

## Working with Wood

### Working with Wood is Good for Kids

Your preschooler will benefit in many ways by working with wood. Woodworking:

- teaches valuable life skills
- improves eye-hand coordination
- gives an opportunity to be creative
- leads to greater self-confidence
- develops problem solving skills
- teaches how to plan ahead
- offers learning such as comparing and contrasting size and shape
- may channel aggressive energy
- helps children feel powerful in a new and positive way
- gives the opportunity to learn how to work safely with tools

### Pleasures of Woodworking Can Start Early

Have your child begin learning about woodworking by playing with plastic tools. Through this play, they learn the names of common tools and begin to understand how they are used. Many children enjoy watching adults working with tools and imitating them in their play.

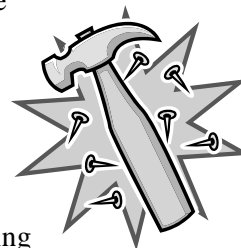
Most preschoolers can learn how to use some basic hand tools (not power tools) such as hammers, saws, and drills. Most children of this age can understand the safety rules but require close adult supervision so that they remember to follow them. Show your preschooler how to hold the tool properly. If you mark where to hold the handle of a hammer with a piece of tape, for example,

children learn to hold the handle far enough back from the head. Or a piece of tape around a saw handle reminds children not to hold the blade. Good activities involve using hand tools to cut, hammer, and drill wood scraps.

Children also enjoy sanding wood. Give them a block of wood covered with sandpaper and let them sand a pinewood block. A coarse grit of sandpaper (80 or 100 grit) lets your preschooler see progress.

Hammering is a good and simple activity. Tips:

- Secure pinewood blocks with a C-clamp while your preschooler hammers.
- Hold the nail in a pincher-type clothespin to avoid hitting your or your child's fingers.



Some hammering options are:

- Give your child roofing nails that are short with large heads to hammer into a pinewood block.
- Use colored thumbtacks instead of nails. Children can usually “start” the thumbtack with their fingers and finish with the hammer.
- Let your child use a plastic hammer to pound golf tees into a styrofoam block. (*Hint: Cover the styrofoam block with burlap fabric to prevent pieces of styrofoam breaking off.*)

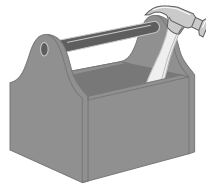
There is no need to make a project with preschool children because children feel as satisfied with a block of wood filled with drill holes and nails as they do with a fancy bird feeder.

As children continue to improve their hand tool skills, you might try sawing. With patience and guidance, many preschoolers can cut through pieces of wood. Japanese saws that cut on the pull stroke are easier to use than saws that cut on the push. A mitre box to hold the wood piece can be helpful for those early sawing experiences.

Don't expect your child to follow a project model. Children of this age have many of their own ideas and become frustrated if their project doesn't match the ideal. It's better to let them create whatever they like.

In talking to your child about their woodworking, try saying, "Tell me about what you made." This gets your child talking and you'll discover that the wood is a car, boat, airplane, or person.

### Tool Rules



Start your woodworking sessions with a discussion of the rules. Talk about safety and the rules before, during, and after woodworking.

Here are some ideas for keeping safe. Together with your child, you may want to add to the tool rule list.

1. **Wear safety goggles.** Tell the children the reason is to protect eyes. Goggles should wrap around and have air vents so they won't fog. Swimming goggles/masks can be used if you cannot find child size safety goggles.
2. **Handle tools carefully.** Explain to your preschooler that tools are heavy and/or sharp.
3. **Always ask a grownup for help.** Working with wood is an activity to do with your child. Be available to watch and guide your child's wood play.
4. **Tools must stay in the woodworking area.** Set aside an area to do your woodworking. Let your child know that the *real* tools stay in the woodworking area. Plastic play tools are for playing outside the woodworking area.

5. **Ask for a tool if you need one.** Tell children the reason you ask for a tool is that you can hurt yourself if you grab a tool. Demonstrate carrying and holding tools by their handles.
6. **Provide a strong and stable work surface.** A workbench or table can be fine, but try to make the work surface level and child-height. An old table cut down to about 25" is good. You can increase the stability by placing the work surface up against a wall to prevent movement.

These early years are a wonderful time to introduce your preschooler to woodworking. Learning names of tools, how to hold them, the work that can be done with tools are life lessons.

Reading about woodworking can be as much fun as doing it. Here are some woodworking books to share with children:

Tool Book by Gail Gibbons, Holiday House, New York. 1992.

Workshop by Andrew Clements and David Wisniewski, Clarion, New York. 1999.

Tools by Ann Morii, Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, New York. 1992.

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*A personal story:*

*Tools are a great gift. My husband created a Christmas family ritual by giving each child a toolbox when they were preschoolers. Each year he gave another tool to add to the toolbox.*

*Whenever the child needed something fixed, he would have them get their toolbox and use their own tools. They not only owned tools, but learned how to use them. Now our children are in college and have frequently mentioned how much they have valued and used their tools.*

*In fact, one son said he'd like a bigger toolbox next year.*

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**Source:**

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