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FAMILY MATTERS

Preschool – a time of great exploration

by Chloe Learey

Ana Williams, a preschool teacher at The Winston Prouty Center, declared that preschool is a time of great exploration, on the sixth episode of 'Family Matters', the talk show where we discuss topics of interest to families with young children. Preschool can span ages 3 to 5 years and has many different developmental hallmarks and stages; including one of the biggest transitions in a young life – getting ready for kindergarten.

Children at this age are beginning to recognize similarities and differences as they become very aware that things are not the same. They might talk about living in a house versus an apartment, or having siblings, or how people are different from one another. Friendships also become more defined and sometimes this can be a challenge for parents and caregivers when a child distinguishes other children as “you are my friend” or “you are not my friend”, causing hurt feelings. While not everyone will be friends, certainly teaching belonging and respect as part of being a community is an essential element to helping preschoolers navigate this aspect of social emotional development. Fortunately this is helped by the increased awareness about the importance of belonging in this age group. Celebrating the group becomes more prevalent.

The tension between independence and dependence continues with preschoolers, with negotiation becoming a skill preschoolers begin to employ as they explore the boundaries of the world. The same approach we talked about with toddlers can apply with preschoolers as well – support their ability to make decisions within some set parameters and even engage them to help set those parameters.

Remember that regression is often lurking! Your preschooler who has been independently putting on boots and coats may temporarily lose that ability and continued patience with these twists and turns is key. One of the teachings in the Touchpoints frameworks is that regression occurs often just prior to a big leap in development. This reminder can help us get through some of those rough patches.

Preschoolers are developing the ability to think symbolically, allowing their imaginations to run wild. While this can be exciting, it also can be hazardous. Your preschooler who used to be fine going to sleep in a darkened room now may need a light left on because he or she can imagine a monster under the bed. This could be a positive sign of development even though it might feel like a regression. This growth in imagination combined with increasing communication skills can also lead to some very interesting stories. Storytelling is another fun part of the developing preschooler. In fact, it can be difficult for these little people to know the difference between fantasy and reality, leading to situations where it can seem like they are lying. Remember to help them know the difference gently and support their imaginative and moral development. Do not press for the ‘truth’ unless the situation is serious and requires more attention. Since preschoolers’ language is improving and speech is becoming clearer, it can be tempting for adults to start over-explaining. You likely have heard the example of the child who asks where babies come from, the parent who launches into “the talk”, only to realize that the needed answer was simply from mommy’s belly. Keeping it simple and using questions of your own helps a child explore the topic from their perspective.

Getting ready for kindergarten does not mean memorizing letters and numbers. It does mean being in an environment that includes lots of opportunities for exploring those skills – a writing station, songs with counting – as well as developing social emotional skills such as waiting your turn, sharing, and self-regulation which all help a child be present and ready to learn in a more academic way.

Chloe Learey is the executive director of Winston Prouty Center for Childhood Development in Brattleboro. You can watch episodes of Family Matters by visiting <http://winstonprouty.org/>.

http://www.reformer.com/columnists/ci_29420669/family-matters-preschool-time-great-exploration