

Getting Ready, Getting Set, Going to Kindergarten

By JoAnn Anderson, Pat Whitaker and Sharon Stephenson

Your role as a parent is very important in getting your child ready for that big step into kindergarten. There is no one skill but a combination of many skills that children are called upon to utilize during kindergarten. All children develop at different rates and as with adults, children have their individual strengths and weaknesses.

All schools have their own kindergarten curriculum, but most agree there are certain areas of a child's development that will make the transition into kindergarten easier.

These areas include:

Social/Emotional Skills

Physical Health/Motor Skills

Language and General Knowledge

Social/Emotional Skills

Social/emotional skills are noted to be among the most important skills for children entering kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers stress the importance of self-control and getting along with others, cooperating and working together, sharing, and showing an interest in peers. These skills lead to being a confident and independent student and are important to academic success in the future. Here are some ways to help develop these skills:

- Be a good role model. Children imitate what they see and hear. Use kind words.
- Set limits for your child. A child's sense of security comes from having consistent rules for behavior with clear boundaries and age-appropriate expectations. This will help them reach their potential within the limits set by your child's teacher.
- Use appropriate discipline. Children whose parents use firm but loving discipline are generally more skilled socially and emotionally to handle the kindergarten experience.
- Have a positive attitude toward learning and school. Your child will share your enthusiasm for learning.
- Listen to your child to see how he/she feels. Help your child be confident in the choices he/she makes. Help when help is needed.

Physical Health/Motor Skills

Good health is vital to school success. Children who do not feel well cannot perform well in school. Some physical skills

are expected to be developed by the time a child enters school. There is a correlation between gross and fine motor skills to later success in reading. Things you can do to facilitate this include:

- Be sure your child has good food, adequate sleep, immunizations, and regular medical and dental care.
- Provide safe places to play. Encourage opportunities to develop both small and large muscles by ball handling, running, jumping, climbing, dancing, coloring, cutting, zipping, and buttoning.

Language/General Knowledge

Experts agree that language is the key to learning. A child who can express his ideas is on the path to success in school.

- Talk with your child so they have opportunities to hear language and learn vocabulary.
- Read to your child to develop a love of books. Studies show that reading to a child 20 minutes every day will help your child be a fluent reader. Make reading materials readily available.
- Provide repetition. Children do not get bored with repetition; instead, it offers an opportunity to gain confidence in new skills.
- Listen to your child as he talks with you. You will demonstrate how to listen in class. Let your child talk about a topic he has selected to encourage him to talk longer.
- Teach your child to follow directions. Start with one or two simple directions at a time and increase to three then four. For example, "Get your coat, put it on, fasten the zipper."
- Encourage your child to question. Ask questions that require explaining rather than one-word responses. Have your child answer his/her own questions to engage in independent thinking and oral expression. Questioning promotes an interest in learning.

The foundation for formal school learning begins at home. You are your child's first and most important teacher. You will be forming a partnership with your child's school. For your child's future success, be an active part of his/her educational team.

MCGCP Academic Development - Reviewed 9/11



Provided for you by the:

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