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# Parenting the Preschooler

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/pp/>

## Puppets

Puppets are fun. You can use puppets with your preschooler to:

- teach social skills
- get your child's cooperation
- play together

### Becoming Comfortable Using Puppets

You may feel a little uncomfortable when you first use a puppet. You might worry about being foolish and not being able to think of something to say. Here are some tips from people experienced in using puppets:

- Give your puppet an interesting personality. Puppeteers say that once the puppet has a personality it is much easier to make up things to say.
- If you are having trouble finding the personality of a puppet, dress the puppet in some clothes. It helps to bring out its uniqueness.
- Find out about your puppet's personality by asking your puppet questions such as:
  - What is your name?
  - What do you like to do?
  - What do you dislike?
- Try to make your puppet move around. See if you can get your puppet to:

kiss	bow	twist	dance
jump	run	push	nod
shake	cry	laugh	wave

- Try using your natural voice with an accent or different speech pattern. (Many people who first use a puppet start talking with a very high or low voice which is very tiring and can really strain your voice.)

### Use Puppets to Teach Social Skills

**Positive Things Children Do.** One way to help children learn positive behaviors is to use puppets to act out the positive behaviors. For instance, act out a meal time showing children remembering to say "please" and "thank you." Or act out a time when your child shares with a friend or sibling.

**Act Out Problems in Getting Along with Other Children.** Use puppets to act out something that happened today. If two children were fighting over playing with a truck, act it out. Ask the children to tell you what the puppets might have said or done differently. Take the ideas of the children and have the puppets do what they suggest. Or ask the children for solutions and let the puppet react to their ideas.

**Use What You Learn from the Children.** Puppets allow a child to express feelings by acting out or verbalizing them. You can learn a lot about how your child thinks and feels. What you learn may help you think of things that you can do differently.

**Act Out Stressful Situations.** By acting out stress-ful situations, you can help your child deal with real life stresses. For example, use the puppet to show how others comfort the child who is going to a new play group, facing surgery, or dealing with a crisis.

## Use Puppets to Get Your Child's Cooperation

Puppets can be a fun way to get your child's cooperation. Children love puppets and, best of all, they almost always listen to puppets. For example:

- A bath puppet in the bathtub can make getting clean fun. (Have the puppet give information about what to do—wash behind the ears, rinse off soap bubbles from hands—or actually have the puppet model what the child should do.)
- A puppet in your child's closet can be used to help your child get dressed. (Even children who hate to put on their clothes, may enjoy getting dressed together with their puppet friend.)

Many children have difficulty making the transition from one activity to another. Use a puppet to tell your child it is time to clean up or to go put on a coat. Children are often more willing to do tasks when a puppet does the asking.

## Puppets You Can Make

Puppets don't need to be fancy. Use stuffed animals, dolls or small people figures. Any stuffed animal or doll can be given voice as a puppet. A sock can be an alligator, a paper plate a lion, an old cereal box a robot.

### Finger Puppets

Use a nontoxic washable marker to draw a puppet onto children's fingers.

### Popsicle Stick Puppets

Cut out pictures of people or animals. Mount on heavy paper and glue a popsicle stick on the back.

### Snack Puppets

Make a puppet out of food using a pear, apple, or other fruit. Decorate with raisins, baby carrots, and other foods. After playing with the food puppets, then eat them.

### Paper Sack Puppet

Using crayons or markers, put a face and body onto a lunch bag size paper sack. On the fold at the top of

the sack, make eyes or a mouth that will open and close as the fold is manipulated.

## Sock Puppets

Collect socks that have lost their partners. Help your child decorate their sock puppet.

- Give your puppet teeth! Try cardboard, white felt, buttons, plastic pearls, sponge, paper cup.
- Give your puppet eyes! Try buttons with a felt center, styrofoam, plastic spoons, pom pom balls, pasta shells, ping pong balls.
- Give your puppet a nose! Try styrofoam peanuts, egg cartons, old knit glove finger, button.
- Give your puppet ears! Try peanut shells, styrofoam peanuts, buttons, shells.

Sew things on well, so a child won't chew things off and swallow them.

When your child makes a puppet from recyclables, relax. Don't give many directions. When your preschooler tells you it's a face, accept it as a face.

## Puppet Stage

You can make a stage for puppet shows where you and your child can create stories and act them out. Some ideas are:

- large cardboard box with a hole cut in the side
- small table, turned on its side
- sheet tacked across a doorway or between two trees
- suspend a broom between two chairs and drape a cloth over the broom
- shoe box with bottom cut out (great for finger puppets or small people figures)

### Source:

"How to Make and Use Puppets" Better Kid Care Satellite, Pennsylvania State University, December, 1999.

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