

# EARLY LEARNING

## Preschool & Kindergarten Ahead



### READY FOR SCHOOL

It all began the day your baby was born. From the moment of your child's birth, you have shared many firsts – first smile, first tooth, first steps, and first words. Now you are approaching another important first – the first day of preschool or kindergarten. You can help your child by talking together about what to expect.

You can provide opportunities to learn new things and make new friendships. Children who have been introduced to a few basic skills and who can get along well with others are better prepared to have a positive school experience.

#### Ask yourself these questions

- How well does my child play with others?
- Does he/she know how to ask others to play?
- Can he/she share and take turns?
- Is he/she good at asking for help?
- Is he/she good at answering questions?
- Does he/she have good listening skills?
- Can he/she follow simple directions?
- Can he/she express thanks and appreciation?
- Is he/she good at solving simple problems?

You are your child's best teacher. Set aside some time to spend with your child, if you think your child needs help with any of these skills.

#### Six Simple Ways To Help Your Child

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## LISTENING, GETTING ALONG, AND LEARNING HOW TO WORK TOGETHER

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### SOCIAL SKILLS

Strong social skills pave the way for learning. Listening, getting along, and learning how to work together are skills that will last a lifetime.

#### Watch, listen, and learn

Encourage your child to watch other children play. As you watch and listen together, point out how other children take turns and join other children in play. Teach your child the words and simple phrases to say: "Would you like to play with me?" "May I play with that ball too?" Watch children closely and gently step in when a little adult coaching is needed.

#### Teach children how to handle conflict

Teach children what behaviors are okay and not okay. It is not okay to hit or kick. It is okay to use words to say, "I'm mad" or "You hurt my feelings." Teach children how to ask for help and how to say "thank you" and "no thank you."

#### Use books to teach social skills

A great way to talk about sharing and problem solving is with a good book. Many children's books show wonderful examples of how children learn to be friends and get along. Check with your local library for good children's books on this topic.

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### ROUTINES MAKE LEARNING EASIER

Establish some daily activities that become routine. Doing things in a predictable order each day helps children feel secure and adapt more readily to school routines. Establishing a routine also makes it easier for children to develop healthy habits such as washing hands or brushing teeth.

#### Make mealtimes count

Eat snacks or meals at about the same time each day so your child can get used to daily routines. A

good breakfast will help your child focus on learning. Share new ideas and experiences while eating meals together to help your child learn how to talk about new things that are happening at school.

#### Keep regular bedtimes

Routines should also include going to bed at a certain time and getting up at a certain time. You might try getting your child an alarm clock. It is fun to learn to set it at night and shut it off in the morning. A clock can help your child feel a little more independent and make getting up much easier.

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## LEARNING SKILLS

The days your child spends in kindergarten will be filled with learning. You can help prepare your child for that experience by reviewing a few basics such as color or shapes. Use everyday activities as opportunities to teach and learn. Treat each learning opportunity as an adventure and make it fun.

### Talk about colors

Point out red, yellow, blue, green, orange, purple, brown, black, and white wherever you see them. Look for colors in food, clothing, and everyday objects.

### Point out shapes and sizes

There are circles, squares, triangles, ovals, and rectangles all around us. In the supermarket find the biggest box of cereal or the smallest apple.

### Talk about directions, position, and order

Discuss ideas such as up, down, front, back, top, and bottom. Talk about first, second, next, before, and after. This can make a great game, with each of you taking turns following the other person.

### Explore same and different

Sort objects by color, size, or type. Talk about more and less. Encourage your child to sort everyday objects such as silverware, socks, or blocks.

### Identify numbers

Look together for numbers on things around the house – calendars, can labels, rulers, or newspapers.

### Count together

Learning to count works best when a child can touch real objects. Buttons, seeds, rocks, and macaroni are all everyday items that can be counted.

## Teach new words

Expand your child's vocabulary by naming and talking about many things. Use the proper label for things, such as refrigerator, blender, television, alarm clock, and newspaper.

### Help your child learn about books

Choose books that you can first read together, tying the pictures and printed words with spoken words. Beginning readers enjoy familiar stories filled with words they already know that are repeated over and over. Ask your child to predict what will happen next. Encourage him or her to retell the story.

### Help your child learn to recognize printed letters and words

Print your child's name and encourage him or her to copy it. Identify common words in books, signs, or grocery store items.

### Help your child learn to listen

You can take turns telling stories. Play games that involve following directions, repeating sounds, or making up rhymes. Be sure to take advantage of your local library's story time programs for children.

### Encourage basic physical skills

Learning how to use finger and hand muscles helps children develop good writing skills. Give your child opportunities to draw shapes or pictures. Show him or her how to use scissors to cut through one-inch strips of paper or along simple lines. Spend some time at the kitchen table playing with play dough. Provide a space to build with wooden or plastic blocks. Throw and catch a ball together.

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## SELF-HELP SKILLS

School is more than book learning and making new friends. It also is a place for your child to take a new step toward independence. Be sure your child learns a few important self-help skills before school starts.

### Common questions children ask

- How will I find my classroom?
- What do I do if I get lost?
- Where (and what) will I eat?
- Where will I put my coat?
- Where will I go to the bathroom?
- Will I have friends?
- What will I do if I get sick?
- Will I see my brother (or sister)?

### Practice dressing skills

Putting on and taking off coats, shoes, and boots are a big part of every school day. Purchase clothing that is easy to put on, and be sure your child knows how to handle zippers, buttons, and shoe fasteners.

### Teach responsibility

Encourage your child to take responsibility for personal belongings. This will lessen the number of lost mittens, caps, and pencils later on. Learning to clean up after a task is also an important skill.

### Practice washing hands

Many colds and illnesses can be avoided by learning to wash hands before eating, after toileting, and blowing noses.

### Teach safety skills

Practice recognizing stop signs and lights. Learn about crosswalk safety. Go over additional safety rules if your child will be riding a bus or will be near buses or cars dropping off children. Also give reminders to stay on sidewalks and avoid walking in the streets.



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### LOOKING FORWARD

One of the best ways to help your child prepare for school is for you to spend time talking with each other about everyday activities. Sharing information with your child can help him or her to get a better picture of what preschool or kindergarten will be like.

#### Teach emergency information

Your child should know his or her name, address, and phone number and your name(s) too. This will help in case of an emergency.

#### Teach personal safety

Tell your child who will take him or her to school. If there is a change in who picks up the child after school, call the school and have the teacher tell the child the changes. Be certain your child knows never to go with strangers or even people he or she knows unless you or the teacher says it is okay.

#### Talk about familiar activities

Tell your child many of the things that happen at home will happen at school. Playing games, singing songs, reading books, and playing with toys are all part of preschool or kindergarten. There will be many new things, too. The teacher will help your child learn about letters, numbers, and words.

#### Show respect for the teacher

A new person who will play a big part in your child's life is the teacher. Make sure your child understands that the teacher is there to help anytime he or she needs it. Tell your child the teacher will be helping him or her learn new things and meet new children. The teacher will answer questions or solve problems that come along.

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### STAYING IN TOUCH

Starting preschool or kindergarten represents a new stage in your child's life and in your role as a parent. Here are some things that can make your child's school experience easier for both of you.

#### Visit the school

Part of the fear of beginning school is being unfamiliar with what school is like. Plan a visit to the school ahead of time. If possible, visit when

children are there. Take pictures of common areas such as the front entrance, the cafeteria, the library, the office, and even the bathroom.

Many schools encourage families with children entering kindergarten to visit on a special day in the spring or summer before school starts. Contact your local school to find out more.

#### Get to know the teacher

Introduce yourself to your child's teacher. Ask questions about how you can help and support your child's learning. Show that you value your child's education by giving an occasional word of thanks.

#### Share information

No one knows or understands a child quite like a parent. You have much to offer that will help the teacher.

Let the teacher know about events that can affect the way your child acts at school: a new baby, a visiting grandparent, or a child care change.

#### Stay involved

Be a part of your child's school experiences. Learn about the new discoveries he or she is making. Eat lunch with your child on occasion and get to know his or her friends. Working parents stay in touch by volunteering to assist with weekend or evening school events. If your child knows you care about him or her and what happens at school, that first year will be easier.

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