

Important Skills to Develop in Early Years Children

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I could not possibly cover all the important skills young children need in order to flourish because that would require a lengthy document covering all areas of the EYFS. However, I often get asked about skills children need before they begin school. This is a tricky area. Before I give some suggestions, I think it would be useful for me to firstly stress that all children are uniquely different and will develop at different rates. A good analogy to illustrate this point is 'Popcorn'. To make it, you simply put oil into a pan and add the corn kernels, pop on a lid and wait for the delicious magic to happen. Some pop quickly, others more slowly and some pop right at the end when you least expect it! Whatever the stage of the 'pop', the popcorn tastes just as delicious and exactly the same. My point is that children are very much like this, they will all pop in the end! It is not the speed of development that is important, children do not learn in a linear way. They need time to re-fine skills, re-visit activities to consolidate their understanding, build resilience, self-efficacy, adapt, and bounce back when things are difficult.

With the above firmly in mind, the following are skills that children would benefit from having before starting school. It is not designed to be a tick list, simply some pointers and suggested ways in which you could support your child.

1. To be focused on a story and listen well without becoming distracted. You could ask open ended questions after the story like 'I wonder what happened next?'
2. To be independent with self-help skills. For example, being able to take jumpers on and off, and being able to go to the toilet, pull the flush and wash hands with soap independently. Use words of encouragement 'you are really trying, well done, you will soon be able to do that by yourself.'
3. To be emotionally aware of their feelings and other children's. Help your child to use their words to describe how they feel and offer key vocabulary to support them. For example, 'You look upset, would you like to tell me what happened so I can help?' Before starting school, talk about sharing, turn taking and getting along with others. Telling a trusted adult about what has happened is better than physically hurting someone in retaliation.

4. To understand the word 'stop' and that such a phrase might be used to prevent danger.
5. To talk in sentences and follow simple instructions.
6. To be able to recognise your name, not necessarily to write it, although that is a helpful skill if your child is ready.
7. To talk about school in a positive way only if your child brings up the subject. Please do not make a huge thing of going to big school. This can cause anxiety, so sound very 'matter of fact' about it.
8. To ask a member of staff for help. Teach your child that it's ok to ask if you need help, especially on the playground or in situations that are unfamiliar. The school family are there to help and support your child.