



Parenting Skills for the Busy Parent of Preschoolers

Working may make being the parent of preschool-aged children seem harder than ever.

- *Working and raising young children is like having two full-time jobs!* At the beginning, you might feel so overwhelmed with job-related concerns that you find it especially hard to deal with your young children's many needs.
- *Young children tend to get upset when their schedules change.* 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.
- *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, brush teeth, eat breakfast. 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.*

For example: You could say "Let's see if you can put on your shoes while I put on mine," or make getting dressed fun by playing a children's music tape and "hopping" into the clothes.

- *Give children a fun activity that they can do if they finish getting ready before they have to leave the house.*

For example: "We have 45 minutes until we leave. When you are finished getting ready you can draw and color until it's time to go."

- *Letting your children watch TV in the morning might give you some time to yourself to get ready, but it may slow you down later when they want to watch the end of the show.*

Once children are ready to go, you may have an activity planned to keep them busy while you get ready. Try using other activities besides TV, like listening to a musical tape, playing

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with blocks, chatting with you, or if you use TV, have them watch a video that can be stopped and started again later so they won't need to linger to see the end!

- *Before you go to work, tell your children about where you are going and when you will be coming back.* You may even want to show them where you work. This way, children will feel safer and more comfortable about being away from you when you leave for work.
- *Younger children often get upset when you leave because they don't understand that you will be coming back.* Leaving something with them to hold, like a picture of you, a toy, a blanket, or a stuffed animal, can make being away from you easier for them.

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 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 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.*

For example: Dinner, bath, preparing clothes for the next day, reading, and bedtime. This way, children will know what to expect, so they will feel better, be more cooperative, and find less to argue about.

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.*

For example: "Today, I'm buying food and not toys."

Follow through with what you tell your children! If you give in and buy something for your children when you said you would not, they won't believe you the next time and will keep asking for things 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.

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.*

For example: "I like the way you cleaned up when I asked you to!"

- *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.

For example: You could pick out three outfits for each child, and then ask each one to choose what he or she will wear the next day.

- *When children starting misbehaving, give them a choice of two more appropriate behaviors.*

For example: "You may sit at the table and eat dinner, or you may go calm down in your room before you come back to the table." Make sure you can live with all the choices you give, no matter which one your child picks.

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 act with anger.
- *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.

For example: "What I need you to do is sit at the table quietly." If you said, "You're always misbehaving. Where are your manners?" you would not be giving your children any information about how they should behave, and they would probably keep misbehaving.

- *Always try to make your actions fit the situation.*

For example: If children make a mess, have them clean up the mess. If they refuse to eat, they'll be hungry until the next meal.

- *Another possible action is "time-out."* Separate children from anything fun for a little while. Time-out should be 1 minute for every year of age, so a 4-year-old would be in time-out for 4 minutes. This is a time to calm down.

Using time-out instead of hitting shows children that people can stay in control even when they are angry. Be sure to control your anger.

You may want to make a time-out area in your home that is convenient, safe, and away from activity. Make sure there is a soft place to sit, and give children activities to get out their anger in a positive way, like pounding on clay. Remember: time-out is not a punishment. It is a way to help children calm down and get themselves together.

- *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.

References

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The titles for the series *Workfront-Homefront* were selected based on telephone interviews with Work First participants. Titles include:

Easing Transitions: Balancing Work and Family, FCS-479-1
Parenting for the Busy Parent of a Preschooler, FCS-479-2
Adjusting to Work: Getting Along with Others, FCS-479-3
Decision Making: It's a Skill, FCS-479-4
Locating and Selecting Child Care, FCS-479-5
Personal Wellness for Top Performance, FCS-479-6

The National Parenting Information Network offers advice on raising healthy children. Their toll-free number is 1-800-583-4135

Also see Extension publications:

DeBord, K. (1997). *Creativity in Young Children*. North Carolina Extension Service. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC. 4 pp FCS-470

DeBord, K. (1996). *Growing Together: Infant development*. North Carolina Extension Service. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC. 4 pp. FCS-459

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