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# Understanding Preschoolers

## Understanding your Preschooler

Preschoolers are in a stage of becoming independent and competent.

They are continuing on their path to the development of self that they have been travelling since the baby and toddler years. They will be learning coping skills, problem-solving skills and social skills.

## Characteristics of Preschoolers

- Preschoolers have moved from the “What’s that?” stage to wanting to know “Why?”
- Language is developing. Other people can understand them and they love having conversations with you, telling stories and using words to explain feelings.
- Having language lets them negotiate with other children and adults.
- They can tell people their name and address.
- Gross motor skills are evolving and they love to run, jump, hop, skip, climb and kick balls.
- Fine motor skills are evolving. Drawing and cutting with scissors, using cutlery to eat and brushing teeth are great ways to work on fine motor skills.

## The parent-child relationship

- Your relationship with your preschool child is enhanced by being in the moment with them, spending quality time together and showing love, affection, warmth and respect.
- Communicate this love through smiles, laughter, eye contact, hugs and gentle touches.
- Nurture trust and respect by being available when your child needs help or support.

- Allow your child to explore their expanding world of people, things, ideas and feelings.
- Give descriptive praise and feedback about the kinds of behaviour that you want to encourage e.g. 'that's great how you put the toy back, waited your turn!'
- Know that it's ok to just watch your preschooler and be present.

## Preschoolers and play

- Your child needs a predictable and safe environment that invites them to explore, touch, manipulate and learn.
- Your child is now more interested in playing with other children and ready to play more co-operatively and wants to make friends.
- The concept of ownership – mine and yours is beginning to be understood. Sharing and turn-taking start to get easier.
- Imaginative play is developing. Your child can play pretend games and even have imaginary friends.
- Creative play develops your child's confidence, language, imagination, and physical and cognitive skills.

## Sleep and daily patterns

- Sleep is important for your preschooler's health, growth and development.

- Most preschool children need 11-13 hours of sleep a night, and some still need a nap during the day.
- A consistent bedtime routine can help your child transition from his busy day to sleep.
- Some preschool children experience night terrors and nightmares. Night terrors occur early in the night when the child is in quiet sleep. He remains asleep even if he looks awake. Waking your child can make the night terror last longer. Wait for your child to stop crying. They will usually settle quickly and have no memory of it in the morning. Nightmares occur later in the night during active sleep when the child is dreaming. They are related to your child's developing imagination. They may wake up upset and will remember the nightmare in the morning. Reassurance from a parent will help them to forget.

## Helping your preschool child

- Learn about expected developmental behaviours so that you have age appropriate expectations for your preschooler.
- Notice your child's subtle cues. Know when they are tired, angry or frustrated and help them manage their upset feelings.
- Show your child love and attention every day. Let them know that they are loved and valued for who they are.
- Be responsive and attentive to your child. Have lots of back and forth interactions as this will build a strong

foundation in their brain for learning and development.

- Provide opportunities to experience everyday situations. Allow your child to problem solve and make some decisions.
- Provide lots of variety in play activities – messy play; active outdoor play; creative play; shared play.
- Provide an environment that is rich in language, reading and music. Read together; tell stories; sing songs.
- Provide unstructured time to help your preschooler find and use his imagination.
- Tuning into your feelings and needs and selfcare will help you to keep supporting your preschooler to understand his world.

**Tresillian Day and Residential Services support families experiencing a range of early parenting challenges including:**

- Sleep and settling difficulties
- Adjustment to parenthood
  - Breastfeeding
  - Infant nutrition
  - Toddler behaviour
  - Multiple babies
- Emotional and psychological health & wellbeing
  - Postnatal depression and anxiety

**For Parenting Support or to Self Refer to a Tresillian Service call:**

**Tresillian Parent's Help Line**  
**1300 272 736**

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