

Preschoolers: Physical and Cognitive Development

Overview

Between the ages of three and six years, the chubby toddler becomes the longer, leaner preschooler. Improved gross and fine motor control and coordination enable the child to tackle a variety of activities with greater skill and success.

The preschool child, in the stage of preoperational thought, can think symbolically and put these thoughts into words. Two questions guide the child's actions: "What does it do?" and "What can I do with it?" The child then proceeds to answer these questions through her handling of and experimentation with a wide range of materials and activities. It is through these actions that the child gains the early math and language skills that form the foundation for later learning.

The adults in the child's life facilitate this learning by providing the materials and a supportive environment.

Questions To Consider

1. In what ways does the preschooler look different than the toddler?
2. What is meant by fine or gross motor skills?
3. What do children learn as they manipulate objects?
4. What does it mean when children engage in pretend play?
5. What role do adults play in children's learning?

Vocabulary

Read these terms with their definitions before viewing the program.

Classification Organizing objects and experiences by their common characteristics.

Fine motor skills Small body movements such as writing, drawing, cutting.

Gross motor skills Large body movements such as running, climbing, throwing.

One-to-one correspondence (or matching) The recognition that one group of things has the same number of things as another group.

Preoperational thought The ability to think symbolically, to form mental representations of objects and events that are not being immediately experienced.

Preschooler The child during the stage of development between the ages of 3 to 6 years.

Symbolic representation The representation of an object through language, pictures, actions or print.

Instructional Objectives

When you have successfully completed this module, you will be able to:

1. Identify the changes in size, shape, and coordination which take place during the preschool years.
2. List the motor skills and fine motor skills gained during the preschool years.
3. Describe the way the preschool child learns.
4. Recognize the activities which foster the development of math skills during the preschool years.
5. Describe those activities during which the preschool child uses symbolic representation.
6. Describe the adult role in facilitating learning during the preschool years.

Self-Test

After studying the objectives and watching the video, take the self-test to check your progress.

1. Next to the following descriptions check those which best describe the typical preschooler.

- a. the trunk is shorter than the toddlers'
- b. fingers, arms and legs lengthen
- c. the preschool child has a "pot bellied" look
- d. the preschooler's head appears smaller in relation to the rest of the body
- e. the face loses the chubby cheeks of the toddler
- f. the brow is less prominent than during toddlerhood
- g. eye-hand and hand-hand coordination have improved
- h. the child gains height but weighs less than a toddler

2. List three gross motor skills and three fine motor skills gained during the preschool years:

Gross Motor

- a.
- b.
- c.

Fine Motor

- a.
- b.
- c.

3. Describe three ways in which children learn

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. From the following list, check those which foster the development of math skills during the preschool years:

- a. singing fingerplays using subtraction
- b. copying rows of numerals to learn to count
- c. reading counting books
- d. completing number tasks in workbooks
- e. cooking tortillas and determining if there is enough for everyone
- f. building with blocks to learn size, shape and balance
- g. filling and pouring to learn volume
- h. cutting out shapes drawn by teacher to learn shape

5. List three activities during which children are using symbolic representation

- a.
- b.
- c.

6. Describe the ways in which adults facilitate learning during the preschool years

- a. materials
- b. environment
- c. adult assistance

Preschooler observation: Experimenting with a pendulum.

Observe the section in the video where the boy is playing with the pendulum. Write in detail the actions the boy performs.

Answer the following question:

1. How many different targets did the boy use with the pendulum?
2. What problem solving behavior did you observe?
3. What did he do when he was successful?

When he failed?

4. What was he learning?