

Wonder Years

Helping parents and caregivers make the most of a child's early years.



**YOUR CHILD
42-48 MONTHS**

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Pets and learning

by Irene Helen Zundel

Pets are not just cute and cuddly. According to Robert Poresky, a sociologist at Kansas State University, they can also boost a child's learning, teach empathy and responsibility, and raise overall IQ scores.

Porosky studied 88 households with pets and children ranging from 3 to 6 years of age. Parents answered questions and took part in interviews about the kind and amount of interaction children had with their furry friends. The results showed that the more children interacted with their pets, the greater the impact was on the child's development.

"One of the things an animal does with a child is to help give the child an understanding of the world from the pet's viewpoint, Poresky said. "That factor may stimulate brain development, which in turn can boost IQ scores."

Continued on page 2



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Leading... Learning for All

Pets and learning

Continued from page 1

What are the benefits of pet ownership?

Owning and caring for pets helped children in the study develop social and learning skills:

- More empathy for both animals and humans.
- Better understanding of behavior traits such as loyalty, unconditional love, comfort, and companionship.
- More sense of responsibility for meeting the needs of others.
- Raised levels of self-esteem.
- Greater patience and perseverance from teaching pets to obey and perform tricks.
- Greater emotional openness from children learning to tell their problems to their pets.

How early should children be allowed to have pets?

Bringing pets into a home with small children works best when parents take care of the animals and oversee the interaction between pet and child.

- Toddlers are able to bond with small animals, but they don't begin to show empathy for a pet until they are past the age of 3.
- Between the ages of 3 and 6, children interact well with animals, but they are



too immature to handle the daily responsibilities of pet care.

- Between ages 6 and 8, children do well at feeding and grooming chores, and emotionally appreciate the love and acceptance that pets can give them.

What kinds of animals should you choose?

While dogs and cats are the hands-down favorites in most homes, other animals make good pets as well. The key is to

choose an animal your child can easily interact with. Overall, you should select a pet that has the following traits:

- A breed known to get along well with children.
- A size that fits the age of the child.
- Relatively calm and well behaved.
- Willing to interact with people.
- Likes to cuddle and show affection.

Irene Helen Zundel is a freelance writer specializing in writing about education and families.



Wonder Kids

Lance Zelent lives in Michigan's upper peninsula in Newberry. Lance wants to be an astronaut when he grows up. From the time he was a baby, he has loved everything about space, planets, and astronauts going to the moon. He can tell you all nine planets in our solar system in their order from the sun.

One day he plans to visit Mars and—who knows?—one day he just might! His parents encourage Lance and his dreams and tell him, "I love you all the way to Pluto and back!" Lance's parents know that whether it's pets or planets, a child's passion can motivate him to learn and grow. When they support Lance's love of space and tell him anything is possible, Lance feels more confident and able to tackle hard jobs. This will help him succeed later—in school and in life. For now, though, Lance is just having fun.

Check out some of Lance's favorite books about space and planet Earth.

Here in Space by David Milgrim

Star! Stars! Stars! by Bob Barner

The Sea of Tranquility by Mark Haddon

Making the most of story time **Part 2**

By Tiffany Spaulding

Did you know that reading to your children can do more than just entertain them? Reading meets their needs in many areas, including physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual. How does all that happen in one 32-page picture book? You can help by following three steps to story time success: cuddle close, choose the right book, and talk about what you read. Here's what I've found as an educator and mom.

Stack the shelf

I usually let my children choose their own books for story time. However, I have been known to “stack the shelf.”

I offer a shelf of choices, some old favorites, some new books, and some of the books we have checked out of the library during our monthly visit. I try to preview everything the kids check out. Books that may not work for bedtime, with monsters and such, get sorted into their own basket for daytime reading.

If they are going through troubling times at home or school, I try to stack the bookshelf with books that deal with that issue. For example, if they are nervous about starting a new class, I might read a story about a character who is trying something new. If I feel a book fits their need, I'll often read it to the child as a bonus book. They are always up for an extra story.

Don't miss the chance to use books that deal with what is happening in the lives of your children and family. The library staff can direct you to great books about death, divorce, bullies, faith, moving, friends and more. Try to scan the books before you read them to your children to make sure they send the right message for your child.

Book talk

The final step in making your story time successful is having a conversation about



the book. This is really our favorite part of story time. It gives me a chance to see into the hearts and minds of my children. The conversation doesn't need to be long or involved. Simple questions with no right or wrong answer are best for little ones.

- **Before reading**, look at the cover and ask, “What do you think this book is about?”
- **While you're reading**, children often will think of similar stories or events in their own lives. Ask, “Does this remind you of anything?”
- **After the story**, ask, “What part did you like best?” “How did the main character solve his/her problem? How would you have solved it?”

Some books open the door to discussions about spiritual or social issues. Don't be afraid to use words like plot (what happens in the story), theme (what the story is about), and character (who is in the story) in your conversation. Children are like sponges; they will absorb these terms and might begin using and understanding them with the very next book you read.

Continue the conversation at other times and other places. If you recently read a story about a park and you are in a park, talk with your children about how the real park and the story park are alike or different. This will help your child build skills in both reading comprehension (understanding) and recall (memory).

If you open the doors of communication now, it will be easier to keep them open later when you need to talk about other important topics like sex, drugs, and peer pressure.

Tiffany Spaulding is a freelance writer and a mom in Tacoma, Washington.

Coming next issue:

See also Part 1 of this series, “Cuddle Up,” which appears in the Wonder Years development guide for children 36–42 months. If you don't have a copy, read it at www.WonderYears.info, ask for a copy from the organization that gave you this issue, or call 800-832-2464 and ask for a copy.



Is your child creative?

by Andrea L. Mack

Does your daughter make up silly words and sing them over and over? Does your son make a beeline for the dirt pile to build mud towers? These every-day actions reveal your child's creativity, even though you may not always recognize it.

By keeping your eyes open and noticing your child's new or interesting ideas, you can support your child's growing imagination. You can also encourage imaginative play by providing the right

kinds of toys and activities. Art materials are great, but so are dress-up clothes, all kinds of building toys, dolls and action figures, puppets—anything your child can use to spark ideas. You might like to try some of these thought-provoking activities:

Ball roll challenge

Snap-together building bricks are great for building towers, garages, houses or anything you can think of. For something a little different, try this. Ask your child to

build a ramp or set of steps that a small ball can roll down. Ask, "How high can you make it? How many turns and curves can you include? Can you use up all your building bricks?"



Appliance people

Cut out pictures of people and appliances such as vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, or lamps from an old catalog or magazine. Cut apart the heads, upper bodies (shirts, jackets), and lower bodies (pants, skirts) of the people cut-outs. Make "appliance people" by replacing some body parts with appliance cut outs. Try a "vacuum-cleaner lady" or a "toaster man." Lamp heads? Television tummies? Create an art gallery of funny people.

Adding on

When you're waiting in a line or driving in the car, make up a story together. Take turns adding on the next sentence or saying what happened next. For example, you

MYTH BUSTERS

Parenting Myth # 17: If you're not good at art, you won't be creative.

Fact: When most people think of creativity, they probably think of paints and brushes. However, creative thinking goes beyond the ability to make interesting art projects. People who think creatively can look at a problem from several different angles. They can put ideas together in new and unusual ways to come up with one-of-a-kind solutions. Scientists, computer programmers, gardeners and carpenters all use creative thinking—and so does your child.

Parents can nurture their child's imagination. Sometimes, all children need is a simple moment of silence. As often as you can, turn off the TV and computer games to make room for playtime. This quiet time allows a child to look inside and find a whole new world—a world where she can be anything, or anyone, she wants to be. Imaginative play isn't always quiet, though. Using imagination can involve music, dancing, art, storytelling and lots of props.

Almost all of us fall victim to "Parenting Myths" of one kind or another. If life with a child isn't quite what you expected, this column is for you. Look for it each time you receive Wonder Years.

might start with, “One day, a girl named Teresa found a lost kitten.” Your child might add, “The kitten showed her the way to a secret hideout,” and so on. Remember to use lots of words, and don’t limit your child’s imagination.

More tips for promoting creativity

- When your child shows you something she has made, give lots of positive feedback. Ask about the steps she took to make it. Or comment on the interesting way she joined some parts together. Focus on the thinking that went into the project, rather than the end result. This helps show your child you value her ideas.
- When your child faces a new situation, give her a chance to figure out what to do on her own. Even though you may see the road block ahead, she’ll grow more if she learns from experience. Just be ready to offer support when she asks.
- Make time to do something creative together every day. Try building a block tower, making pipe cleaner jewelry or even baking new recipes.
- Show her something new. The more new experiences a child has, the more new thoughts and ideas she will come up with.

Remember, there’s no right or wrong when it comes to getting creative. The point is to encourage new ways of thinking—ways that might be different from your own. Show your way of doing something, then let your child show her way, too.

Andrea Mack is a freelance writer in Mississauga, Ontario.



Courtesy Photo

Getting School Ready

What do children need to be ready for school?

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS	You CAN...
<p>I need to get along with others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show me ways to make new friends. • Help me understand how I can be friends with children who are different from me. • Teach me what to do when someone hurts my feelings.
<p>I need to feel good about myself.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to me and listen to my ideas. • Help me feel good about all the things I can do. • Be patient and let me develop at my own pace. • Teach me that all my feelings are okay, but not all my actions are okay. For example, it’s okay to be upset, but it’s not okay to hit others. • Teach me ways to calm myself down when I get frustrated.
LEARNING SKILLS	You CAN...
<p>I need to be excited about learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage me to explore with my senses—to see, touch, smell, hear and taste my world. • Give me fun, exciting choices. • Give me lots of time to figure things out.
USING WORDS AND NUMBERS	You CAN...
<p>I need to learn to count and understand that numbers have meaning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help me play counting games. • Let me count things at home and in my community. • Show me how numbers are used around me.
KEEPING SAFE AND HEALTHY	You CAN...
<p>I need to be safe and feel safe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help me practice saying my name, address and phone number in my home language and in English. • Teach me about watching for cars and not talking to strangers. • Teach me who to ask for help when I need it. • Give me time each day to play outdoors.

Used with permission from the Getting School Ready Project (Seattle/King County, Washington). www.gettingschoolready.org

In search of the perfect preschool

by Dawn Marie Barhyte

Looking for the perfect preschool for your child can be a challenge with all the choices available today. Finding a high quality program requires careful research, lots of questions and knowledge about what to look for.

Lots of learning takes place during the preschool years—learning that sets the stage for later success in school. If you choose to send your child to preschool, take the time to get your child off to a good start.

Check for a safe and healthy setting.

- Make sure the program is licensed by the state (which means it has met the minimum health and safety

requirements). The license should be displayed, but if it's not, ask to see it. You can check with your local department of human services to see if it's current.

- Walk through the preschool at least once to check for safety. Try to visit when the program is in session.
- Look for an accredited preschool by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). These schools can be very hard to find, however.

Know what you want.

Preschools are based on many different values and beliefs. For example, some schools value play above all else, since children learn through play. Others focus



on language skills, arts, or physical activity. Look for one that matches your ideas about what your child needs.

- Base your decision on your child's needs and temperament. Ask yourself, how does my child react to group experiences? Is he shy or eager to join? Is he very energetic or more low-key? Is he a self-starter or does he need prodding to engage in an activity? Your answers will give you a picture of your child's strengths and weaknesses and help you select a program.
- Don't be afraid to ask direct questions. Good directors will welcome your interest and understand your concerns.
- Discuss your expectations and share information about your child. Don't rely on first impressions.

Visit the school while children are in session.

If the preschool refuses to let you visit, think very hard about whether to send your child there. This is a courtesy most schools allow. How welcoming is the staff, to you and your child?

Sit back and watch activities as out-of-the-way as possible. Many parents find that taking along a checklist makes it easier to record and remember what they see. You can find sample checklists at www.WonderYears.info. Some child care and education organizations also provide checklists. (See resources on page 7.)

Dawn Marie Barhyte wrdmastr@warwick.net is a former teacher and freelance writer in Warwick, New York.

Here are some terms you may hear when you are shopping for preschools.

Head Start—Free preschool programs for low-income 3- to 5-year-olds. Federal law requires that 10 percent of Head Start enrollment be open to children with disabilities. The goal of Head Start is to prepare children for success when they enter kindergarten. Programs may also include health care and parent training.

Michigan School Readiness

Program (MSRP)—Free preschool programs offered by some school districts, community agencies and universities for 4-year-olds who might have factors in their lives that place them “at risk” for school failure. More than 50 percent of children in the program must be low income. All programs provide strong family involvement and parent education as well as preschool education.

High/Scope—Based on the research of Jean Piaget, who believed that children learn through play. Children are encouraged to make independent choices throughout the day. Children explore, ask questions, solve problems and interact as they pursue their choices.

Waldorf—Places a strong emphasis on the arts and nature. Children have access to

simple toys that lend themselves to many functions. It is believed that young children learn through imitation of adult behavior. Children are encouraged to develop strong creative and language abilities.

Montessori—Based on the research of Maria Montessori, who believed children learn best through real world experiences. Children are respected and encouraged to learn at their own pace and to reach their full potential. The goals of these schools are independence, ability to focus and school readiness.

Reggio Emilia—Children work on topics in which they express interest. Teachers act as guides, careful not to impose adult ideas. Children are encouraged to show in an artistic manner what they have learned. These programs emphasize creativity and research skills.

You can find more information about each type of preschool at www.WonderYears.info. You'll also find more preschool tips and checklists to take along on preschool visits. No access to the Web? Call 800-832-2464 and ask for information on choosing a quality preschool.

Ten things a preschooler needs

by Heidi Hoff

Preschoolers have reached a wonderfully exciting age. They seem so curious and eager to learn. Toys and educational games can fuel this learning. But you don't need lots of money to make a child's life special. Here's my list of ten things every preschooler needs:

- 1. Someone who really listens.** Most preschoolers babble all day long, so it's easy to tune them out. Your child needs to know he is being heard. When your child tells you a story, listen and respond.
- 2. Someone who stimulates the imagination.** A preschooler lives in an imaginary world. Jump in and play along; you never know where you might end up. My daughter loves fairies. She made a mailbox and put it in her closet to leave her fairies notes and drawings before she went to bed. While she slept I took her notes and left a reply—signed by the fairies, of course. When the fairies gave good advice like "Practice your ABCs," she cooperated happily.
- 3. Someone to open new worlds.** A visit to the airport, a museum, or even a new park or library will expose your child to new and interesting places.
- 4. Someone to model an enthusiasm for life.** Talk about what excites you and share it with your child. Whether it's classical music, painting, writing or racing cars, help your child enjoy it with you. Also, notice what your child enjoys and find new ways to explore it.
- 5. Someone to bring life issues to a simpler level.** Questions about God, birth, and where fish go when they die—these are the kinds of things on a preschooler's mind. Talking about life's mysteries eases fear of the unknown.
- 6. Someone to accept her just the way she is.** Adults sometimes feel they have the right to bend and shape children into a mold. We should teach children how to behave, but we should never try to dampen their spirits.
- 7. Someone to teach how to behave socially.** Letting a child grow up with bad manners sets him up for embarrassing

situations. Set a good example, and teach a few basics like saying "please," "excuse me" and "thank you."

- 8. Somewhere to find safety.** Make your home a loving and nurturing place for children. Any kind of arguing or uncontrolled behavior by parents can make a child feel afraid and unsafe.
- 9. Someone to confide in.** Nothing surprised me more than when I asked my 4-year-old daughter if she's ever been kissed by a boy, and she replied yes! Her honesty opened the door to a discussion about kissing and what it means.
- 10. Someone to give credit when credit is due.** Arguing and telling a child he is wrong because the parent "should" always be right gives the impression that he is not entitled to his own opinions. Before you answer a request with a "no," take a couple of minutes to think it over. He may have a valid point. Admitting this some of the time will make it easier for him to accept a "no" from you when necessary.

As parents, we can give our children the gift of ourselves many times a day. Along with meeting our children's material needs, we can also provide for their all-important emotional needs.

Heidi Hoff is a freelance writer and editor of *Preschool Planet*.

Resources

800-942-HELP—This Parent Helpline offers 24-hour answers to your parenting questions, with referrals to services that can help.

Project Find—All children develop at different rates. But if you are concerned about your child's development, **Project Find** can refer your child for a free evaluation and, if needed, help you locate educational services. Call **800-252-0052** or visit www.earlyonmichigan.org/PF.htm

Pets and families

The Healing Power of Pets by Dr. Marty Becker. Hyperion Books, 2002.

Creative kids

A Lullaby of Sounds and Words—This booklet by the FACT Coalition at Michigan State University offers tips on

how children develop and how to reach them at each stage using words, song, and actions. Available for \$1.00 from the FACT Coalition at **517-432-9207** or download from www.fcs.msue.msu.edu/earlyliteracy.

Countdown to Kindergarten

Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and Schools by Robert C. Pianta and Marcia Kraft-Sayre, Baltimore, Md. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2003. This hands-on guide helps early educators, parents and schools prepare children for school and schools for children.

Getting School Ready

www.gettingschoolready.org offers the *Getting School Ready Guide* and Resource Kit, along with links to resources for parents, child care providers and teachers.

Finding a preschool or child care provider

Community Coordinated Child Care (Michigan 4C) offers resources to help parents choose the right preschool or child care provider for a child. Call **1-866-4CHILD CARE**; or e-mail mi4c@mi4c.org.



Toys for children with special needs

Beyond Play

www.beyondplay.com or call **877-428-1244 (toll free)**. The toys in this catalogue are selected with the advice of occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, developmental therapists and other experts.

Let's Play

<http://letsplay.buffalo.edu> or call **716-829-3141**. The *Let's Play! Projects* provide education, service, and research on accessible materials and supports to promote play in young children with disabilities.

Exceptional Parent's 2002 Annual Toy Review

www.eparent.com/toys/
The magazine asked experts from the field of education, parents with disabled children and others to name the best new toys from all, along with some all-time favorites. Call **877-372-7368** to subscribe.



You can find all the resources mentioned in this publication at www.WonderYears.info.

Helping parents make a difference, right from the start.

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Deborah Strong, Executive Director
800-CHILDREN



Lena Montgomery, Manager,
Early Intervention Services
734-334-1438



Bryan Taylor, President
800-832-2464

To suggest story ideas or order group subscriptions, contact:

Partnership for Learning
321 N. Pine, Lansing, MI 48933
e-mail info@PartnershipForLearning.org.

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Wonder Years

AGES 0-5

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Wayne County
Regional Educational
Service Agency
33500 Van Born Road
P.O. Box 807
Wayne, MI 48184-2497
(734) 334-1300
(734) 334-1494 FAX
montgol@resa.net

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Tricks of the trade

Getting ready for play dates

Having a friend over for a play date is a great way for your child to practice sharing, manners and being a friend.

As a parent, you are responsible for providing a safe play space and ensuring the play goes smoothly. With a bit of planning and organization, your home can become a fun place for children to play and learn.

Make your home safe—Chances are you have taken precautions to make your home as safe as possible for your own child's behavior. However, a visiting child may be even more active or curious. Take a few minutes to make sure he or she is in a safe

environment. Lock up medicines and cleaning supplies; put away sharp scissors, knives and matches; buy slip-proof rugs and clamp bookcases and ranges to the wall. Also make sure chairs and dressers are kept away from windows that are easily opened.

Know the parents—It is unlikely that the parent of a 2- or 3-year-old will leave his or her child alone at your home on the first visit. But if you have offered to look after a friend's child while she runs a few errands, you must have a cell phone number, emergency contact number, address of child's residence and any allergy or medication information. Make sure you agree on a time the parent will return to pick the child up.

Organize the play area—Setting up your playroom to encourage a flow of

activity extends the fun. Keep similarly themed toys together. A bookshelf with plastic bins holding toy cars, Lego™ pieces, dolls, play dough and puzzles is an ideal way for providing easy access to toys. Setting up a reading corner, a dress up corner or a music center with interesting instruments also stimulates creative play.

Rules—If a child is visiting your home for the first time, it doesn't hurt to give a few rule reminders before play starts. You can gently tell young children that hitting or name-calling is not allowed and that toys and books are to be handled in a respectful manner. When children are finished playing, expect them to clean up before their parents arrive.

Visit www.WonderYears.info for more information on making play dates more fun.

Do you have a parenting tip or trick that:

- helped you help your child learn (as this tip does),
- helped your child grow, or
- made your life easier as a parent?

Send tips or tricks to *Wonder Years*, Tricks of the Trade, 321 N. Pine, Lansing, MI 48933. We'll post the best tips to the *Wonder Years* Web site at www.WonderYears.info for other parents to read and try with their own children. Each person who sends a tip will receive a free gift.

