

Tips for Preschool Parents by Ann MacKay (recipes included at the end!)

Greetings to you, Parents of Preschoolers, as September 2020 begins like none other! Here are a few suggestions for you and your preschoolers, assuming that you will have extra time with them this fall. These suggestions come from my friend Ellie Beatty and me, both former early childhood educators.

First of all, a few thoughts about life with preschoolers:

We wish for you patience, creativity, and joyful times with your young kids amidst the stress and uncertainty we're living with. You won't get these years back - you are building the foundation for a lifelong relationship! Listen to them and laugh with them! Hear their feelings, their thoughts, and take their questions seriously. Pray with them when troubles arise.

Find Support

Talk to others who are in the same boat you're in. These are challenging times. Share your ups and downs! None of us get it right all the time. Share prayer requests and thanksgivings. A support network is important.

Keep a regular schedule.

Most young kids do best with a routine and predictability. Get up and dressed in the morning, have regular meals and regular bedtimes. No need to be rigid, but when kids know what to expect, life can be easier. Try a simple schedule of the day on a piece of paper or a white board. If you have the space, work from left to right (as a pre-reading skill) - use simple pictures, a few words, maybe a star symbol if something special is going to happen.

Timers

Using a timer can be very helpful for kids who need to know what's coming next. Anything from a sand-timer to a "time-timer" is an excellent way of visually showing a child the passage of time. Go to www.LakeshoreLearning.com for ideas.

Share the Load

Share the childcare in bite-sized pieces, if you are working from home. If there are two adults at home, see if it's possible to arrange schedules so that you can trade off child care responsibilities every few hours.

Quiet Time

Make sure everyone gets a quiet time, maybe in the afternoon, where kids have a quiet space; separate so that parents and children get some downtime.

Art is art!

When children draw/create art, avoid asking “what is it?” “what did you make?” Rather, comment on your child’s efforts, his/her creative thinking, his/her unusual way of putting colors together, and the like. Kids shouldn’t feel they have to produce a “product” in order to please an adult (there are exceptions, of course, such as if you’re asking your child to make a gift for someone).

Shaping Identity

Here is something I heard on an NPR interview not long ago; it is particularly relevant if you want your child to develop kindness and generosity. Rather than saying to your child, "Thank you for helping, or "Would you like to help?", use the noun - name it. So, the preferred way would be, "Thank you for being a helper." "Would you like to be a helper?" Rather than saying "Thank you for being generous," one could say, "Thank you for being a generous person." This may seem subtle, but it helps a child shape his/her identity.

Now some old, reliable suggestions for activities:

Toys and Activities

Open ended toys such as **blocks, legos, play dough** (plus kitchen tools, measuring cups, golf tees, cupcake tins, etc.) (see recipe), **water play** (fill the sink with soapy water and some washable items, plus a sponge or two) (or how about a daytime bath?), **Gak** (see recipe), **a small hammer, nails, and pieces of wood, soapy foam** (see recipe), **a bucket of water plus some big paintbrushes** for painting anything outside, **buckets/containers and shovels and scoops with dirt/sand, dress-up clothes ...**

Let Them Help

When you can, let your child help you with real tasks: **putting laundry into the washing machine, counting the silverware for dinner and putting it on the table, feeding the pets, watering plants.** Kids can appreciate doing real work (even if they grumble about it!) and it can be a confidence builder.

Boxes!

Boxes, boxes, boxes - big ones for climbing into and decorating (cut out a door or a window if the box is large enough), smaller ones for painting/gluing and collecting.

Rocks, Rocks, Rocks

Stones, rocks, shells, sticks, etc. - for collecting, examining (a magnifying glass lends extra interest), stacking, painting/gluing. Remember: **it's the process of doing these things that really matters, not the finished product.**

Household Items

Have available newspapers, magazines, stickers, tape, string, markers, paints ... Bubbles! Take a-parts .. have an old radio? Screw drivers, pliers, etc. can be fun! **How about** a set of walkie-talkies? They can provide a lot of fun for young ones.

Fresh Air!

Get some fresh air every day, if at all possible. Go for a walk, run around in your yard 3 times. Whatever. It's good for everyone, helps break up the day, and gives everyone something to look forward to. Give the kids a clue to find something ("find something that's brown" "find something that grows," for example). Never mind the cold - bundle up!

Wishing you well! I know sometimes it can feel like you have to keep your children busy and engaged and even challenged. But unstructured time can be good, too - **even boredom has its beneficial qualities** - you are not failing your kids if you can not fill their every moment or their every request. Don't be hard on yourselves - give yourselves grace. I trust that you love these dear young kids and that you do the best that you can.

Blessings to each of you,
Ann MacKay

(SEE NEXT PAGE FOR RECIPES)

Recipes:

GAK -

2 cups of white glue
1 cup hot water
1 1/2 cups water, room temp
2 1/2 TBS 20 Mule Team Borax
food coloring if desired

Combine first 3 ingredients in a bowl. Combine the last two ingredients in a larger bowl. Combine 2 mixtures together in the larger bowl, stirring constantly. Squeeze it, squish it, bang it, etc.

PLAY DOUGH -

1 cup flour	2 TBS vegetable oil
1 cup water	1/2 TSP cream of tartar (if you have it)
1/2 cup salt	food coloring

Mix ingredients together in a saucepan; cook on medium heat til firm but not sticky (should be similar to mashed potatoes). Let it cool a bit before young hands play with it. Store in an airtight container.

GOOP - Cornstarch (start with 2 cups) and water

Slowly add small amounts of water to cornstarch while mixing with a whisk. The best consistency is when it looks like a bowl of milk but it feels hard to the touch. Put it onto a tray or into a flat container. Push it, squeeze it, stick things into it ...

SOAPY FOAM -

2 TBS dish soap	2/3 cup warm water
2 drops of gel food coloring, or 4 drops of liquid food coloring	

Mix ingredients in a mixer or a blender at highest speed for 2 minutes, or until stiff peaks are formed. Repeat with as many colors as desired. Put the foam into the sink, or container, or even a wading pool. Just let the kids have fun with it!