**Getting Your Preschooler Ready for Kindergarten**

Children attending quality preschool and pre-kindergarten programs will have many opportunities to learn the skills they will need in kindergarten. Parents can enhance their learning at home as well.

**General Learning Skills**

The two bedrock skills necessary to build a firm foundation for learning include a strong attention span and the ability to focus. Each of these skills can be strengthened or weakened depending on how your preschooler spends his time during the day. The child who is in a structured environment allowing for learning opportunities is more mentally stimulated than the child who is given freedom of choice during his waking hours.

**Attention Span**

A child’s attention span develops best in a structured environment. This means having activities planned during the day, including a starting and stopping time for each activity. Left to choose for herself a preschooler will generally spend too much time flitting from one activity to another, or following an adult around expecting to be entertained. Flitting and following generally lead to whining and discontent, and soon the child will be characterized as having a very short attention span.

As a child grows and matures, the length of time spent happily engaged in an activity can be lengthened. This will increase the child’s attention span.

**Focusing Skills**

Focusing is the ability to concentrate on an object or activity without being distracted by surrounding sights and sounds. Your child needs this ability in school so that she can complete an assignment in the face of distractions. In a school setting, these distractions can occur from the children around her, the decorations in the classroom, or noise from the playground. The ability to focus is developed in children by giving them time to play by themselves.

It is important for the child to have independent play time as part of their daily routine. This is not a time when the child chooses where to play, what to play with, and how long to play; a preschooler is not capable of making these decisions wisely. He will flit and follow and soon have a very short attention span.

Independent play time begins early, by the time a child is between eighteen and twenty-four months of age, he should have developed the skill of learning how to spend forty-five minutes to one hour of uninterrupted time playing. Concentration and creativity are developed during independent play. The most important aspect of this time is that the child is learning to focus on what she can do with the things he has. This might involve playing with toys, puzzles, or books at an assigned time in an assigned place. There should be no artificial forms of stimulation such as computer games, TV and he should be in a place.
where he is not easily distracted watching others, listening to noise from cleaning or conversations between adults.

Keep her toys developmentally stimulating and challenging, rotating toys is the key to this. Children easily become bored when there is nothing new to play with.

Specific Skills

Getting Ready for Reading

Developing a love for books is foundational to becoming a good reader; to enhance this love children need to be read to from the start. When choosing books, variety is key; heavy cardboard books for play time or fun and silly stories for reading aloud. Read alphabet and rhyming books to develop phonemic awareness (sound/symbol relationships).

Puzzles aid reading. Puzzles develop a child’s ability to see how one part fits into the whole picture. This is not just fun and games, but a life skill perspective. Puzzles come in all different sizes, ranging from several pieces to several thousand pieces. Keep puzzles challenging, but not so challenging that the child becomes overwhelmed.

Sequencing cards help children develop a sense of the beginning, middle and end of a story. Introducing children to the alphabet can begin with some kind of three-dimensional letters or alphabet cards. These can be made of plastic, sponge, or wood. Choose a ‘letter of the week’ and point out all the things in the child’s world that start with that letter. You want to help children hear the beginning sound of a word; for example ‘yes, popcorn and peanuts both start with P’. An alphabet book is also very helpful, books with lots of different pictures for each letter are best.

Getting Ready for Math

In the beginning, it is all about patterns. The child on the kitchen floor with the plastic stacking rings is learning the pattern large to small. For the preschooler, patterning activities include but are not limited to bead stringing, pegboards, and pattern blocks. With patience and repetition, children eventually learn to follow or reproduce the pattern, and the activity becomes much more rewarding than just free play.

Calendar activities are another good way to develop math awareness. A perpetual calendar works best, on which the month, date and day of the week are removable pieces. An enjoyable morning routine develops when children get to place the pieces into the calendar and review the month, date and day of the week. When children are ready, it is easy to teach the concept of before and after; having them guess what the date is by looking at the number before and after the place for the current day’s number.

Make counting a part of everyday life. Counting objects can take place anytime; count fingers, toes, blocks, cheerios, spoons, or just about anything. Counting out loud is a great activity for car rides!
Getting Ready for Penmanship

Getting ready to write is generally an activity for the child older than three years of age. In the beginning, writing and coloring have virtually nothing to do with lines and everything to do with grip. Because the thumb and pointer finger are uniquely wired to the brain, children need to learn to grip the pencil between the thumb and pointer finger, letting the pencil rest on the middle finger. The same grip should be used with crayons. It is very difficult for a classroom teacher to constantly check on each student’s pencil grip. Therefore, this skill is best taught at home.

Children need help to remember to use relaxed rather than cramped movements as s/he learns to color and write. Later they will learn the importance of staying in the lines or on the line. But in the beginning, correct grip and relaxed movement should be encouraged and praised. Tracing offers the child many different opportunities to practice correct pencil grip and to strengthen the muscles of the hand. Children love the great pictures they can ‘draw’ by tracing.

Cutting also helps develop the muscles of the hand, using the same fingers for gripping the pencil and holding the scissors. Children can learn cutting skills by cutting strips of construction paper, starting with straight cuts, then diagonal lines and progressing to curved lines.

Getting Ready for Art

Call it craft time, cut and paste time, fun time with a parent or teacher, or making a prize for Daddy. No matter what it is called the time spent introducing children to various types of media impacts children’s attitude about art. Teaching children to appreciate art includes learning shapes, sizes, colors and patterns. Beginning art skills include cutting, coloring and learning to draw simple shapes such as circles, squares and triangles. These activities require a certain amount of fine motor development that is not usually present until about three years of age. However, appreciating art can be taught as soon as children can match like items and put together simple puzzles.

Getting Ready for Music

Children should be introduced to music as soon as birth or sooner. As children grow older they should be encouraged to sing along with adults or taped songs; their listening skills will grow as they learn to sing in pitch.

Rhythm clapping is an excellent way to develop listening skills when they mimic a simple clapping pattern, and as their skills grow the patterns should become more difficult.

Getting Ready for Science

Finding worms scattered upon a sidewalk after a rain allows for scientific conversation; Why are they here, where are they going, what do they feel like, how do they move are all questions that engage children in scientific exploration. Preschool science can be summed
up in three words: observation, conversation and exploration. Science is all around us and teaching children to be observers is key to their developing abilities. Asking questions about things around them leads them to pay attention, which leads to conversations.

Talking to children about the world they live in give them the needed information and increase their vocabulary. Using very simple words to explain what happens when we plant a see in soil, water it and expose it to sunlight. Not everything needs to be explained it is more important to not miss natural opportunities to talk to children about the environment.

The observation and conversation can be greatly enhanced by exploration into simple books, videos and games about science. Children are able to actually understand some complex workings of the human body.

**Getting Ready for the Teacher**

The transition to school is easiest for children who have already learned appropriate school behavior. A good teacher will explain all of this to students, but children will feel so much more confident if they know what to expect and what will be expected of them. Some of the behaviors teachers would like children to have learned prior to coming to school include:

- Standing and walking in line
- Raising your hand and waiting to be called on
- Listening to the teacher and following directions
- Not talking or whispering to other children while the teacher is talking
- Not talking or whispering to other children while the children are working quietly at their desks

Children can easily be taught these behaviors by explaining the correct behavior and following up with a fun time of practicing the behavior. Children can learn that when a signal is given it is time to get in line and you need to walk to the designated spot and stand behind anyone who is already in line. Further they can be taught to face forward and keep their hands at their sides, as well as keep facing forward while walking in line.

Children can be taught about the problems that can be created in a classroom when several people want to talk at the same time. This problem is solved when a child raises her hand and waits until the teacher calls his name before speaking out.

Children need to learn to listen to the teacher when she is talking so that he will know what to do. Saying things like ‘we talk to our friends during play time; we listen carefully when the teacher is talking’. Children can learn to be good listeners by learning to stop talking; children who do not learn this skill are hampered academically and teachers find them irritating. A talkative child can be challenged to ‘not talking’ for five minutes at a time. Silence is a valuable self-discipline and usually heightens a child’s powers of observation.
Getting Ready for Social Interaction

The final element of school readiness is social. A child who comes to school with an understanding of how to behave in a classroom setting is more likely to have a positive first impression of school than the child who is unfamiliar with classroom and playground procedures. With explanation and practice beforehand, children can be ready and even excited about starting school.

Getting ready for school also includes knowing how to make friends. This is not something children automatically know how to do. Good social skills should be taught and practiced over a period of time. Talk about things to say and how to show interest in other people. Introduce the concept of what it means to be a friend and how being a friend leads to having a friend. Children need to experience both playing with a friend at a time and other times with a group of peers.