

preschooler



## little know-it-alls

If your child always insists she's right, we've got ways to encourage her curiosity without bursting her bubble. *by HEIDI SMITH LUEDTKE, PH.D.*

When my 4-year-old son, Carson, found a small black pod at the Jersey Shore, he was ecstatic and scooped it right up. "It's a lemon-shark egg case!" he shouted. "I saw it on my *Wild Kratts* show!" I'd never seen a pod like that before, but since the shark thing seemed pretty unlikely, I suggested it might have fallen from a tree. That didn't go over well. Carson restated his findings with the certainty of a marine biologist, shot me a smarty-pants look, and ran off, specimen in hand, to impress his dad.

Like most preschoolers, my son thinks he is an expert at everything. After all, 3- and 4-year-olds love feeling grown up and smart, and sharing their discoveries about the world around them. All of this grandstanding is sweet, but it's hard to know when to correct kids' facts and when to indulge their creative genius (and burgeoning ego). I asked the experts how to deal with some common know-it-all situations.

### spouting totally wild "factoids"

Your child might insist that your miniature weenie dog weighs 80 pounds or that meat-eating dinosaurs loved chicken nuggets. The facts may be wrong, but they prove that your child's making connections in her mind using her limited knowledge about the world, says David Bjorklund, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Florida Atlantic University, in Boca Raton. Perhaps she learned in a book that some dinos ate meat, and you told her at dinner recently that chicken nuggets are meat. Obviously, then, dinos ate nuggets! Preschoolers also sometimes confuse facts and fantasy: "Kids this age don't necessarily distinguish between what really happened and what they imagined or what they wish for," says Dr. Bjorklund.

You may be tempted to set the record straight. But experts say it's okay to let inaccuracies go for now. Try responding with curiosity. Say, "That's interesting. Tell me more about it!" Or go online together and search for information that expands her knowledge. An inquisitive approach encourages your child's thinking and shows her that her ideas are significant, notes Dr. Bjorklund.

### overestimating his brainpower

Scientists have proven what parents know firsthand from being around their puffed-up preschoolers. In research conducted by Amanda Lipko-Speed, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology at The College at Brockport, in New York, preschoolers were shown ten pictures of common objects and then asked to predict how many images they would remember after the pics were covered up. On average, children believed they'd remember around eight but actually recalled only about three. And despite falling short in the last round, the kids made the same too-high predictions for

LEILA MENDEZ/GETTY IMAGES.

each new set of pictures. This optimism is a good thing because it keeps little ones from getting discouraged, says Dr. Bjorklund. “Kids who overestimate their skills improve more over time because they want to keep practicing and get better,” he says.

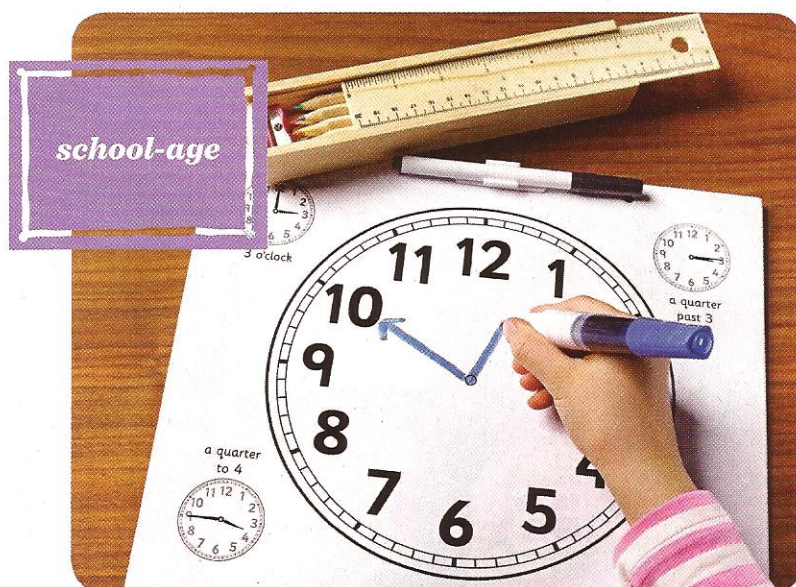
Audacious self-assessments won't last forever, so just roll with them and let learning take its course. Research shows that by age 6, kids' predictions are more accurate. But they're still likely to be biased in a positive direction. “Most of us believe we're a little brighter than we really are,” says Dr. Bjorklund. “That's part of having healthy self-esteem.”

### thinking she's a superhero

Preschoolers also commonly overestimate their physical abilities. “Many broken bones and scraped elbows happen because kids dress up like a superhero and try to fly,” says Dr. Bjorklund. However, taking physical risks teaches preschoolers about how their body moves through space. Kids build muscle, improve coordination, and explore concepts like speed, motion, and gravity.

You can help protect your child with a few precautions. “The majority of accidental injuries in this age group are from falls—out of windows, off monkey bars, down stairs, and off of furniture,” says Bindi Naik-Mathuria, M.D., a pediatric trauma surgeon at Texas Children's Hospital, in Houston. So use gates around stairs; put in window guards; and install wall straps on furniture and large televisions. You can also teach your child skills she'll need to be safe, such as how to use a crosswalk and look both ways for cars.

My own little know-it-all sometimes understands more than I think. When we compared that pod to photos online, we learned it was the egg sac of an undulate ray—indeed more like a shark than the tree I thought. He just might be a scientist someday! 😊



school-age

## beat the clock

Teaching your kid how to tell time seems complicated until you break it down into these six key steps. *by MAUREEN SANGIORGIO*

When your child knows how to tell time or at least grasps some of the basics, your life will be so much easier. She'll know what five more minutes with her friend at the playground really means. She'll even be able to remind you that you need to leave soon for soccer practice. Many kids start to become curious about time at around kindergarten age. “When yours does, seize the opportunity to start familiarizing her with the concept,” says Florence Harper, lead teacher in the early-childhood-education program at Burrville Elementary School, in Washington, D.C. “But don't begin by trying to teach her to read a clock. There are a lot of skills kids need to master first.” We've got ways to give them a hand.

### zero in on hours and minutes

You can help your child get a feel for how long a minute lasts by having fun with a timer, suggests Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D., the author of *A Mandate for Playful*

*Learning in Preschool*. Start by saying, “Let's play this game for one minute, until the timer goes off.” After you do that for a while, set the timer but put it out of sight. He can tell you when he thinks the minute is over. If he