

GETTING
READY FOR
Kindergarten



A Guide for Parents



"In every task the most important thing is the beginning, and especially when you have to deal with something young and tender."

- PLATO, *the Republic*

GETTING “READY”

By law, a child is eligible to attend kindergarten in North Carolina if s/he she has turned five years old on or before August 31 of the year he or she enters kindergarten.

However, we know that there is more to a child experiencing success when s/he starts school than age alone. On the following pages we will describe some of these contributing factors and ways you as a parent can support your child's readiness for kindergarten.



THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Family is the most important source of care, teaching, and providing for a child. You are your child's first teacher and will ALWAYS be the most important one. What you do and the way you treat others will set a model for your child to follow. If you approach learning as important and worthwhile, your child will too.

Your interest and involvement will help promote your child's learning. You can use your everyday activities to help your child gain skills and abilities that will support his/her success when s/he starts school.



HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN

Each child comes to kindergarten with his or her own individual pattern and timing of growth, personality, learning style, and family and cultural background. No two children are alike. Each child is unique and wonderful. However, the way young children learn is very much the same.

THE WAY YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY ADULTS (AND EVEN OLDER CHILDREN) LEARN.

Adults have a memory "bank" that is filled with concepts and understanding that have developed over years of experience with people, places, things, and ideas. In addition, adults have the capacity to think analytically. As a result, we can learn using paper, pencils, and books.

- Young children have not had the many experiences we have had. Their little memory "banks" are not very full. Their "banks" are filled by having lots of opportunities for hands-on experiences with real materials. Young children learn through play. They learn best when the activities they are involved in are interesting, fun, and meaningful.
- Young children learn through their five senses. The more senses a child uses in an activity, the more likely s/he will be able to understand the world, how it works and remember what h/she has learned! Provide your child many opportunities to taste, smell, hear, touch, and see.

Did you know?

Good preschool and kindergarten teachers have long known that young children learn best when they are active.

But now brain research supports this belief. Movement is one activity that connects all levels of brain function and allows the two separate hemispheres of the brain to work together. For young children, physical activity is the **ONLY** way the two sides of the brain communicate with each other. Allowing children to move often and freely will strengthen this communication within your child's brain and help the brain development.

MUCH MORE THAN A, B, C, AND 1, 2, 3

Children learn and grow as whole people not in isolated parts. Children learn best when their physical and emotional needs are met, and they feel safe and secure. The child's self-image strongly affects his/her eagerness and ability to learn.

The National Education Goals Panel has identified five important areas of development to consider in determining a child's readiness for kindergarten. They include:

- Health and physical development
- Social development and emotional well-being
- Language development and communication
- General knowledge and cognition (thinking)
- Approaches towards learning.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Children must have their basic needs for health, rest, nutrition and feeling safe before they can learn.

- Make sure your child has regular checkups and vaccinations.
- Regular visits to the dentist and daily tooth brushing are so important.
- Establish a bedtime routine and a certain time for bed to ensure your child gets enough rest (10-12 hours).
- Junk food is fine occasionally, but healthy food builds better minds and bodies! Encourage healthy eating by modeling it yourself, fixing nutritious, balanced meals and having healthy snack foods in your home.

*Physical exercise helps your child develop balance, strength, and coordination.
It serves as a release for all that boundless energy!*

- Take your child to the park to play on the outdoor equipment.
- When you have access to stairs let your child climb up and down.
- Provide opportunities for your child to ride tricycles, run, jump, hop, climb, to balance, throw, catch, and experiment with balls.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

For children coming into kindergarten, having some mastery of the art of making friends, sharing, cooperating, and getting along with others can be more important than knowing shapes, letters, or numbers.

The best way to develop these skills is through supervised play with other children.

- If your child is not used to being around other children, plan opportunities for him/her to interact with children, such as a play group, story time at the library, playing at the park, or inviting the children over to your house to play.
- Talk to your child about what it means to be a friend and show him/her ways to be a friend.
- If your child is not used to staying with other adults, give him/her some chances to do this over the summer. Such experiences now can help your child's comfort level when it comes time to separate from parents on the first day of school.
- Play simple board games or card games with your child like Hi Ho! Cherry-O, Candyland or Old Maid. This helps him/her learn to take turns and begin to follow a few rules. Playing board or card games also builds attention span and ability to focus on one activity.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Having a positive self-image and sense of worth is critical for a child. Such well-being comes from receiving positive feedback, encouragement, and guidance from the important adults in the child's life.

The goal of discipline is to help a child understand acceptable ways of behaving so that s/he can grow to become self-determined. It should not be simply by punishment. Mature behavior and self-control can take years and lots of practice to develop. Young children need lots of support and reminders to behave in socially acceptable ways.

- Model the type of behavior you want and expect from your child.
- Remember to always let your child know you love him/her even if you dislike your child's behavior.
- Catch your child being good and praise him/her for making positive behavior choices.
- Set a few simple rules.
- Be consistent!
- Let your child know it is okay to have feelings and help him/her express feelings into words.
- Assist your child in finding appropriate ways to deal with angry feelings. "I know you are feeling angry with your sister, but I can't let you hurt her. Tell her with words what she did and how it made you feel."
- Give lots of hugs and smiles and spend time together.

Are routines important?

VERY! Children love surprises, but day in and day out they do better with some structure and routine. Being able to anticipate what comes next provides a sense of security to the young child and makes the child calmer. Therefore, good teachers have regular schedules and routines.

If you have a regular schedule at home and establish routines for bedtime and in the morning before school, these times will be more relaxed for both you and your child.

APPROACHES TOWARDS LEARNING

Everyone wants his/her child to start school confident and eager to learn.

When a child starts school, his/her attitude towards learning and interest in school depends on the feedback from adults focused on the efforts of the child. Adult feedback should include specific praise on areas of strength for the child. For example, “You did a great job coloring this picture! Your choice of colors really makes the picture beautiful.”

- Support your child's exploration and curiosity.
- Encourage your child to attempt new tasks and develop interests.
- Encourage your child to his or her best, not to be the best.
- Attempts and effort need to be recognized and praised. This will give a child the confidence to try other things and not fear failure. Such support also encourages your child to take initiative.
- Try new things yourself. Talk about successes and times things didn't work out quite as you had planned.
- Most parents of four-year-olds think they might go crazy if they hear, "Why?" one more time! However, discussing these questions with your child at least most of the time, let your child know that it is okay to be curious and ask for information.
- Provide opportunities, props, and materials for your child to express creativity and imagination through a variety of avenues such as art, music, movement, make believe, pretend, and play.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The development of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is critical to children's success throughout their school years and the rest of their lives. It is tied not only to reading but to each subject and everything they will learn and do in school. Effective communication is learned through meaningful experiences, not drills. Maintaining a child's home language is important.

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

It is valuable for your child to be able to express in words his/her needs, wants, thoughts, and feelings when your child starts kindergarten.

- Talk together as much as possible. Get down on your child's level and listen carefully as s/he shares experiences, ideas, and feelings.
- Ask your child questions that require more than a yes or no answer: "What do you think might happen if...?" "How would you feel?"
- Describe things that you are doing and explain why or describe what your child is doing. "Look how high you are swinging!" "The road is slick now because it just rained so I need to drive slower."
- Introduce new words to your child as you experience everyday things. "Can you feel the ridges in the potato chip?"
- Sing lots of songs and learn lots of nursery rhymes.
- Play fun games to practice listening skills and following directions. For example: "Simon says, walk to the door and jump 2 times!"

What about ABC's?

We all learn best when something has meaning to us. Learning the letters of the alphabet is no different. Start by helping your child learn the names of the letters in his/her name and recognize his/her name in print. Then move to letters in other names that have importance to your child, such as a pet or even a favorite TV character.

READING

Did you know?

Hearing a book read aloud as you are cuddled in a parent's lap is one of the delights of childhood, but it is also one of the single most important things you can do to help your child learn to read.

- Read with your child every single day. Read at a regular time so it becomes a habit for both of you. Ten minutes is good, twenty is great!
- Sometimes follow the words with your finger as you read.
- Ask questions and answer your child's questions as you read. Relate the story to something in your child's life.
- Sometimes discuss the title, author, illustrator, and parts of the book or let your child look at the pictures first to see if s/he can tell what the book is about.
- Select a special place for your child to keep his/her books and teach your child how to care for books.
- Give your child books for presents to build his/her own library.
- Get a library card and take your child to the library regularly.
- Help your child understand that books, songs, newspapers, and magazines are "talk written down." This is a way for someone to talk to us when they can't be there. The "STOP!" sign at the corner is a message from the police officer.
- Point out signs and other print in the environment such as cereal boxes, street signs, and the menu at the drive-through.
- Let your child see you reading.

WRITING

Learning to communicate on paper is a way to share thoughts and ideas. It helps children make connections between the printed and spoken word.

Your child's first attempts at writing may be scribbles. Do not discourage this!!! S/He is practicing communicating in this way. Drawings are also a means of communication through writing.

- Invite your child to tell you about drawings or to "read" his/her note.
- Praise the efforts. Respond to the message, not how it looks.

Did you realize?

Holding a pencil and making letters requires a lot of finger strength and control. This takes lots of exercise! Things like play dough, puzzles, scissors, and Legos help build those little finger muscles.

- Provide a space for writing and materials to use (crayons, pencils, paper).
- Let your child see you write and tell your child why you are doing it (shopping list, note to your spouse, etc.).
- Have a place such as the refrigerator to display your child's writing.
- Help your child learn to write his/her name or part of it. Your child will be so proud of their ability to write their name.

At first, your child will write approximations of letters. Praise the efforts! Sometimes a child will write letters backwards and certainly not in a straight line. Quality penmanship will increase over time and through opportunities to practice writing.

What about phonetics?

Phonetics are the sounds of letters and words. By reading books with rhythm, rhyme, and repetition, you will be building your child's awareness of phonics in an appropriate way. Dr. Seuss books, Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See, or any nursery rhyme are excellent choices to model rhythm, rhyme, and repetition.

Have fun with words: make up silly sentences such as, "Silly Sally sat on a slimy slug-- ug!!! And guess what... you are teaching phonics!"

MATH CONCEPTS

For a child to really understand quantity and numbers, the child must have an assortment of any one object to handle and count (such as buttons or popsicle sticks).

Math is much more than numbers. It is also used to compare, classify and order, as well as to understand the time and space relationships. Providing real materials of different sizes, shapes, and weights for your child to manipulate and explore will help your child develop a solid foundation for performing mathematical tasks throughout school and the rest of your child's life.

- Help your child gain an understanding of what numbers mean rather than just counting. "How many forks do we need? One for you, one for me and one for Grandma... that makes three!" Have your child point to objects as they are counted.
- Give your child the opportunity to sort things that are alike and different. Sort coins, socks, and silverware or match canned goods, plastic containers and lids.
- Set up a routine or sequence for the morning and bedtime. "First I take a bath, second, I brush my teeth, third, we read books, and then I'm going to sleep!"
- Help your child begin to understand the concept of time using concepts s/he can grasp such as day and night.
- Help your child know his/her birthday and their age.
- Identify shapes in the environment and point them out to your child regularly (circles, squares, rectangles). "Your cracker is a square."
- Provide materials that your child can use to figure out relationships like longer and shorter, lighter and heavier, bigger and smaller.

SELF HELP & INDEPENDENCE

- Work with your child to learn how to snap, zip, button, and tie so that s/he can take care of toileting needs and put on shoes and coats independently at school. If your child has not yet mastered these skills, help your child dress in clothing s/he is able to manage.
- Help your child learn how to wash hands, use a fork and spoon, blow his/her nose, and use the toilet independently.
- Give your child responsibility for simple jobs such as setting the table, sorting socks, or putting away his/her toys and belongings.
- Provide your child opportunities to make decisions. "What book would you like to read?" "Do you want to wear your red shorts or your blue ones?"

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND COGNITION

(THINKING SKILLS)

Children are born with a keen sense of curiosity and a strong desire to learn. Their interests and exploration should be encouraged. This is how they gain knowledge about their world. They also need many opportunities to think and solve problems.

Young children develop concepts as they interact and work with materials, people, events, and ideas. "I learn the properties of sand by pouring it, feeling it and adding water."

- Take turns pretending to do something or making different expressions. Let the other one guess what you are doing or feeling.
- Provide some toys and materials that require thinking such as wooden puzzles, blocks, and things to sort and match.
- Provide material scraps, boxes, and other things from around the house to use for creative play and art.
- Work with your child on learning his/her first and last name, your name, your phone number, and your address.
- Talk to your child about things that go together, such as socks and shoes, and fork and spoon.
- Help your child learn some body parts like arms and toes and some things in your home, such as the bed, table, and sprinkler.
- Assist your child in learning concepts such as hot and cold, in and out, and, over and under, by describing those things as your child experiences them.
- Point out colors in the natural environment and let your child find colors that are alike and different in magazines, in the closet, etc.
- Introduce your child to the world around him/her by taking walks, visiting the grocery store, park, library, and other places in your neighborhood and town. Talk with your child about what you see.

STARTING SCHOOL

A week or so before school starts, you will be notified by mail or phone who your child's teacher will be and invited to an orientation or "meet the teacher" day. It is very important that you attend to learn more about the school, your child's classroom, and important procedures. This is also a time you can share special information about your child with the teacher. If you cannot attend, try to get a family member or good friend to go for you or make a special appointment with your child's teacher for another time.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MOST FREQUENTLY ASK

- What procedure should I follow if my child needs to take medication during school hours?

Answer: You should get a school handbook that outlines the procedure. A doctor's note is required for office personnel to be able to administer any medications both prescription and over-the-counter. This note must include the dose and time. No medication can be kept in a child's backpack or in the classroom. All medications are kept locked up to ensure the safety for all students.

- How do I know which bus my child will ride and where it stops?

Answer: The school office will have a list of all bus schedules, including pick-up and drop-off stops and times.

- Does our school have after-school care?

Answer: Many schools do provide after-school care for a fee. The school office can also provide you with information on some other programs that serve your school.

- What supplies will my child need?

Answer: Most teachers provide a supply list at registration or at orientation or "meet the teacher" day.

Most other questions will be answered in the Parent Handbook or through teacher handouts. However, if not, do not hesitate to ask!

TIPS FOR THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

The following are suggestions to help make the first day a happy one!

- Set the tone that learning is good, fun, and important.
- Share fun things with your child that you remember about school.
- Begin the "going to bed/getting up" routine at least a week before school starts so everyone will be used to it by the first day.
- Make sure your child has a good breakfast or arrives at school early enough to eat breakfast at school.
- You may want to let your child ride the bus the first day. You can meet the bus at school and walk your child into class.
- Label all personal belongings, such as jackets and lunchboxes.
- Place any money your child takes to school in an envelope and label it with your child's name, the amount, and what the money is for. Example – Bo Hill – Lunch Money – \$1.25
- Make sure your child is dressed in clothing that s/he can manage independently at bathroom time.
- Provide a special place at home for school materials (backpack, notes, lunch money, etc.).
- Set aside a special time later that afternoon/evening to talk about the day. "Tell me about your new friends." "What was your favorite part of your first day of school?"
- Arrival and dismissal are not the best times to try to talk to your child's teacher because many children may need the teacher's attention. Ask the teacher for a good time to come in or chat on the phone.

NEXT STEPS

Sometimes parents feel that once their child has started school, their job is finished. Actually, you are more important now than you've ever been.

The 5 R's for Parents

Make sure your child:

1. Gets plenty of REST
2. Eats REALLY healthy food
3. Has ROUTINES and a schedule
4. Attends school REGULARLY
5. Is READ to every day

These things are extremely important for your child and will help him/her to do well in school.

Nothing makes a child feel better than seeing a friendly, respectable relationship between the most important grownups in the child's life: his/her parents and teacher.

But sometimes parents feel nervous. They may feel that the teacher knows everything and that they have nothing to add. Teachers do not feel that way. They are pleased when parents express a desire to work together as partners to help their children learn.

Always remember...you know your child better than anyone. You were your child's first teacher, and you will ALWAYS be the most important one.

- Offer to help in ways that you can. Ask if there are things you can help your child with at home. Let the teacher know you support his/her efforts to help your child.
- Keep on top of what your child is learning in school and how s/he is doing. Make sure notes and homework are completed and returned.

What do you think parents of current kindergartener children have to say?

"The most important thing you can do is get involved however you can and stay involved."

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

If a child comes to school eager to learn, excited about starting school, self-confident and with a solid foundation of social skills, the child will be like a little sponge soaking up more academic skills quickly and easily.

Relax and enjoy your child. Entering kindergarten is a major milestone in both of your lives. Make the most of this time before your child starts school.

SOME GOOD BOOKS TO READ TO YOUR CHILD

Crocodile Beat, by Gail Jorgensen and Patricia Mullins

The Listening Walk, by Paul Showers

The Doorbell Rang, by Pat Hutchins

Feast for 10, by Cathryn Falwell

Corduroy, by Don Freeman

It Looked Like Spilt Milk, by Charles G. Shaw

Mouse Paint, by Ellen Stroll Walsh

The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear, by Don and Audrey Wood

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault

The Rainbow Fish, by Marcus Pfister

Any book by Dr. Seuss, Eric Carle and Ezra Jack Keats.

Ask your public library librarian for more good books.

ONslow COUNTY SCHOOLS

KINDERGARTEN READINESS SKILLS

Please check off the skills that your child has already mastered and work on the remainder over the summer.

SMALL MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

- _____ Ties shoes.
- _____ Buttons and snaps clothing.
- _____ Holds a pencil correctly and with confidence.
- _____ Holds scissors correctly and is able to cut along lines.
- _____ Uses glue without making a mess.
- _____ Recognizes and writes first name in print.
- _____ When handwriting, child starts at the TOP of letters and numbers.

SOCIAL

- _____ Completely toilet trained including proper wiping techniques.
- _____ Follows simple directions.
- _____ Plays in a group.
- _____ Can be without parents for a short period of time.

ACADEMIC

- _____ Child answers who, what, when, where, and how questions
- _____ Recognizes and names colors.
- _____ Understands and uses positional/directional words such as: under, over, in, on, above, beside, around, behind, and in front of.
- _____ Recognizes and identifies some alphabet letters. (Singing the “Alphabet Song” does not qualify as letter knowledge).
- _____ Counts using one-to-one correspondence. (When counting, each object gets a number name).
Have your child count the dinner plates, forks, napkins, and glasses at your family meal.

SAFETY

- _____ When you register your child, be ready to provide several important phone numbers including cell, work, and emergency contacts.
- _____ Label all clothing with your child’s name and provide clothing that is simple and easy to manage.