

# Preschool Connection

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## Problem Solving

Problem-solving ability is no less than a style of life—a style so important for rational existence that children deserve to learn it when they are young. What happens when we encounter a problem? Any problem. A chair may be in the way, a person may be unhappy, a dish may have smashed into a million pieces; the question is: What are we going to do about it?

First of all, we need to figure out what the problem is. Identifying problems is a skill, one that children do not learn without help. For example, think of a child having trouble putting on his sneakers. He may not realize that the problem is the result of tightly tied laces. Once he identifies the trouble, he can proceed to the next skill, that of figuring out one or more possible solutions. In the case of the sneakers, for example, two solutions are plausible: He can either untie the laces himself or find someone else to do it for him.

The next step in the problem-solving process is to choose a solution, hopefully the best one, and act on it. This step takes courage. Some children are so afraid of being wrong that they cannot solve problems. Their fear is often a result of parents who insist on correct behavior. Other children develop self-confidence and are willing to take risks. Predictably, they come from homes in which the parents encourage individual thoughts and the notion of following through on a decision.

An important aspect of problem solving is understanding the laws of cause and effect. If you push a lamp off a table it will fall to the floor. If you rub a crayon along the wallpaper, it will leave a mark. Once a child understands the relationship between cause and effect, he will have an intellectual foundation for learning two

additional skills: 1) being able to predict what is *going* to happen in certain situations, and 2) being able to figure out what has *already* happened in others. For example, if he sees someone pushing on the lamp, he guesses that it will fall. If he sees crayon marks on the wall, he surmises how they got there.

The ability to cope with problems by identifying them and solving them does not come easily for children, nor for many adults. It takes constant practice and a sense of humor too. After all, problems do seem to be a human condition and children need to learn not to be overwhelmed by them but, instead, how to think for themselves realistically and intelligently.

(Excerpts taken from Learning through Play by Jean Marzollo and Janice Lloyd, Harper and Row, Publisher, Inc. 1972 )

*Intelligence is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don't know what to do.* - John Holt, *How Children Fail*



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## Being Responsible

### Suggested Book to read: THE LITTLE RED HEN

By Paul Galdone, Clarion Books, 2006 (Children ages 2-5 years)

Most parents are familiar with the story of the Little Red Hen, who ignored the laziness of her animal friends, and continued to do all the work necessary to grow, harvest, and then prepare the wheat for the bread she finally baked, and your children deserve the introduction of this story, complete with the wonderful illustrations of Paul Galdone.

Every child enjoys the predictability of the "Not I" responses of the animals who find too many other things to do rather than help. But they are sometimes surprised when the Little Red Hen turns the tables at the end of the story, pointing out that she alone did the work, so she alone will eat the bread.

A common complaint of preschool teachers is that children today have never been expected to help, and are quite unused to the idea that everyone in a community (or family) should have a contribution to make.

When teachers persist with the explanations that the classroom belongs to them all and they each have a role in keeping it tidy and attractive, children quickly come to enjoy the responsibilities and work together towards common goals.

Why is it that many of today's children are not being asked to help with chores in their homes? Is it because today's parents are just too busy with keeping up with their own lives that they don't have the extra minutes it would take to show a child how to sweep the floor? Or perhaps they feel they would just have to take the time to do the job again, properly? Is it because parents feel childhood should be carefree, with plenty of time later for the work in life?

Whatever the reason, we do children a grave disservice if we don't offer them early opportunities to be involved in the tasks of daily living, whether that is picking up toys, putting away the silverware from the dishwasher, setting the table, or sorting the recyclables.

Very young children thrive on being able to imitate the behaviors of their parents, and this is really the best time to start participation in family jobs. Healthy self-esteem grows as children discover their own competence in carrying out the expected tasks. Willing attitudes develop as children get positive feedback for their efforts.

Beginning children's participation in family responsibilities too late--say in the school years--makes more likely the "Not I" mindset that leads to nagging and family unpleasantness. Why not start instead with the smallest ones, who will happily toddle along behind busy parents?

Many parents find that establishing habits of work may be enhanced when children have visual reminders of their jobs, such as a chart that pictures the expected task, and spaces for stickers when the job is completed.

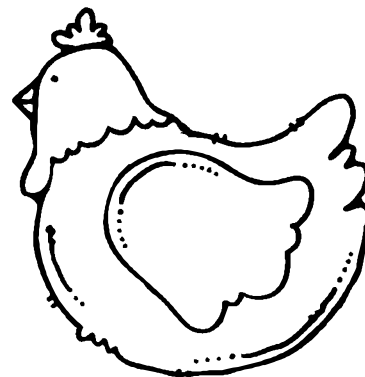
Such a system also makes the child clearly in charge of completing the task, an important part of developing responsibility.

The Little Red Hen has a timeless message, and perhaps responsibility for jobs is an idea whose time has come in your household.

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Suggested Activity: Read the story with your child. With the predictable text, have your child fill in the words "Not I" said the "Cat", etc. If they are not speaking yet, have them point to the animal. After reading and discussing, have your child practice "I will!" when asked to do something around the house.

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These activities are not a test to see whether your child knows the skills. If your child has trouble, give enough hints so that he or she can be successful. If the activity is too difficult or becomes frustrating, stop that activity and do something else that is fun. The main goal is to spend quality time with your child each day and to help your child be successful!

Activities copied from First Steps to Success, with permission from Sopris West Publisher, 2001.

# 1

## What's Wrong Here?

In this game the parent purposely makes obvious mistakes for the child to discover and correct. For each mistake the parent asks, "What's wrong here?" Some "mistakes" to make:

- Try to eat a banana without peeling the skin off.
- Try to pour milk out of an unopened carton.
- Try to put on your shoe when it is laced and tied.
- Try to put on a shirt without unbuttoning it.
- Try to pour soup out of an unopened can.
- Try to eat with an upside-down spoon.
- Try to sit on a chair that is turned on its side.
- Try to brush your hair with the wrong end of the

# 2

## These Belong Together

1. Gather pairs of items that go together, such as a shoe and a sock, a lock and a key, and a toothbrush and toothpaste, etc.
2. Place the items in a basket.
3. Pick an item and have your child find the object that goes with it. Why do they belong together? What would you use if one were missing?

# 3

## What if?

What if questions help children learn to anticipate results. To play, set up a situation like the ones listed below. Pose your question, giving the child time to guess the outcome before it occurs.

- ◆ What will happen to the milk if we add chocolate syrup to it?
- ◆ What will happen to ice cream if we put it in a hot oven?
- ◆ What will happen to a balloon if we poke it with a pin?
- ◆ What will happen to red paint if we mix it with yellow?
- ◆ What will happen to the water if we add bubble bath?
- ◆ What will happen to a dish of water left out for a week?
- ◆ Try some questions that spur the imagination:
- ◆ What if the sun stopped shining?
- ◆ What if animals could talk like people?

# 4

## What's Missing

Gather 3 common objects in your house and place them on the table.

1. Say "Here are three objects. Close your eyes and I'll hide one. You guess which one is missing."
2. Keep the objects in the same order but remove one.
3. See if your child can figure out which one is missing
4. Take turns. Have your child hide an object.
5. Start with three objects and add one at a time until you have ten objects.
6. When your child gets good at the game, try mixing up the order.