on a nature walk, discussing things you see.
• Teach a preschooler a simple game, fingerplay or song.
• Prepare a snack with a preschooler and observe eating habits.
• Help a preschooler get ready for bed by planning a restful activity before the child goes to sleep.

In a notebook or journal, write down what you learn about preschoolers as you observe and do the activities in the project.

12-14 years old
If you and your parents feel you are capable of taking care of a preschooler by yourself, you may babysit as you complete this project.

You may select activities from the suggestions for 9- to 11-year-olds and 12- to 14-year-olds. Additional ideas include:

• Prepare a preschooler’s meal, including a new food the preschooler has not tasted before. Observe the child’s reaction to the new food.
• Compare three to five preschoolers you know. Make a chart showing how they differ physically.
• Look into possible jobs in the child care area. Interview a child care provider, preschool teacher, pediatrician, or other professional who works with children to learn more about the job they do.

Keep a journal of things you learn about preschoolers as you complete this project.

15-19 years old
You may select activities from the suggestions for 9- to 11-year-olds and 12- to 14-year-olds. Additional ideas include:

• Make a simple toy or piece of furniture for a preschooler.

Keep a notebook or journal in which you write down what you learn about preschoolers as you do the activities you have selected and as you observe preschoolers.
In a world full of adventure and imagination, a preschooler is busy from dawn to dusk. A preschooler is a bundle of energy, always wanting and finding something to do — whether it's a simple household task or a game around the house or outdoors.

A preschooler may like to play with other children. Playing with others helps the child learn cooperation and sharing. It's fun and educational to try out adult roles such as father, mother, fireman or carpenter.

Preschoolers want to make decisions, and may resent interference in their play and with their possessions.

To help you understand how a preschooler develops mentally, physically, socially and emotionally, observe one or more preschoolers. Observe the same child two or three times during your project to see how the child changes over time. By observing more than one child of similar ages, you can see how individual children develop at different rates.

Record what you see on forms like the Observation Form on the following page. You may copy this form and keep it in your journal.
PRESCHOOLER OBSERVATION FORM

Name of Child Observed ___________________________ Date ___________

Age _______ Boy _______ Girl _______ Weight _______ pounds; Height _______ inches

(Write YES or NO in each blank.)

Physical Development
___ runs
___ jumps
___ skips
___ stands on tiptoes
___ rides a tricycle
___ kicks a ball
___ goes up stairs (tell how _____________________)
___ plays simple games
___ sleeps well (how long? _______)
___ has clear, bright eyes
___ uses hands skillfully
___ eats well with tableware
___ has teeth (how many? _______)

Social Development
___ friendly to you
___ friendly to strangers
___ plays with other children
___ can take turns
___ is a leader
___ can share with others
___ likes other children
___ likes pets
___ plays well alone
___ is a follower

Mental Development
___ notices people
___ speaks clearly
___ uses sentences
___ likes books
___ asks questions
___ can learn games
___ can share with others
___ imitates grown-up life in play
___ likes to explore, experiment
___ has short attention span (less than 5 minutes)
___ has long attention span (10 minutes or longer)

Emotional Development
___ overall a happy child
___ afraid of new experiences
___ afraid of the dark
___ afraid of dogs
___ afraid of strangers
___ cries when parents leave
___ shows love to pets, dolls, stuffed toys
___ shows signs of jealousy
___ gets angry quickly
___ has temper tantrums
___ can wait for attention
___ shows pleasure with attention
___ craves attention
___ seems secure
___ resists authority

If you have additional comments about any of the observations above, record them in your journal.
TALKING TO PRESCHOOLERS

The way you say and do things tells a child how you feel. A child will react to your feelings more than to your words. Your voice and actions should tell the child you are a friend.

A first impression is very important to a preschooler. Give the child time to look you over. A child's curiosity plus your smile usually will lead to a friendship.

Preschoolers will be guided by your words, so choose them carefully. Use the word "do" rather than "don't." "Don't" tells the child only what cannot be done. A preschooler needs to be told what can be done and where it can be done.

Instead of saying "Don't run in the house," say "If you want to run, you can go outside and run around the house." The child's urge to run is still satisfied.

Whenever possible, give a child encouragement and approval. Say, "Sue finished the puzzle," or "Billy tied his shoes like an expert."

Give a preschooler a choice only when it is easy to make a decision. A choice between two or three things is best for this age.

Never offer a choice when something has to be done. Say "It's time to rest," rather than "Do you want to rest now?"

Chances are the answer to that question will be "no."

Avoid bribing or forcing a child to do anything. "Eat your vegetables or you won't get any ice cream" does not encourage a child to eat and like vegetables.
I AM A PRESCHOOLER

Being a preschooler is an adventuresome time for me. This is how I grow:*

When I am 3 years old, I like to:
- walk upstairs using alternate feet
- ride a tricycle with pedals
- imitate drawings made by other people
- speak three- to five-word sentences
- undress myself and wash myself
- do some things without my parents' help
- be aggressive with other children
- color with crayons
- put on my own shoes
- say a few rhymes

When I am 4 years old, I like to:
- play "pretend" with my toys and use my imagination
- skip on one foot
- brag a lot and talk a lot
- be friends with other children
- spread butter and jam on my bread
- wash and dry my face and hands without help
- count a few objects
- visit the neighbors
- play well with other children
- make my parents and other adults happy

When I am five years old, I like to:
- count a few more objects
- imitate simple drawings
- put my toys away
- print my own name
- cut things out with my scissors
- play games with a group of boys and girls
- balance on the sidewalk curb
- skip, using feet alternately
- name a penny, nickel and dime

*Each child is unique and will proceed through these stages at his or her own rate. The ages given here are approximate ages for each skill.
Feeding the Preschooler

Happy mealtimes help children develop good eating habits. With cheerful people around them and attractive, tasty meals, life may seem quite secure at mealtimes.

A preschooler’s appetite may change from meal to meal. A child is likely to be a fussy eater when overly tired, excited, in a strange place, or if a routine has been upset. If there has been active play, it is a good idea to have a quiet time before coming to the table. Reading a book or looking at a magazine may help the child relax. It also may be quieting to lay on the floor and look out the window at trees or the sky.

Don’t force a preschooler to eat food he or she does not want or like. Offer only one new food at a time and give only a very small helping.

Let the child judge when he or she is done eating. Allow enough time to eat what is wanted (30 minutes is enough) and then remove the food from the table. By this time a child has decided to eat or not to eat.

If a child gets hungry between meals, provide nutritious snacks, but be sure snacks do not interfere with mealtimes.

The preschooler’s daily nutritional needs include:

1. Milk and Cheese group — two to three cups of milk (other dairy products may replace some of the milk).

2. Meat, Fish, Poultry and Beans Group — two to three small servings. A serving for a preschooler equals 1 ounce of meat, poultry or fish, 1 egg, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, or 1/3 cup cooked dry beans, peas, or other legumes.

3. Fruit and Vegetable Group — four or more servings are recommended (one serving of citrus fruits, one of dark green or deep yellow vegetables, plus two other vegetable and fruit servings.) A serving for preschoolers equals 1/2 cup juice, 1/3 cup fruit or vegetable, 1/2 piece of medium fruit or one whole small fruit.

4. Cereal and Bread Group — four or more servings are recommended. A serving for a preschooler equals 1/2 slice of bread, 1/4 to 1/3 cup cooked or dry cereal, or 1/4 to 1/3 cup cooked rice or pasta.

Here are some general rules to help a child enjoy good food:

• Serve the food in an attractive, eye-catching manner but do not “doctor up” the food so the child doesn’t recognize its original taste.

• Give small helpings. Children can ask for seconds if they want.

• Allow the child to use his or her fingers but encourage the use of a spoon. You may begin talking about table manners.

• Maintain a calm, cheerful atmosphere. Avoid mealtime arguments and scoldings.

• Leave the radio, television and stereo off during mealtimes.

Clothing the Preschooler

At ages 4 and 5, a preschooler can dress and undress with little assistance, especially if clothes are loose-fitting and have only a few simple closures. You still may need to help tie shoes and button difficult openings. Besides learning how to dress, a preschool child also needs to learn — how to hang up clothes, — how to keep clothes fairly clean, and — how to keep clothes on.

Teach the child to choose the right
clothes for an activity by telling how
certain clothing is used. Say “mittens
for cold,” or “bare hands for summer.”
This helps a child relate clothes to the
situation. Too often children catch
colds or chill their bare hands because
they have not been taught to dress
properly for outdoors.
Because a preschooler is very active,
clothes need to be loose and comfort­
able, and not hinder movements.
Clothes that hang from the shoulders
rather than being fitted at the waist
are good for the active child.
Clothes that can be put on and taken
off easily and are easily managed at
the toilet give the child a chance to be
self-sufficient. This builds self-confi­
dence and independence, and improves
muscle coordination.
Self-help clothes
—have simple openings: elastic
waistbands, large buttons or zipper
pulls, gripper strip fasteners,
—are well-marked so the child knows
the difference between front and back,
—have elastic at fitted areas, and
—are simple in design.

Preschoolers’ clothing is purchased by
size and not by age of the child. Here
are the standard measurements most
manufacturers use for preschoolers’
clothing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>HEIGHT</th>
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**Preschooler’s Bedtime**

A preschooler’s bedtime should be a
happy time. This makes the difference
between a child who goes to bed will­
ingly and the child who delays and
argues.

To eliminate last minute stalling,
remind the child about one-half hour in
advance that it soon will be bedtime.
Try not to rush the process of going to
bed, unless the child is definitely stall­
ing.
The smaller preschooler loves to be
carried affectionately to bed in your
arms. The older preschooler can be led
by the hand while you chat about
things that will happen tomorrow.

If time allows, tell or read a story to
the child. The story should have a
happy, peaceful ending that leaves
restful thoughts in the child’s mind.
Some children enjoy having a small
stuffed animal or other favorite toy in
bed with them. Usually these toys are
soft and cuddly. A child may have a
special blanket to sleep with. Check
with the parents about toys and blan­
kets the child will want at bedtime.
Without these things, the child may
fuss and cry.

Older preschoolers probably will have
outgrown the stage of bringing toys to
bed with them.

A preschooler needs an average of 11
to 12 hours of sleep a night. Although
some still nap during the day, most of
them need just a rest period.
LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

A preschooler spends a large part of his or her day playing. Play is one way to learn about oneself and the surrounding world. Through trial and error, the preschooler learns new skills.

Play provides an outlet for excess energy and an opportunity for the child to practice physical skills. It also promotes good appetite and healthful sleep.

There are several types of play:
- Active play includes running, jumping, playing active games or throwing a ball.
- Quiet play may be things like reading a storybook, making something out of clay or doing a fingerplay.

Several types of play are discussed in the following pages. Try some of these activities with a preschooler.

Imaginative Play

At ages 4 and 5, imaginative play almost crowds out the real world. Preschoolers will spend hours and hours acting out adult roles. This is their way of learning what these roles are like. They also are learning to express themselves by acting out their ideas and feelings. At this age, preschoolers are very inventive.

Through play, a child masters many skills. For example, Johnny and Sue are playing carpenter. They are building houses in an imaginary town. Through make-believe, they are learning to hammer nails and to ride the tricycle from one imaginary house to another.

A good toy for a preschooler is one that appeals to the child's imagination; it can be used in many ways and for many things. An old purse, a fireman's hat, a small toy animal, play money and a doll buggy are toys that develop a child's imagination. Dress-up costumes make play seem even more realistic.

At ages 5 and 6, children recognize that this type of play is pretend. Those children who still confuse reality with make-believe must be reminded that they are just pretending.

Nature Hike

A fun way to teach a preschooler about the world is to go on a nature hike. As you walk through the backyard or nearby park, look at the clouds, peek under rocks, and point out bird nests and other interesting things in nature.

Have the child bring along a paper sack for collecting items on the hike. Parents will enjoy seeing what was found and learning about each thing.

If the hike is around midmorning or midafternoon, pack a simple snack to carry along. It may be an apple, or some crackers and cheese. Preschoolers enjoy eating lunch outdoors.

Play "touch and feel" while you are walking on your nature hike. As the child picks things up, ask if they are soft or hard, cool or warm, smooth or rough, light or heavy. Here are some things in nature that the child can touch and tell you about:

- SOFT - grass, feather, fuzzy caterpillar, kitten
- HARD - rock, sidewalk, stick
- LIGHT - leaf, feather
- HEAVY - log, large rock
- COOL - shade, water, ice
- WARM - sun, skin
- ROUGH - rock, bark on tree, pine cone
- SMOOTH - leaf, your skin

See if you can find other things to add to this list.

Take a trip to a zoo, pet show or animal farm where a child can see many different kinds of animals, birds, insects and fish. Watch carefully so the child is not accidentally scratched or bitten.
Telling a Story

Preschoolers will listen to 10 to 20 minute stories about animals and children. They also enjoy comic books and humorous characters. Stories that give human qualities to cars, trains, etc. also are popular with preschoolers.

Select stories that involve the imagination but avoid those that are so "make-believe" they confuse the child. Stories with ghosts and witches may frighten some children.

Realistic stories also are good for a preschooler because they help him or her learn about the world.

Preschoolers enjoy
---stories about themselves and their play activities,
---stories about things that move and make noises (such as choo-choo trains, cows that moo, tugboats that go putt-putt),
---stories that repeat lines over and over again (like "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down"), and
---stories that have large, simple, colorful pictures.

Here are some suggestions for telling stories to a child:

• Be sure the child is seated in a comfortable spot. Sit facing the child so he or she can see your facial expressions as you tell the story.

• Tell the story slowly and allow for questions and comments as you go.

• Try to include only one subject in the story or the child will lose interest.

• As you read or tell the story use a lot of expression in your face and voice. This will entertain and help the child learn to use face and voice in expressing himself or herself.

• Allow the child to leave before the story is finished. Try telling it again later in the day. Some children will want you to tell the whole story again.

There are several things you can use to help tell a story:

• story or picture books
• puppets
• homemade television set
• flannelboard
• some items mentioned in the story

These visuals can make the story more interesting to the child. Try using one as you tell a story.

STORY AND PICTURE BOOKS

Preschoolers enjoy books that are small and easy to handle. Books with only one story are best. The pictures should be large and colorful with not too much detail. Three or four lines of story on each page are about right. Preschoolers enjoy books that let them turn from one page to the next quickly.

Rather than buying a book, try making a simple cardboard one. Select pictures from magazines and paste them on heavy cardboard, or draw your own pictures. Punch holes in each page and tie the pages together with a shoe-string, yarn or other heavy cord. Have the preschooler tell you a story about each picture in the cardboard book.

You may want to let the preschooler create a book. Have the child tell you a story. On each page of the book write one sentence of that story. Then let the child draw a picture to go with each sentence. Here is an example:
I have a dog and his name is Skipper.

Pupets

Puppets may be made from a variety of inexpensive or leftover materials. They should be bright and colorful so children will find them attractive.

There are two types of puppets:
- hand puppets, and
- puppets on a string.

Choose the type that will help you tell the story best.

The three middle fingers form the main part of a HAND PUPPET. The little finger and thumb operate its arms.

1. Use two pieces of plain material of the same size.

2. Lay the two pieces together and place your hand on them with your three middle fingers together and your little finger and thumb spread.

3. Draw a line around the little finger and thumb for the arms. Be sure to allow enough room so your fingers can operate the puppet easily.

4. Cut out the puppet and sew the two pieces of material together.

5. Decorate the puppet to fit the character in the story.

He has a bone that he likes to chew.

My dog likes me and I like him too.

He has a house where he sleeps at night.

PAPER BAG PUPPETS are easy to make:

1. Lightly sketch a face on the paper bag, leaving enough space at the bottom so you can tie the bag on the wrist.

2. Color or paint the facial features.

3. If your puppet needs a hat or some hair, make these separately and attach to the top of the bag.

SOCK PUPPETS can be made from old socks:

1. Stuff the end of the sock to form the shape of the head.

2. Tie a piece of string or yarn around the sock below the head.

3. Decorate to make your character.

With a little practice you can operate a PUPPET ON A STRING when you are telling a story. Make a puppet with many moveable joints, tying a string to each joint. Attach the other end of the strings to small sticks that you will use to operate the puppet.

You may want a stage for a puppet show. Practice using the puppet in front of a mirror while you are telling the story. Then you can see how well you operate the puppet and where you need more practice.
Homemade Television

Select a cardboard box for the television set. Use one that has flaps on top so you can open and close the set when you are changing “TV scripts.” The box will be more attractive if you paint or paper the outside.

1. Cut out one side of the box, leaving about two inches around the edge for a frame. The child will see the story pictures you make through this side.

2. Make two rollers from an old broom handle or other round sticks. Each roller should be as long as the front of the “TV” plus six inches (so three inches will extend on each side).

3. Cut two holes in each side of the box near the top and bottom edges and insert the rollers in the holes.

4. Cut a piece of plain wrapping paper or freezer paper about one inch narrower than the front of the TV set. Make the strip as long as you want the show to be. Leave enough paper on each end of the strip so you can attach it to the rollers.

5. Draw or paste colored pictures on the strip.

6. Attach the bottom end of the strip (which has the last picture of the show on it) to the bottom roller. (Be sure your pictures face the outside of the television set.)

7. Roll the strip onto the bottom roller until the first picture is on the screen.

8. Attach the top end of the strip to the top roller.

9. Your “television set” is ready to use. Turn the top roller as you tell the story.

Finger Plays and Action Songs

Finger plays help the preschooler develop body coordination while learning to recite a simple verse.

Go through the motions as you say the words. Speak clearly and slowly at first so the child can pick up the actions and words. After a while, the child will recite the words and go through the actions alone.

Here are some finger plays a preschooler might enjoy:

GRANDMOTHER’S GLASSES

These are grandmother’s glasses (put fingers in circles over eyes)
This is grandmother’s cap, (put hands over head like a bonnet)
This is the way she folds her hands, (fold hands)
And lays them in her lap. (lay hands on lap)

These are grandfather’s glasses (make large circles over eyes)
This is grandfather’s hat, (large hat)
This is the way he folds his arms (fold arms)
Just like that!

THE LITTLE TURTLE

There was a little turtle who lived in a box, (cup hands, palms together)
He swam in the puddles and climbed on the rocks, (swim and climb)
He snapped at the mosquito and snapped at the flea, (snap)
He snapped at the minnow and he snapped at me. (snap)
He caught the mosquito and he caught the flea, (close hand)
He caught the minnow, but he didn’t catch me.
Music

Whether they have musical talent or not, preschoolers enjoy singing. By the age of 4 and 5, many of them can
— sing simple melodies,
— beat rhythms, and
— recognize simple tunes.
If they don't know all the words to the song, they will make up their own.
Preschoolers pick up many songs from children's television shows or commercials.
Children also enjoy making up their own songs. They may make a tune to go with "This is how I wash my face," or "Now I am very sleepy."

When you are around a preschooler, hum or sing simple songs you know. A child often is able to pick up most of the tune by listening to you. Later you can teach the whole song.
Preschoolers like songs that have simple actions and motions to go with the words.
Children’s records or tapes and musical games also help teach new songs. “London Bridge” and “Farmer in the Dell” are examples of musical games.
Musical instruments — such as a drum, xylophone, harmonica, trumpet or guitar — also entertain preschoolers. By age 5, they can pick out tunes and play a few familiar, simple melodies on the piano.

Creative Art and Play

Preschool children want to use their hands to be creative and imaginative. Although much of their art may not be recognizable to you, it means a lot to the child who created it.

To let the child use his or her creative talents freely, avoid making patterns to follow. The child will probably feel unable to do as well as your pattern and become discouraged.

In creative art, preschoolers are not too concerned about what the art will look like when it is finished. They are interested mainly in the fun and excitement of doing it.

Because some creative art and play, such as painting and water play, may be messy, you need to protect a preschooler's clothes. You can make a simple plastic apron for this purpose:

1. Use a piece of plastic or washable fabric about 18 inches wide by 45 inches long.

2. In the center of the piece, cut an oval hole for the child's head. Be sure the child's head will slip in and out.

3. Bind the hole and the outside edges of the apron with bias tape. Use the long stitch on the sewing machine if you are stitching on plastic or a regular length stitch if you are using fabric.

Finger Painting

Children enjoy finger painting because they can put their hands in the paint.

White butcher paper (or freezer paper) is excellent for finger painting. You also may use shelf paper.

Dip the paper in water or dampen it with a sponge. Lay the paper on the table, pressing out any air bubbles caught between the table and the paper. Be sure the paper is large enough for the child to move his or her hands freely.

Here are some recipes for finger paints:

Finger Paint

3/4 cup liquid laundry starch
1 quart boiling water
1 1/2 cups soap flakes
food coloring
cold water

Mix starch with a little cold water. Mix in soap flakes. Pour the mixture slowly into 1 quart of rapidly boiling water. Turn burner off. Stir constantly
until mixture thickens, then stir occasionally as it cools.

When cool, pour a small amount of mixture into several small containers. Add a different food coloring to each container and mix well.

**Instant Finger Paint**

Sift or shake non-toxic dry powder (wheat paste) into cold water. Beat as you add powder until it is thick enough for a finger paint. Add food coloring or powdered tempera paint for color. This paint may thicken as it stands.

**Easy Finger Paint**

Pour a little liquid laundry starch onto moistened paper. Shake or sprinkle food coloring or tempera paint over the starch. Children will enjoy mixing the ingredients as they paint.

**Play Dough**

2 cups water  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1/2 cup salt  
2 cups flour  
2 tablespoons powdered alum  
food coloring

Mix water and salt in a pan. Bring to a boil and boil until salt is dissolved. Remove from heat. Add alum, vegetable oil and flour. Stir until dough is stiff. Cool.

When cool enough to handle, turn onto a flat surface. Divide into four equal parts. Add a few drops of food coloring to each part and knead until dough is smooth and coloring is evenly distributed. (Children enjoy helping with this part!)

Store in tightly covered containers.

**Blowing Bubbles**

A child is fascinated with bubbles. Preschoolers are even more fascinated when they can make and pop their own bubbles. To make your own bubble solution, combine 1 cup water and 1 tablespoon liquid dishwashing detergent. Mix well.

Children can blow bubbles through a pipe, a funnel, empty spools, a drinking straw, or through a circle made by their thumb and forefinger.

**Toys for the Preschooler**

You will find many toys in a preschooler's toy box. Each toy is used in a variety of ways. Check preschoolers' toys carefully for safety hazards. A good toy for a preschooler is one that:

- **is simple enough for the children to understand**
- **has no parts that can be put in the mouth and accidentally swallowed**
- **is brightly colored.**
- **has no sharp edges and points**
- **is not poisonous when licked or sucked (Some paints are poisonous.)**
- **has moving parts**
- **will help a child grow by**
  - teaching something new
  - helping develop skills and coordination
  - satisfying urges to squeeze, cuddle and love
  - allowing the child to use imagination
Preschoolers enjoy toys such as:

- pedal toys
- swings, climbing bars, gym sets
- pull-apart, put-together toys
- skill games
- housekeeping equipment
- “pretend” costumes
- puzzles, simple games
- wagons, sleds, wheelbarrows
- woodworking equipment (hammers, large nails, soft wood, play saw)
- farm animals, tractors, trucks, barns, fences, etc.
- dolls and stuffed animals

Homemade Toys

Choose a toy you would like to make for a preschooler. Be sure the toy you select meets the requirements of a good toy for a preschooler. Some toys you could make are:

Drop Box

Children enjoy learning about colors and shapes. A drop box is a simple educational toy that is easy to make. Educational toys for preschoolers should be simple and teach only one main idea at a time. Decide what you want the child to learn. If you want to teach about colors, make all the cardboard pieces the same shape. If you want to teach about shapes, make all the pieces the same color. When a child is about 5 years old, you may begin using limited combinations of colors and shapes.

1. Make a 7- to 9-inch slit in the top of a small box. (A shoe box will work.)

2. Paint or cover the box with contact paper. Use a bright color.

3. Use 4- to 6-inch squares of cardboard to cut out various shapes. Some simple shapes are:
   circle, square, triangle, star, half-moon, diamond, apple, pear, leaf, oval.
   or

   Use 4- to-6-inch squares of cardboard and color, paint or cover them with contact paper in different colors. Use simple colors such as:
   black, white, red, green, purple, yellow, blue, orange, brown.

4. For preschoolers 5 years of age and older, the numbers 0 through 9 or letters of the alphabet may be used in the drop box. Use only a few numbers or letters at a time until the child begins to identify them correctly. Add more as the child progresses. When using letters, use large block letters rather than small letters (A,B,C,D rather than a,b,c,d).

To use the drop box, give the child one cardboard piece at a time. Ask what color, shape, number or letter it is. (Do not mix these all together. Concentrate on one thing at a time.) With each correct answer, let the child drop the piece through the slit into the box. If the answer is wrong, give the correct answer and lay that piece aside. Use it again after you have shown the child three or four other pieces.

When all the pieces have been correctly identified and put into the box, or when the child tires of the game, let the child take the lid off and see the pieces that were correctly identified.
Stuffed Animals or Dolls

1. Choose colorful pieces of washable material for the parts of the animal or doll.

2. Use your imagination and make your own pattern, or select a ready to use pattern.

3. Pin the pattern on the material.


5. Sew the main parts together, leaving an opening so you can stuff the filling into place. It is a good idea to stitch the seams twice so they'll be less likely to split open when you put in the stuffing.

6. Choose a filling that will not be harmful to the preschooler if the seam does split open. Pieces of nylons or polyester fiber fill make excellent fillings. The filling must be washable.

7. Sew on the eyes, nose, mouth, and other decorations using fancy embroidery stitches. Choose stitches that will not come apart or be easily pulled. Avoid buttons, hooks, eyes and other small items that a preschooler might accidentally swallow.

Doll Clothes and Bedding

Children like to dress up their dolls and make up the doll's crib. Select patterns from pattern books, or use your imagination and design your own patterns. Try the garment on the doll as you are making it. Then you know it will fit properly.

Make the garment easy for the preschooler to put on and take off the doll. Use simple fasteners such as snaps and ties. Make the armholes large enough for the doll's arms to go through easily.

Make the clothing colorful and sturdy.

Ring Toss

1. Attach a 1-inch dowel rod to a square piece of wood for the base. The dowel should be about 6 inches long and the wood base about 8 inches square.

2. Make rings by winding two or three thicknesses of clothesline cord together and tying them in three places with a heavy, strong cord. You will need about three feet of cord for each ring. Painted embroidery hoops or jar rings also may be used.

3. Let the child decide the rules for this game. This is a good game for two or more children.

NOTE: When painting any toy you make, be sure you select a non-toxic paint. Beware of paints that contain lead, antimony, arsenic, selenium, soluble barium, mercury or cadmium. These materials are poisonous.

Toy Furniture

Toy furniture can be used for many of a child's activities. If you would like to make a piece of furniture for a preschooler, look at how big the child is. Here are some measurements you might need:

- For a chair, measure from the knee to the floor and also from the knee to the lower end of the child's spine. (Make this last measurement when the child is sitting down.)

- For cupboards, sinks, stoves and small dressers, measure from the floor to the child's waist.

- Cradles and beds may be any size, as long as the child's dolls fit into them.

When making toy furniture, use heavier materials such as wood to make chairs and other items that will need to hold the child's weight. You can
make a stove, refrigerator or sink from cardboard boxes. Use markers or tempera paint to add details such as doors and knobs on the furniture you make.

Be sure furniture is safe for preschoolers to use:

• Is wood sanded until all surfaces are smooth and splinter free?

• Are edges of wood sanded until they are well-rounded?

• If paint is used, is it a non-toxic paint?

• If cardboard is used, is it sturdy enough for the preschooler’s play?

• Have loose staples or other possible hazards been removed from cardboard?

These are some suggestions for toys for preschoolers. Use your imagination and come up with ideas of your own.

When you have finished the toy, evaluate it using “Guidelines for Evaluating Toys” found at the back of this manual. If your toy meets the requirements, then you may let a preschooler play with it.

Let’s Play a Game

Young children usually enjoy playing alone and may not like to share playthings with other children. At about 4 or 5 years old, children become interested in neighborhood games that a number of children can play together.

Five-year-olds also enjoy games that test their skills. They will try walking on curbs, jumping rope, skipping and climbing the jungle gym.

Games that preschoolers learn are simple and brief. They have few rules, which are usually made up or changed as the game progresses. One good example is “cops and robbers.”

When teaching a game to preschoolers, give directions as you play. Don’t worry if some children seem to be breaking the rules — unless this interrupts the game. Just having fun is the most important thing.

Try teaching one of these games to a group of three or four preschoolers:

• Nice Doggie
  All children sit in a circle. The one who is “it” is the doggie. The doggie goes on hands and knees to the other children and tries to get one to laugh by barking and making funny noises. The other child then says “nice doggie” without laughing. When the dog succeeds in getting someone to laugh, that person becomes “it.”

• Hot Potato
  Players sit in a circle and one child is chosen as a leader. An object such as a small potato, ball, stone or piece of wood is passed around the circle. Players must pass the object very quickly, and everyone must accept it when it comes to them. When the leader yells “hot,” the child holding the “potato” is out.
  The game is played over and over until every child but one is out. The last player is the winner.

• Dog, Your Bone Is Gone
  One child is chosen to be a dog. The dog sits in the center or in front of the room with eyes covered, pretending to be asleep. A bone (eraser, rubber bone or other toy) lies beside the dog.
  The leader points to a child who is to get the “bone.” The child tiptoes up as quietly as possible, picks up the bone and sits down again, hiding the “bone.”
  Everyone places hands behind their backs, and the group shouts, “Dog, dog, your bone is gone.” Dog tries to guess who took the bone. The child who took the bone becomes the next dog.

• Basket Ball
  Children stand in a circle and take turns trying to throw a ball into a basket in the center of the circle. Children shout, “Basket” each time the ball goes in.
FOR MORE HELP WITH YOUR PROJECT

- Ask your parents
- Ask your 4-H leader
- Read the 4-H manual for The Sitter project
- Refer to the following Fact Sheets:
  (They are available at your Extension office.)
  - FL21 How Young Children Learn
  - FL23 The Preschool Years — Three to Five
  - FL26 The Three-Year-Old
  - FL27 The Four-Year-Old
  - FL28 The Five-Year-Old
  - FL40 Toys and Play for Young Children
  - FL52 Self-Esteem: Our Gift to Children
  - FL80 Read to Your Child

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GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING TOYS

Originality & Safety
Creating and constructing imaginative toys can be an opportunity for you to express your knowledge and CREATIVITY.
1. Shows evidence of originality in design.
2. Exhibits unique use of available and inexpensive materials.
3. Is a creative adaption of an existing idea.

Safety
Toy should be designed so that the child can use the toy safely.
1. Is free of sharp or pointed edges.
2. Has been put together so that there are no exposed straight pins, sharp wires, rails, etc.
3. Is made of a material other than glass or brittle plastic.
4. Non-toxic paint has been used on toy.
5. Is free of parts which deliberately pinch fingers or toes, or catch hair.
6. Is free of small detachable parts that can lodge in the windpipe, ears or nostrils.
7. Is of a material which would be difficult to bite into and/or swallow.
8. Cord or string is no longer than 12" in length.

Appropriate for the Child's Age & Development Skills
Toys are the child's tools for learning and are part of a rich learning environment. Toys should be appropriate and usable at each age level.
1. Attracts the child's attention and interest.
2. Stimulates the sense (color, texture, shape).
3. Enhances intellectual development.
4. Is a versatile toy—can be used in a variety of ways.
GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING TOYS

Promotes Growth & Development
Toy should be age specific.
1. Can be used by the child when playing alone as well as with another person.
2. Encourages interaction between the child and other people.
3. Helps in developing large muscle skills (example: running, walking, sitting on).
4. Promotes the development of small muscle coordination (example: dressing, drawing, lacing).

Quality of Construction
The toy should be able to withstand the rigors of child use.
1. Is durable.
2. Buttons, trims, and other parts are well-fitted and securely fastened.
3. Sewing is well done and secure.
4. Is washable.
5. Has been carefully and attractively constructed.
6. Rough edges and corners are smooth.

Completeness of Exhibit
Statement about toy should contain the following components:
1. How the toy/game will be used by the child.
2. Materials from which toy is made.
3. Statement about washability.
4. Description of the type of paint used.
5. Skills the child will develop from playing with this toy.
6. Origin of the idea. (Identify if made from a kit or pattern.)
7. If the exhibit is a game, include instructions.