

How you communicate with preschoolers

Try to give your preschooler full attention, watch your body language, and tune in to your child's emotions.

Give your preschooler your full attention. Even a quick but focused connection can fulfil your child's need for communication. If your child says, 'Play with me', and you're not available, you might explain why. You could say, 'I had a hard day at work today. I need three minutes to change. Then I can play with you'. Preschoolers can understand your feelings – to a point – and will appreciate your honesty.



Be aware of your tone. Because preschoolers are new to sentence-making, they might have a heightened awareness of your tone and body language.

Reflect your child's unspoken emotions. This helps put your child's feelings into words. If your child didn't get a turn at the playground, you might say, 'You wanted to play with the ball next, didn't you?' or 'I can see you feel really cranky!'

Enlist your preschooler's help in figuring out a problem. For example, you might say, 'Did something in that movie scare you?' If your child doesn't answer, you might follow up by saying, 'Could it have been the look on that person's face?'

Help your preschooler develop emotional awareness. Even if there is misbehaviour – you can talk about it together. Most preschoolers can understand a sentence like, 'Sometimes, I get mad too. It helps me to go into another room and take some deep breaths'.

Offer limited choices . Preschoolers gain a sense of control by making their own decisions. You might say, 'Do you want to get dressed before or after breakfast today?'

Don't end your sentence with 'OK' unless you are ready for your child to say 'No'. Asking your child if an activity is OK can lead to a lengthy discussion and even a power struggle.

Grant a preschooler's wish in fantasy. If your child expresses sadness that a toy has to be shared, you might say, 'Would you like it if you had the toy all to yourself? What would you do with it?' By expressing a wish and talking it through, even if it can't be granted, a child begins to calm down.

Create safe opportunities for preschoolers to express their BIG feelings. For example, if your child is extremely angry, instead of saying, 'Stop yelling', you might say, 'Go in the bathroom and scream as loud as you can for one minute'.

Don't over-explain. Simple explanations can be more effective than long discussions. If your preschooler is having a tantrum, holding your child close – or just staying nearby – can mean more than any words you can say.

Dads

Read info and watch short videos especially for dads, or meet other fathers in the discussion forum.



For Fathers



Solve problems playfully

Preschoolers love to play and three minutes of play can save you 10 minutes of struggle. If your preschooler refuses to leave, a question like, 'Would you like to hide under the table so no-one sees you escape?' turns a potential battle into a game. It's a lot more fun for both of you – and actually can save time!

– Gillian McNamee, PhD, Director of Teacher Education, Erikson Institute



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 - Connecting with your preschooler
 - Positive attention and your child
 - Building good family relationships
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