Family Corner

Welcome to our preschool Family Corner. We publish this site several times per year in order to provide information on a variety of topics of interest to preschool parents. All content is written and maintained by the staff of the Belmont Public School Preschool and represents their experiences and favorite choices for gifts; activities; resources; and fun ideas. Click on the pictures for further information on that topic. Enjoy!

The Toy Shelf Link is a list of recommended preschool toys; games; or books staff found to support motor, sensory, language, and cognitive development in children.

The Resources Link is a list of resources compiled by our staff that provide interesting, useful or fun ideas for parents of preschool children.

The Staff Tips Link contains ideas from staff members on how to deal with common seasonal concerns voiced by parents of preschoolers.

The Planes, Trains and Automobile Link contains tips on how to make those long family journeys more enjoyable.

Two fun activities for the whole family. Season specific pleasures recommended to promote motor, language and social development in your preschool age child.

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The Toy Shelf Link is a good source of ideas for gift. Listed below are our staff choices for fun and educational games, books and toys for the preschoolers on your list. They are separated by developmental focus.

**Sensory and Gross Motor Toys**

- Silly Putty – Binney and Smith
- Koosh Ball – Koosh
- Sit ‘n Spin – Playskool
- Playchute – Pacific Play Tents
- Tent and Tunnel – Pacific Play Tents
- Fun-Ride Scooter – Hot Wheels
- Up and Down Roller Coaster – Step 2
- Splat Gak Splat – Hasbro
- Floam – Rose Art
- Mini-Trampoline

**Constructional Toys**

- Tinker Toys – Hasbro
- Lincoln Logs – K‘nex
- Kids K‘nex – K‘nex
- Marble Run – Galt America Inc.
- Mega Blocks - Megablocks
- Large Legos
- Bristle Blocks
- 50 Piece Wooden Block Set - Brio
- Soft and Sturdy Deluxe Blocks – Step 2

**Games for Fine Motor Coordination**

*(Perceptual Skills)*

- Perfection – Milton Bradley
- Cootie – Milton Bradley
- Hi Ho! Cheerio! – Parker Brothers
- Sequence for Kids – Jax Ltd.
- Mr. Mouth – Milton Bradley
- Hungry Hungry Hippos – Hasbro
- Twister – Milton Bradley
- Race to the Roof – Ravensburger
- Ice Cream Scoops – Fisher Price
- Melissa and Doug Floor and Wooden Puzzles
- Ants in the Pants- Milton Bradley
- Don’t Spill the Beans – Milton Bradley
- Don’t Break the Ice – Milton Bradley
- Fishin’ Around Game- Milton Bradley
- I Spy Memory Game – Briar Patch
- Memory – Hasbro
- 130 Piece Wood Pattern Blocks – Melissa and Doug

*(Prewriting and Bilateral Strengthening)*

- Stacking Cups – Shelcore
- MagnaDoodle – Tyco
- Playdough Fun Factory – Playskool
- Big Ten Bowling Set- STATS
- Magnetic Alphabet Desk – Fun Years
- Magnetic Numbers and Letters – Preskool
- Lite Brite Cube – Hasbro
- Model Magic – Crayola
- Crayola Trace ‘n Draw Projector – Crayola
- Wood Block – Melissa and Doug
- Deluxe Large Standing Easel – Melissa and Doug
- Lacing Beads in a Box – Melissa and Doug

* This list was partially compiled by a prior list developed by Ingrid H. Smith, OTR
Here are just some of the reasons why reading picture books with your preschooler is so important:

**Books help to develop rhyming skills, and learning to recognize rhyming words helps children learn to read**
- Read nursery rhymes or other verses
  - Encourage your child to fill in the last rhyming word of a verse (the pictures can give your child a clue about the rhyming word)

**Books help to teach children the meaning of words**
- Encourage your child to talk about the pictures and the story
  - Try to point out the meanings of words using the pictures
  - You can relate new words to words that your child already knows (such as relating the word “huge” to the word “big”)
  - You can also teach your child various concepts including colors, sizes, shapes, quantities, and same versus different

**Books help to develop sequencing skills, which is the process for children to begin telling their own stories**
- As you read the story, encourage your child to talk about each event, even if it is just a word or two
  - You can show how two events are connected in a cause and effect sequence
  - After the story, encourage your child to recall events from the story, use the picture to help

**Books help to develop storytelling skills**
- Encourage your child to tell parts of the story (if it is a familiar book)
  - Help your child to make predictions about what will happen next
  - Ask questions while reading, such as who, where, what, how, and when

**Books are also wonderful tools to practice articulation (pronunciation of sounds) as well as develop fluency of speech (smooth and uninterrupted pattern of speaking)**

Here are just a few suggestions of picture books for Preschoolers:

*The Mitten* (Jan Brett)
*Goodnight Moon* (Margaret Wise Brown)
*The Runaway Bunny* (Margaret Wise Brown)
*The Grouchy Ladybug* (Eric Carle)
*The Very Busy Spider* (Eric Carle)
*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Eric Carle)
*The Very Noisy Cricket* (Eric Carle)
*Jamberry* (Bruce Degen)
*Hey Diddle Diddle and Other Mother Goose Rhymes* (Tomie de Paola books)
The fall and winter seasons Staff Tips focus on three areas of parental concern during these busy days. Helping our children to enjoy large family gatherings; setting and maintaining a stress free bedtime routine; and providing active experiences through the winter months are the challenges we address. Hope we help!

Holidays, celebrations, and family gatherings are wonderful, exciting and stressful times for children. Routine is disrupted, bedtime is often later, children (and parents!) are tired and excited, and frequently feeling overwhelmed. You can help your child to enjoy festive occasions by planning in advance.

* Prepare your child for the event a few days ahead of time:
  - Before the big event:
    1. Mark the event on a calendar with a visual symbol and together count off the days.
    2. Tell your child the Who-What-Where-How of the event (who will be there, what will happen, where it will take place, and how you will get there). Go over twice a day until the event.
    3. Practice social responses so that you and your child are not put in an uncomfortable position under pressure (saying thank you for a gift; giving a hug; waving; saying “hi”). Using dolls works really well to practice these routines.
    4. If the gathering is at your home and other children will be present, talk to your child in advance about identifying toys that he is willing to share, and the toys he will put away or cover as “not available”.

The Day of the Gathering:

1. On the day of the event, put out a new toy or game for all the children to share, whether the event is at your home or you are traveling.
2. If you are going to someone else’s home, bring a favorite and familiar DVD/video to help give your child a time to calm down or be quiet.
3. Avoid caffeine and high-sugar foods (including soda and fruit juices).
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4. Keep to your regular routine as much as is humanly possible before, during, and after an exciting event.

5. Talk to your child ahead of time about a quiet place they can be if things get too noisy or busy. Bring a small bag of familiar books, coloring, or another quiet, soothing activity that your child can do without you to regroup. Try to intervene before a breakdown occurs and provide a quiet time.

6. If you can, take a few moments to step outside with your child, or go to a quiet room with them for hugs, rocking, or talking. This can do a lot to calm their system during the busy gathering, allowing them to tolerate more.

**Bedtime Routines**

The important word in establishing a happy, calm transition to bed each night is “routine”. Once a child has experienced this routine many times, each piece of it further prepares and calms him for sleep (think of Pavlov’s dog and the bell!). Parents can be ready to put a routine in place by doing the following:

- Start with the time you would like your child to be in bed with lights out, ready to sleep.

- Then time how long it normally takes your child to accomplish each task in getting ready for bed, and subtract this time from bedtime. Add in a 5-10 minute transition signal (“5 more minutes of play time. Then it is time for your bath”). **This will be the time** you start the bedtime routine every night. With this strategy, you will avoid rushing your child and therefore getting him “excited” and less able to calm and go to sleep.

- Give a verbal transition warning to your child five or ten minutes before he/she needs to begin getting ready for bed. Get full eye contact and acknowledgement from your child when you do this – don’t just call in from the other room while he is watching TV and says “ok” – often kids are so absorbed in play or TV that they don’t truly process what you say, and so when you come in five minutes later to turn off the TV you may get a strong reaction of outrage from your child – to them it may be abrupt.

- Many parents find it helpful to make a simple picture schedule for each step of the bedtime process (For example, bath, pajamas, brush teeth, 2 books, kiss, sleep). Pictures can be very powerful because even though your child may understand language well, pictures help him/her internalize the steps and usually take the struggle out of the routine. For example, if your child starts to play after brushing his teeth, you can say “Harry, go check your schedule. What’s next?” When he says “2 books” you can say “great job – would you like to choose them or do you want me to?”.
• Give your child many choices within non-choices, as you would have done in the example above. Brushing teeth is not a choice, but which flavor of toothpaste he/she uses that night is a choice, etc.

• Avoid exercise within two hours of bedtime. This is often hard for parents who have established a fun, interactive routine of wrestling, jumping etc. when they come home from work or right after dinner. If your child has trouble getting to sleep at an appropriate time at night, it would be better to save the active games for the mornings or weekends, and to substitute them with another quieter activity.

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**Being Active in the Winter**

It is very important to continue to offer opportunities for active play and physical development during the cold months. Please find some tips for fun activities for children and adults!

**DO**
- Make activity a daily routine
- Dress for the weather
- Cover nose and face in the cold
- Leave cell phone **OFF**

**DON’T**
- Exercise 2 hours before bedtime
- Over plan-remember the backyard!
- Overdo-several shorter activities are as good as one long bout.

Take a walk outside in the rain or snow and **JUMP** over those puddles or snow banks!
- Use opposite words like big, little, deep, shallow, wet, dry, cold, warm.

Take a Flashlight Safari through the neighborhood. Make a list of things to find. Be creative!
Encourage and join in snow play. Build snow forts; igloos; snowmen. Go sledding. Use spray bottles filled with colored water to “decorate” the snow. Let your child help with a kid sized snow shovel.

Encourage independent dressing—it builds self-esteem. You can also provide interesting dress-up clothes for play. Include zippers, snaps, buttons, pullovers. Use lots of different fabrics and sizes. Compare!

Indoor Activities

Inside camping with real tents or blankets on tables.
Musical chairs
Exercise mats and video yoga
Dancing
Treasure hunts
Obstacle Courses
The Planes, Trains, and Automobile Link provides staff tips for those long family trips. If the way to grandma’s house involves cruising along in a car, soaring up in the sky or riding the rails, these planning tips will help parents and children to relax and enjoy the trip.

Traveling with children can be exciting as well as stressful for families. You know your own child. Sometimes planning ahead can make the trip smoother and calmer for all. Taking into consideration some tried and true tips may help for smooth sailing, railing or rolling along the road. Packing for your trip can help ease the way.

- **Use your child’s back pack** to pack a few small familiar toys and activities that they will enjoy. You will know which bag belongs to each child. Let them be involved in choosing what they bring but you control the amount and size of the collection.

- **Keep a stash of small unfamiliar toys** (happy meal toys, etc) with you. Introduce them one at a time as needed. The novelty of a new toy may help ease the time sitting.

- **Ziploc bags** are your friend! Use them to pack individual personal care kits that include toothpaste, toothbrush, comb/brush, band-aids, shampoo and soap. Use travel size. They will intrigue your child as well as make it easier to transport. Mark each bag with a name. Larger zip loc bags can be used for snacks, wet/dirty clothing and snack trash.

- **Bring a small photo brag book** with favorite pictures for your child. Kids enjoy pictures. You can use this to preview the people that you are visiting as well as use the brag book for a visual schedule for upcoming events.

- **Post-its and pencils/pens** help create instant social stories. They also are fun to stick around the child’s travel space without causing damage.

- **Keep to your child’s routine**, especially sleep/wake cycles. Don’t skip naps thinking a child will sleep on the trip. This may backfire with an overtired, irritable child. If traveling at night, complete the night time routine as much as possible. Bath, snack, story, etc. Consider having your child wear their comfortable pajamas and socks. Bring a favorite quilt or blanket and pillow.

- **Preview music** that you both can live with. For example, if you like James Taylor, let your child listen to it prior to your trip while traveling in the car. This may become music you both can live with. Don’t forget to pack your child’s old favorites and just grin and bear it. If your child can handle headphones, use a walkman/mp3 player.

- **Avoid high sugar and caffeinated drinks and snacks** prior to your trip. Encourage your child to drink plenty of water all day. Bring disposable bottles of water and mark with names. Sport top water bottles can control the flow. Be aware of restrictions at airports. This will keep your child from becoming dehydrated. Stick with familiar snacks while on your trip. This is not the time to experiment with the new soy snack treats.

- **A bright fluorescent piece of tape** or sticker on the back of your child’s coat or matching T shirts can help you easily locate them in a crowd. Keep a picture of your children in your wallet just in case you are separated from them.

- **Allow extra time** for your travel and let children get out and stretch and have a small play time out of the seat.

- **Remember that your child is traveling with you. Have adult discussions** with your partner when your child is not sharing your space. Sometimes children appear to be asleep, but are not. This will avoid your child misunderstanding information as well as sharing private conversations with people you are visiting.

- **Remember they are kids! Think back to your best memories and worst memories of family travel. Share the funny ones with your child. Expect spills, restlessness and tears. It is all part of a child’s day. Traveling won’t change this.**
• Remember they are kids! Think back to your best memories and worst memories of family travel. Share the funny ones with your child. Expect spills, restlessness and tears. It is all part of a child’s day. Traveling won’t change this.

• Try to keep yourself calm and this will be picked up by your child. Enjoy and keep it simple!

    **Happy travels!**
Useful Websites for Families of Preschoolers

General Child Development and Medical Issues:

www.cfw.tufts.edu/ (child and family web guide)

Parent Training Opportunities:

http://parentingresourceassociates.org/_wsn/page6.html

Pre-reading, literacy and writing activities:

www.starfall.com

www.onemorestory.com

www.abcteach.com

www.activitypad.com/dot-to-dot-10.html

Sign Language:

ASL Browser Michigan State University:
http://commtechlab.msu.edu/Sites/aslweb/browser.htm

Supplies and Materials:

www.difflearn.com

www.Lakeshore.com
www.discountschoolsupply.com

www.reallygoodstuff.com
The Family Activities chosen are fun for all ages and guaranteed to promote cognitive, motor, language and social development in your preschool age child. Our indoor activity is cooking. What could be better than baking a batch of cookies, smelling their wonderful aroma and then eating them? Step outdoors for our other activity and build a snowman! Dress your snowman in your own unique way. Watch it guard the family house at night. Measure the melting that a warm day brings. What happens to the snowman?

Top Ten Reasons to Cook With your Child!

10. Planning a cooking activity allows your child to make decisions and to see, feel, touch and taste the final product.
9. Gathering materials and ingredients promotes organizational skills
8. Looking over the recipe gives you and your child an opportunity to identify familiar numbers, letters and words.
7. Allowing your child to measure ingredients independently develops eye-hand coordination and fine motor control. Making a mess is half the fun!
6. Mixing ingredients is a great opportunity to discuss changes in color, texture, and form.
5. Stirring is one way your child can experience resistance and deep pressure.
4. Working in the kitchen is a time to discuss general safety awareness.
3. While your dish is cooking talk to your child about the steps you followed and the importance of waiting.
2. Cooking is a functional, life-long skill that has real world implications for your preschooler.
1. There’s nothing better than a home-cooked dish!
10. Teaching preschoolers to put on outerwear is a great way to promote independence, organization, and sequencing.
9. Walking through snow develops physical endurance and strength.
8. Touching snow is an opportunity for sensory exploration (cold vs. hot, light vs. heavy, smooth vs. rough).
7. Creating round balls of snow is a way to expand your child’s knowledge of shapes.
6. Rolling the balls of snow promotes cooperation and teamwork among family members.
5. Helping your child stack snowballs develops eye-hand coordination and problem solving.
4. Giving the snowman a face is an opportunity to talk about the placement of specific facial features, as well as emotions.
3. Choosing items to decorate your snowman allows your children to express themselves artistically.
2. Discussing your “work of art,” is a chance to revisit the step-by-step process of making a snowman. Talk to your child using first……..then…….language.
1. It’s fun to spend time together as a family!