

Helping Your Child Get the Most from a Zoom Class

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Welcome to the world of online early childhood education! It's new for many of us, so here are some tips to help support your child's learning in this new environment.

Getting Zoom all set up

A few days before your child's first class, get Zoom all set up, and spend some time practicing on your own before trying to teach it to your child. You can use Zoom on a smartphone, tablet, or computer. My first choice for kids is a laptop with a touch screen – the bigger screen lets them see everything well, and they can tap on commands with their fingers. You'll need to install the Zoom app. On a mobile device, find it free in the Google Play store or the Apple store. On a computer, go to <https://zoom.us/support/download>. Zoom will start downloading. When it's done, choose "open file."

Practice on Zoom Yourself

Now, go to <http://zoom.us/test>. Click on a big blue button that says "Join" meeting. The test meeting will walk you through testing your speakers and your microphone, then you'll "Join with Computer Audio." In the meeting, practice muting, unmuting, chatting, finding the participants' list and "raising your hand". Learn these skills at: <https://janelledurham.com/zoom-basics-joining-a-meeting/>

If you know someone who knows how to use zoom, or is willing to learn, do some practice meetings. Go to <https://zoom.us>. Create a free account. Click on "host a meeting." In the meeting, go to the participant list, click on "invite", copy the invitation to email to your zoom buddy. They join the meeting, and you can talk as long as you want. (For 3+ people, you'll be limited to 40 minutes.)

Introduce Your Child to Zoom

Once you know how to use Zoom, teach your child by doing a test meeting, or ideally, a practice meeting with one of their favorite people. (For fun ideas for what they could do on the call, check out: <https://goooddayswithkids.com/2020/07/31/young-children-and-zoom/>.) This call may just last a few minutes, if your child loses interest. If so, try again a few more times to build attention span.

Teach them to un-mute. Many teachers will ask children to unmute for portions of the class so they can engage in a conversation and ask or answer questions. (This is helpful for language learning and social skill development.) At times, the teacher may need to mute the children. How to unmute: On a touch screen, tap the screen to bring up the command bar, then tap on the mic icon, usually on the bottom left. Or, if they hold down the space bar, they are unmuted – when they let go, they re-mute.

Setting the Stage

Think about whether you expect to participate in the class with your child, or if you are thinking they will be on their own while you try to work, or get things done around the home. And, be sure you know what the teacher is expecting. Some programs (like the parent-toddler classes I teach for Bellevue College) absolutely expect parents to be a part of the class experience. Others (like the classes I teach for Outschool) do not allow adults to be on-screen during a class, though you can sit next to your child, just off-screen, and I think most parents do for their 3 and 4 year olds.

If you'll be using Zoom on a desktop computer, make sure there's a little space around you, because preschool classes may include movement activities like dancing around or spinning in circles. Make sure there's a comfortable place for your child to sit. They may love sitting on your lap, or may prefer

sitting in their own chair next to your chair. If you have a portable device, think about where in the house would be best for your child to sit for class. Note: the stronger your internet signal, the better the Zoom experience. To test how good it is in different parts of the house, go to <http://fast.com>. It will test your speed – about 800kbps – 1.0 Mbps will *work*, but the higher the number, the better.

Virtual backgrounds? When I teach, I find it interesting to see the child's actual home, and it can help me engage them in conversation about the things around them. However, I understand there are many reasons some parents might prefer not to have their home seen in the background. You could set up the device somewhere there's a blank wall behind your child. Or, use a virtual background. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background>

Before the call, gather anything you'll want to use during the call: snacks or fidgets if you'll use those (see next section) plus anything the teacher has asked you to bring. Some teachers may ask children to bring instruments, or show & tell items, or paper and crayons. You'll want it nearby so that no one has to step away from the computer during the call - that might cause the child to lose interest.

Although certainly many people attend Zoom calls in their pajamas, I would recommend that you have them dress as if they were attending an in-person class. It's practice for the real world.

Plan to join 5 minutes before class time to be sure you're ready to go when they start. Many classes have a waiting room set up, so you may see "please wait for the host to start the meeting." While you wait, prepare the child. Talk about what will happen and how long the class will be. Remind them who will be there, and what they did together last time.

During the Call

One of the big benefits to a preschool experience, whether in-person or online, is to help a child learn about social rules and expectations. We want them to practice being quiet when asked, taking turns, speaking up when asked, sitting still when needed, or being active when that's what the class is doing. It's easy during an online class to be lax on all the social rules (e.g. thinking it's fine if they're yelling because they're on mute), but then you're missing a learning opportunity for your child. So, try to encourage them to participate in the same way you would encourage at an in-person class. If they miss the teacher's directions or aren't following along, repeat the directions and support participation.

That said, don't expect them to sit perfectly still and silent. Children don't do that at an in-person class! We understand some children need to move a lot. But encourage them to participate as they wiggle. If you sing along and play along, you model for them how to do that. Some may look away from the screen or may wander away to play nearby. That doesn't necessarily mean they're not listening and learning. They may be self-regulating... as they start becoming overloaded and overstimulated, they take a little mental break, and then are able to return and settle down.

Some children focus better if eating a snack while participating - for others, that is distracting. Some children focus better if they have some simple toys nearby to hold and to fidget with during the call. Others find that distracting. If you think these things will help your child to focus, check with the teacher to see if that's OK for their class expectations. (Mute the mic if you'll be eating crunchy food!)

Let the child know when the call is nearing its end. Let them know what the plan is for after the call. This can help them to separate from the call.

In the days after the class, refer back to the class, and talk with your child about what they learned. If the teacher recommended any hands-on activities to follow up, or if you have ideas for activities, be sure to try those. Hands-on, multi-sensory experiences will reinforce what they learned on-screen. Help get them excited about the next class, and their opportunity to see friends and learn more.