

Getting Ready for Kindergarten

The Importance of Reading

During the preschool and kindergarten years, children are developing many of the skills that help them read, write and speak with others effectively. All children are born with the potential to learn these skills, but many will need direct teaching strategies to help them develop the basics of reading.

Important Skills for Learning to Read

The following lists some of the skills that many children demonstrate in the early months of kindergarten:

- Listening to and retelling a favorite story;
- Identifying letters of the alphabet, most often those in their own names;
- Matching sounds to letters – often the beginning sounds of a word – such as the sound of “d” in dog;
- Pretend writing letters, lists or descriptions of their art;
- Printing or copying letters of the alphabet;
- Writing and copying words of interest;
- Pretend reading;
- Reading along with an adult;
- Re-reading a favorite book many times;
- Retelling the story through pictures; and
- Playing with the sounds of words, by rhyming, such as hat, cat, bat.

How You can Help Your Child

- Let your child see you read and write. When you read something interesting, share what you are reading with your child;
- Provide a comfortable, quiet space for your child to read stories, draw and write;
- Read with your child every night; and
- Encourage your child to have many experiences that help build these literacy skills.

1. Listening:

- Give names to things in your child’s environment to increase vocabulary, i.e., body parts, colors, clothing, food, toys;
- Sing songs and recite rhymes daily;
- Listen to music, move to and clap with the beat of the music; and
- Read stories to your child regularly, at bedtime for example, and talk about the pictures

2. Speaking:
 - Ask your child questions about their day and about stories you read to them;
 - Explain new vocabulary used in books, label new items in your child's environment;
 - Show interest in what your child has to say;
 - Share storytelling time with your child; and
 - Build your child's vocabulary by reading daily, going on field trips to the zoo, a farm or a grocery store.

3. Reading:
 - As you read, help your child learn about books by talking about concepts like front/back, right-side-up, one page at a time, left to right and beginning/end of a story;
 - Have your child "read" a story to you;
 - Read and reread stories as often as your child requests
 - Put your child's name on some belongings to help him or her learn to recognize a name in print;
 - Read road and business signs to your child when you are driving;
 - Read some books that have memorable repeated words and phrases so your child can join in as you read;
 - Display and talk about printed materials in your home, i.e., books, magazines, recipes and coupons;
 - Visit the library regularly with your child;
 - Read recipes, cards and information such as cereal boxes;
 - Look at and read everything that comes home from school with your child; and
 - When the mail arrives, look through it with your child.

4. Writing:
 - Provide daily opportunities for your child to draw with different instruments, i.e., crayons, pencils, markers, pens and paintbrushes;
 - Play with letters, particularly the letters in your child's name;
 - Help your child to recognize and write his/her name;
 - Write a dictated story about an activity and then read the story together.

Understand the 5 Key Reading Skills

1. Phonemic Awareness

This teaches children to notice, think about and practice sounds that make up words. For example, the word "mat" has 3 sounds (phonemes) – the sounds made by the letters "m," "a" and "t."

Awareness of the sounds in speech usually begins in the preschool years. Your child may begin to:

- Take spoken words apart sound by sound

- Put sounds together to make words sound similar or rhyme
- Make up words that rhyme with real words
- Notice that some words begin or end with the same sound
- Phonemic awareness is the first steppingstone in learning to read.

2. Phonics

This teaches children the relationship between written letters and sounds. With phonics, children learn rules for sounding out new words. This includes learning how letters sound when they are blended together. For example:

- “sh” is the first sound in “shell”
- “tr” is the first sound in “try.”

Phonics is important because it helps children begin to recognize familiar written words. It also helps them figure out words they don’t know.

In general, children who learn phonics recognize more words – and understand more of what they read.

3. Vocabulary

This teaches children what words mean and how to use them.

There are 2 types of vocabulary:

- Oral vocabulary – the words recognized in speech
- Print vocabulary – the words recognized when reading or writing.

Learning vocabulary happens in many ways. It may involve:

- Using clues to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a sentence
- Creating a mental picture of what a new word means
- Thinking about the different parts of a new word (for example, dividing “newspaper” into “news” and “paper”)
- Figuring out connections between unfamiliar words and familiar words (for example, learning the word “history” through the word “story)
- Using a new word in writing or speech.

4. Reading Comprehension

This teaches children how to understand what they read. Reading comprehension involves:

- Skimming or previewing the text to see what it is about
- Creating mental images of what the material is about
- Using what you already know to help figure out the meaning of the text
- Thinking about what the text will reveal (or what will happen next)
- Thinking of questions about the material while reading

- Making connections between the text and your own experiences
- Coming to a conclusion about what the text means, after reading.

Reading comprehension helps children learn to read with understanding.

5. Fluency

This is the ability to read text correctly and quickly. Fluency skills come later in the reading process.

Fluency is related to being able to recognize words. It also includes:

- Being able to recognize phrases, instead of reading word by word
- Reading with the correct emotional feeling – to give the text meaning
- Reading at a good pace – not too slowly or too quickly
- Reading accurately – with few errors.

Children who can read fluently are better able to understand what they have read.

A Child’s Checklist for Kindergarten Readiness

I feel comfortable with the school I will be attending.

I’ve visited my new school building, walked around and used the restrooms there.

I know where my classroom is.

I know where the playground is.

I know where the school office is, and what I can go there for.

I know where I’ll be dropped off and picked up each day.

I know what to expect on school days.

I know what time I’ll go to bed and what time I’ll get up on school days.

I know I’ll have a healthy breakfast each morning, either at home or at school.

I know where my bus stop is.

I know some of the rules of my new classroom.

I am excited about starting kindergarten.

My parents listen to my feelings about starting kindergarten, and help me answer the questions I have.

My parents show me every day that learning is fun!

I know I will meet children who are different from me and I will make new friends.

I know my parents are excited about me starting kindergarten.

They read to me every day at home.

They help out with school activities if they can.

They attend teacher-parent meetings if they can.

They have made sure my health records are up-to-date.

They have checked into free- and reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs at my school.

They encourage me to think of solutions when I have a problem.
They explain to me that families have their own traditions and celebrations.
They invite friends over to my house so I know how to play with other children.

I feel ready to start kindergarten.

I know how to use the restroom.

I know my full name, my phone number and address, and my parents' names.

I know how to share with other children and wait my turn.

I can sit and listen to a story.

When I am upset, I know my feelings are OK and I know ways to calm myself down.

I can follow simple directions.

I know how to take care of my body by brushing my teeth, washing my hands and covering my mouth when I cough or sneeze.

I know how to find a safe adult if I need help.

I have plenty of chances each day to run, jump, dance and throw balls.

I have plenty of chances each day to use my hands to do things like button my shirt, tie a knot and use crayons or scissors.

Websites

Countdown to Kindergarten = www.countdowntokindergarten.org

Starfall (Where children have fun learning to read) = www.starfall.com

Reading is Fundamental – <http://rif.org/>