

INVITATION TO

INDEPENDENCE

FOUR/FIVE YEARS OLD

Crossroads Families  
A ministry of Crossroads Church

How does it feel to have a preschooler? It is a strange feeling to know that this child who has been totally dependent on you for their entire life is starting preschool. Before you panic and lock them in their room to keep them home forever, we want to assure you that it will be okay. This is such an exciting time for a child, and we want to help you prepare them the best you can.

So, how do you help your child get ready for school when it seems like some days they barely function by themselves? One thing I've realized is that kids this age thrive when given some independence. This year's Family Experience is Called "Invitation to Independence." They love it. I'm not saying get them ready to be completely on their own, but we can start small. We have three Kick-starters to help you give your child independence. These include independence at home, with friends and with themselves.

You want them to succeed at school, and it's up to you to prepare them for what lies ahead. The Kick-starters will help you build a foundation to begin this year's Family Experience and are expounded upon in our Kick-starter Guide. They will have questions and activities for you to do with your child that set up the Family Experience.

Giving your child some responsibility at home will not only show them that you believe in what they can do,

but it will give them a sense of accomplishment and pride in themselves. I know you may want them to stay your baby forever, but they need to be able to do some things by themselves. You don't want them to have to go through life with you tying their shoes and opening their lunch for them! Help them by giving them personal independence.

The Parent Guide will give you instructions and ideas for carrying out the Family Experience for age 4. One idea is to give your child a gift that shows them you are excited for their new journey of starting school. That gift could be any item that they can take to school with them. Maybe it's their new backpack or perhaps their lunchbox. Take this opportunity to show your child how much you believe in them!

Raising an independent child may be hard to do, but you are giving them a gift. They may only use that lunchbox for a little while, but independence is something they will carry with them for a lifetime.

## Invitation to Independence

This baby that was completely dependent upon you just a few short years ago to feed, bath, cloth, etc is getting ready to venture into a world where he/she will be responsible for doing these things independently. What do we need to do to make sure they're ready. **How will we know if they're ready?** This Family Experience will help your family work toward knowing you've done all you can to prepare your child through an invitation to independence.

## Kickstarter 1: Independence At Home

Jim Fay, who cofounded Love and Logic, says we all need to feel needed and know we're making a contribution. The only way for children to have this same need met is through chores. Chores at home give a child a sense of worth and belonging. Each person in a family has a different role to play.

When it comes to children doing chores, even us as adults doing chores around the house, it's a picture of us putting others needs above our own. We wash our children's clothes so they'll have clean ones. We cook food so bodies are fueled to move and grow. Chores are a way to serve our family. When you look at Jesus you see the perfect picture of someone who came to serve. Read Philippians 2:3-11 now.

Our children at the age of 4 and 5 are perfectly capable of helping around the house. Maybe you've already given your child some chores around the house, maybe not. Here are a few things to remember when it comes to setting your child up for successful independence at home with chores:

1. Choose developmentally appropriate chores. Children can make beds, set tables, put up clean clothes, etc.
2. Realize they won't do it exactly like you do. It's OK if the bed has a few wrinkles in it!
3. Be consistent. If you want your child to make his/her bed, make sure that's expected every day. If you do it some days, and expect it others, it sends inconsistent messages to your child about what he/she needs to do.
4. Show your child exactly what you want them to do. If you want them to clean their room, do it with them a couple times, talking them through each step. Your son/daughter may not think to clean off the top of the dresser. If that's important to you, make sure you show your child exactly what you mean by "clean your room."

Start somewhere with helping your child have independence at home. When he/she feels independent at home, it will carry over into other areas of his/her life. This is the best and safest place to start. Empower your child to make a difference at home, to contribute to the family and feel needed in the process.

## Kickstarter 2: Independence With Friends

Your child may not be ready for sleepovers with friends, but you've probably experienced playdates. God created us to be social beings, so let's set our children up for success with friendships by helping them choose wise friends.

**Proverbs 13:20** says, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

As you talk with your child about choosing friends, ask him/her, "Does \_\_\_\_\_ make wise choices?" Your child may not be able to decipher if a person is wise, but they'll know whether or not that person makes wise choices.

We also want our child to BE a good friend. How do we make sure we've done our part to help our child BE a good friend? John 15:12-17 gives us a glimpse from the words of Jesus. Basically, Jesus says that a good friend loves and is willing to lay down his life for another (putting the needs of others above our own).

As a parent, we can help our child have independence with his/her friendships by teaching them to be a good friend and how to choose good friends. We won't be teaching these things once. It's a lifelong process of reminding our children to choose friends well and choose to be a good friend.

## Kickstarter 3: Personal Independence

Can he tie his shoes? Can she zip the zipper? Can he open his juice box? Can she wipe well? These questions and more are the ones we ask ourselves when assessing if our child is becoming independent. The easy part about all these is that we can actually practice them BEFORE our child goes to kindergarten.

Although it's hard to find verses in the Bible that say, "A child should know how to tie his shoes," or "Every child should be able to open her own juice box," there is something in the Bible about doing things to our best.

**<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, <sup>24</sup> since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

**COLOSSIANS 3:23-24**

Perseverance is one of the best character traits we can teach our children when it comes to independence. Yes, teaching them to tie their shoes takes a while, but it matters. It's something he/she needs to know how to do. We would all do well to teach our children that even in the mundane, they're doing for the Lord.

Take some time to practice on the ones with which your child needs the most work. Doing this now will set your child up for success when it comes to personal independence.

## Independence Family Experience

Through the 3 Kickstarters, you've worked through the different areas of independence that are developmentally appropriate for your preschool aged child; independence at home, with friends, and personal independence (all those things he/she will have to do for himself/herself at school). Realize every child develops differently. Some children will do better socially than organizationally, therefore his/her independence with friendship will come more naturally than his/her personal independence.

We want to celebrate the independence of your preschooler, letting him/her know she is ready for kindergarten with a gift he/she can use at school. This item could be a new backpack, lunchbox, sleep mat, etc. It would be great to have this item personalized and one that can be kept for your child's life. How cool to send them away to college with their first backpack?

Another way to make this moment special is to have family and friends text a video message to your child. You can collect all these on your phone and share them with your child when you present them with their school gift. The video message can include a kindergarten memory from that person or encouragement to your child as they get ready to enter kindergarten.

You can send your friends and family an email/text saying,

*"To honor \_\_\_\_\_ as he/she gets ready for kindergarten, will you take a minute to send him/her a video of you telling a story from your kindergarten year OR a video encouraging him/her as he/she gets ready to start school?"*

If these videos are texted to you, you can show them to your child from your phone. If emailed, you can put them all together in a file on your computer to show your child. These videos will provide great encouragement as your child gains their independence.

You can rest well knowing you've done all you can to assure your child's success through this invitation to independence.

## Physical

**Gross Motor:** Move with enough control to perform more complex tasks. Maintain balance on a two-by-four beam; climb with more agility on the jungle gym; jump with confidence in ability from low platform; develop coordination of moving arms and legs in order to pump on a swing; run up to ball and kick it while maintaining balance; gallop, wiggle, and tiptoe along with classmates watching and imitating movements; throw a variety of objects overhand with increasing accuracy.

**Fine Motor:** Use hands with increasing control and precision for a variety of purposes. Easily grasps hold of writing tools such as pencils, crayons, paint brushes and markers; continue to fit together a wide variety of items such as connecting blocks, pop beads, stacking rings, bristle blocks, etc.; shape play dough or clay into more intricate/representational creations; experiment with scissors; experiment with fitting a variety of objects into a defined space; continue to experiment with building and designing familiar structures with blocks.

**Self Help:** Begin to perform self-help skills and follows basic health and safety rules. Use toilet independently; put on own hat and coat; wash and dry own hands with verbal prompts and support; untie shoes, button and unbutton with little or no assistance; know basic safety rules and follow them with verbal reminder; begin to look both ways before crossing the street; begin to understand how to dial 911 for an emergency; begin to avoid dangers such as hot stoves and sharp knives.

## Social and Emotional

**Self Concept:** Show positive self esteem. Recognize own special interests and abilities (child announces “I can run really fast!”); expresses pride in accomplishments. Verbalize feelings, needs and wants. Talk to self and others (including dolls, puppets, imaginary friends) about what he/she is thinking about and how he/she feels; continue to use physical ways of expressing self when feelings are intense. Show greater comfort with independence and increased feelings of self-worth. Take pride in accomplishments (“I did the puzzle by myself!”); develop a sense of humor; can laugh at self and others when small accidents happen

**Self Control:** Manage own behavior with increasing skill. Gain new understanding about other people’s feelings to guide the way he manages his own behavior (may decide to share a toy after another child begins to cry). Begin to demonstrate an understanding of social expectations. Cover mouth when sneezing, hold door for another child, share blocks with another child.

**Cooperation:** Engage in cooperative play with other children. Can include give and take in play with others; sometimes work out problems encountered during play with others. Begin to develop more complex pretend play. May imitate cultural or family routines or rituals (going to church, visiting aunt in the hospital, riding the bus). Show increasing willingness to work out problems with peers. More willing to talk about problems and issues to work out solutions; participate in transitions and assist with routines (e.g., help other child clean up spilled water).

## Relational Spiritual

These are the philosophers of the human race. They ask the big questions that have puzzled people from the beginning of time. And they ask one question after another, often following our best answers with an innocent, but frustrating “Why?” To make things even more challenging, they expect simple, clear answers to their short, but deeply profound questions. They think about God in very literal, physical terms, and it frustrates them to receive abstract, “spiritual” answers. Give the shortest, correct answer possible.

Ask if the answer was helpful or if they want to know more. Avoid the temptation to explain all the issues the child has raised. When it’s not possible to give a simple answer, point out that God is so great and there are some things that no one really understands. Then state one or two essential truths about God that we do know for sure.

### RESPONSE

Our hope is that during the past year, your four or five year old has learned how to help around the house, Be a good friend, and has learned to be more independent.

In order to encourage other parents, we would love to hear about your experience teaching your child to be more independent and how that experience has impacted your relationship with God and your preschooler.

Feel free to send us an email, make a video, or send us a copy of your story, Bible verse, song, or prayer so that we can better encourage other parents. Thank you for taking this journey with us and we pray that God continues to work in your life and the life of your child.

#### SEND RESPONSES TO:

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