

If you are looking for extra learning activities to do with your child on a regular basis, there are several very accessible things that you can do without opening your wallet, and they are right in your own community - and most of them are literally right in your own back yard! Here are eight things that you can do to help encourage learning in your preschooler:

1. Allow your child to do things independently even if he/she takes longer than doing it yourself.
2. Provide plenty of social experiences for your child. Whether in a formal or informal playgroup, preschool, or other setting, your child will learn skills that can only be taught by other children. Sharing objects or time with an adult is different from doing so with another child. Children develop their imaginations by role-playing and pretending. Pretend play has been consistently linked to cognitive, intellectual, language, and social growth.
3. Provide daily opportunities to develop strength and coordination of large and small muscles. Go to the park, play ball games and tag, practice lacing, pour, stir, and participate in other functional activities.
4. Play games in which your child counts out loud (such as hide and seek), play board games that require your child to count the dots on a die, and use household items such as cans, boxes, and balls to explore shapes. Complete puzzles and play with interlocking building toys.
5. Provide plenty of opportunities and materials for writing and creative expression: crayons, sand, water, paint, paper, markers, scissors, hole punch, yarn, beans, and popsicle sticks.
6. Read picture books, poetry books, nonfiction books, nonsense books, nursery rhymes, and signs. Exposure to a wide variety of literature allows your child to learn different sentence patterns and hear vocabulary that you might not ordinarily use at home.
7. Talk WITH your child. (You talk TO your child when giving directions.) LISTEN to your child's stories. TELL your child stories. ASK questions. SHARE your ideas using descriptive language. Children learn language when they HEAR it and USE it.
8. Visit your local library or bookmobile regularly.

There are many other things that you can do with your child to encourage learning, but these are just a few things to get you started. If you are already doing these and you are looking for some new ideas to add, try checking out books on a particular subject, i.e. science experiments for children or books on how to draw dinosaurs. You may also enjoy going on learning walks, finding bugs in the backyard, or setting up a birdfeeder where you can watch different birds come and go. The possibilities are endless!