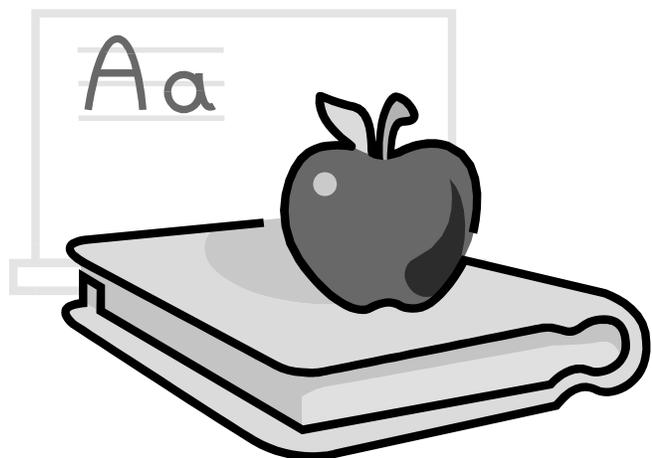


# Everything You Always Wanted to Know About School Readiness

... but didn't know where to look or whom to ask!



## *What is school readiness? What does it mean?*

School readiness means preparing children to enter school ready to learn. It means helping children develop the skills they will need to be successful in school. It also means giving children lots of different experiences so they learn naturally through play and are not forced to “work” on learning.

School readiness means the healthy physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child.

School readiness skills include:

- ✓ listening
- ✓ observing
- ✓ paying attention
- ✓ following directions
- ✓ small and large motor development
- ✓ having positive self-esteem
- ✓ language development
- ✓ imagination and creativity
- ✓ problem solving
- ✓ self-help
- ✓ socialization
- ✓ reading and writing readiness

These skills not only help children enter school ready to learn and succeed in school, they are the same ones that are needed to succeed later in life!

Enjoy using this book as a resource and guide as you help prepare young children (birth through preschool years) for school readiness.

Arundel Child Care Connections

Anne Arundel Community College, Child Care Training Institute

Anne Arundel Public Schools

## The Write Stuff

Long before a child learns to form letters with a pencil or marker, he has taken many steps toward learning to write. Children must have many opportunities to use their hands to do various things before they can successfully print letters.

Molding clay, using large and small building materials, picking up beads, and playing with knobbed puzzles all prepare the fingers and hands for writing. Scribbling with markers and crayons, controlling a pencil for use with a stencil, using chalk on a sidewalk, and painting with fingers and large brushes are a few ways children can practice for letter writing.

Be sure to have plenty of paper, markers and crayons (paper clips and staplers for older children) available. Let children “write” notes to their friends and family or messages to each other. They can use writing materials in their dramatic play – signs for a store, tickets for a show, and menus for a restaurant.

As children experiment, developmental stages of writing become evident. Children move from random scribbling to controlled scribbles to random alphabet letters to consonants that represent words. Only with lots of opportunities to practice can children move through these stages.

If a child does not have a proper pencil grip, cannot purposefully manipulate a crayon or shows no interest in learning to write, he is not ready to do so. Take care not to push any child. Children enjoy learning a new skill only when he is ready for it. Getting ready is just as important as mastering the skill.

## Learning With Blocks



Blocks are open-ended materials that stimulate young imaginations, provide choices for discovery and invention and promote the development of problem-solving skills. One day, a block may be an airplane; the next, they can be a sofa for a house the child is building.

Building with blocks helps develop young children’s eye-hand coordination, visual perception and large and small motor skills.

Working with blocks often deepens a child’s interest in literature and literacy. A child may be inspired, for example, to build a pirate ship, an enchanted castle, or the three bears’ beds and chairs from Goldilocks.

Take photographs of children’s block creations and invite the children write or help to write captions. Encourage children to make their own signs for their creations. This helps children to be exposed to print in meaningful ways.

Suggest children use blocks to build what they have seen on a field trip or vacation. They can build cities, farms factories and stores while working out their own understanding of these complex sites and communities.

Older children can develop age-appropriate math and science concepts, such as balance and gravity, as they work with blocks.

Blocks are a fun activity for young children, while serving as invaluable tools for promoting children’s development in many areas.

## What are fine motor skills?

Fine motor development is much more than how a child holds and uses a crayon, pencil or scissors. To understand fine motor development, it is important to understand a little about how the human body develops.

Human development progresses from the head down and from the trunk outward. The torso and shoulders develop long before the knees. In other words, skilled use of one’s hands and fingers is the last in a long process of development.

Fine motor development is enhanced early in life by many opportunities to develop and refine large motor skills. It is developed by giving young children large pieces of paper and large crayons and allowing them to practice their movements or through a variety of activities, such as working with play dough, constructing things with Legos and Tinker Toys, stringing beads, doing puzzles, and playing with pegboards and other table toys.

Such activities are better than tasks at which the child could “fail” or those that are very repetitive. Through these fun and natural activities, children improve their fine motor development without frustration or boredom.



## Helping Baby Learn to Love Reading

Reading is one of the most important hobbies for your child to develop. You can help him start early, even if he's only a baby. Here are some ways to teach babies that reading is fun:

1. Choose sturdy books. Babies chew, bend and throw books in addition to looking at them.
2. Pick books with pictures. Large, clear drawings of familiar things (such as animals and people) are best.
3. Look for simple themes. Pictures books and books with one word per page are good beginner books. Babies also like books that rhyme because they sound interesting.
4. Save old magazines. It's fun to look at the big, bright pictures. And, it's okay for babies to play roughly with them since magazines can be thrown away. But some magazines contain lead, so never let your baby put them in her mouth.
5. Take your time. Stop and talk about the story as you read. Change your voice for different characters and emphasize important points.
6. Read often. Read for a few minutes at least twice a day if possible. Choose times when your baby is content, perhaps after a feeding. Stop if she seems unhappy.
7. Put books within reach. Store baby-safe books on a low shelf so he can reach them. Change the selections occasionally so she stays interested, but keep favorites books available.
8. Read yourself. Set an example by reading in your spare time. Say things like "I like to read" or "This is my book."

## Word Play Helps Increase Reading Skills

You've been reading to your child/the children in your care for years now. Four- and five-year-olds need to continue their interest in books. What to do? Talk about words and letters you see in favorite stories. Pick a familiar word like *girl* and ask her if she knows what the letter is at the beginning of the word. If she does know that the letter is *G*, ask her to find another *G* word in the book.

Ask a child to read to you. He doesn't actually have to read to do this. Many children learn to recognize certain words before they really can read. If you think she knows the next word, pause and give her a chance to say it before you read it, then repeat the word together.

When you get a new book, try to figure out the story together. Turn to a page filled with pictures and ask, "What do you think is happening on this page?" Go through the entire book this way and then ask, "What is this story about?"

As the child gets older and shares experiences without you (such as being with other children and families), she may be seeing books, movies and characters that are new to both of you. Encourage his interest if he asks for books about these new things. You don't have to buy books, but visit your local library.

Helping a child have fun with books, words, and letters can do more to help him get ready to start school than nearly anything else you can do!

## Social Skills

1. Encourage children to resolve conflicts
  - Adults should “model” appropriate ways to do so.
  - Role play situations using children and stuffed animals.
  - Ask the children how to resolve situations as they occur.
  - Avoid “How would you feel if . . .” type of questions.
2. Encourage children not to interrupt adults or their peers.
  - Be sure adults don’t interrupt.
  - Avoid allowing children to poke you or call your name repeatedly.
  - Give children a chance to practice the behavior you want to see in them.
3. Encourage children to use appropriate manners.
  - Make sure children say *please* and *thank you*.
  - Encourage children to use complete sentences to make requests.
  - Read stories and talk about whether or not the characters used good manners.

## Self-Help Skills

1. Encourage children to turn on and off faucets.
  - Make sure children can reach faucets.
  - Provide them with opportunities to practice.
2. Encourage children to zip, snap, and button their own clothes.
  - Set aside specific time to practice.
  - Have children practice using extra clothing articles.
  - Have children practice with a buddy.
3. Encourage children to tie their own shoes.
  - Set aside a specific time to show children how you tie your shoes and to let them practice.
  - Lots of practice is needed.
  - Provide children with lacing activities to help them learn to tie their own shoes.

**Remember:** Children develop physically and mentally at different rates. For example, a child who is three years old may not have the skills of another three year old. However, giving a child time and many learning experiences will help him/her develop those skills.

## Academic Skills

### 1. Language Skills

- Encourage children to use complete sentences.
- Encourage children to share stories.
- Have children recite nursery rhymes and fingerplays.
- Have children sing songs.

### 2. Writing skills

- Provide children with blank paper to draw and write.
- Encourage children to share with you what they have written.
- If necessary, prompt children to talk about what they have written.
  - “Tell me about the people in your picture.”
  - “Tell me about the red and green colors in your picture.”
- Provide opportunities for children to practice writing their names.
  - Children enjoy writing in pudding, shaving cream, and sand.
  - Work on one letter at a time.
  - Start with them writing large letters first.
  - Have them try to write with different writing utensils.
  - Have them write their names in the air or on other surfaces.

### 3. Mathematics

- Engage children in calendar activities.
  - Count how many numbers are on the calendar each day.
- Have them clap the number of days in the month.
- Engage the children in counting activities all the time.
  - Count buttons on clothing, blocks, number of books, or number of children present.
  - Read counting books.

### 4. Literature

- Read to children every day.
- Create puppet shows with them.
- Use puppets during a story.
- Encourage children to read aloud with you.

### 5. Reading

- Encourage children to identify the first letter in their name anywhere they see it.
- Read alphabet books.
- Hang printed signs to label things in the room.

# Let's Pretend!

Make believe play is not only one of the great joys of childhood, it also offers abundant opportunities for children's development. Children develop interpersonal skills, particularly cooperation and conflict resolution, and improve their language and problem-solving abilities in pretend play.

Around the age of two, children begin to cry, sleep and eat. They soon include a stuffed animal, doll or a favorite toy in their play. They also begin to transform objects into symbols – a simple block becomes a fast car or a stick makes a fine racehorse.

As children approach three, they begin participating in make-believe play with their peers. Dramatic play gradually becomes more elaborate and complex. Four and five year olds engage in socio-dramatic play which provides opportunities to rehearse adult roles. Such play helps children to make sense of the world around them.

Dramatic play fosters emotional development as children work through fears and worries in a safe context. Social skills are promoted as children communicate and negotiate their roles and actions. Children also use language more frequently and more elaborately in make-believe play than they do in virtually any other activities.

Adults can encourage dramatic play by focusing on their children's interests at the moment, developing themes from stories the children have heard or movies they have seen and providing materials to use for making or using as props.



**Remember:** The safety of the child is of utmost importance. Some activities in this booklet are meant for specific age groups. Safety and supervisions should be based on the child's age and ability.

## *Listen, Listen, Listen . . .*

**Listening is the language ability that develops first and is used most often!** True listening means not only hearing sounds in the environment, but also taking meaning from, and responding to, those sounds.

Listening is an essential part of the development of both written and oral language. We can best help children develop listening capabilities by providing experiences that encourage careful listening.

Finding a comfortable area where children can use a tape recorder, headset, and a variety of audiotapes gives the children a daily opportunity to listen to spoken language and music. Children's vocabulary, comprehension and critical thinking skills also get a boost. Through songs, poems, and stories, children identify and differentiate familiar or similar sounds, rhyming words, letter sounds and speech patterns.

Listening experiences stimulate kids to express their own reactions in various ways, including verbal discussion, art, drama, or stories of their own. Through these activities, children can relate what they hear to their own experiences.

Adults can extend this focus on "listening with a purpose" by trying to identify particular sounds while driving in the car, taking a walk, or running errands. Play games with words by finding rhyming words or words that begin with the same sound. Don't make this work . . . just have fun!

# Let's Be Healthy!

Good health is part of the physical development of a child and is an important part of being ready for school. Good health comes from good habits and wise choices. To enjoy good health now and in the future, children must learn how to exercise, control stress, eat nutritious foods, be clean and reduce the risk of disease. Eating healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, meat, grains and milk, and getting enough sleep each day, helps too.

Following these good health practices will help children to be ready to learn:

- Adults can set examples by limiting sugary and fatty foods in meals and snacks.
- Start the day with a healthy breakfast.
- Teach children how to stop the spread of germs by keeping clean and by washing hands before meals and after using the bathroom.
- Make sure children are vaccinated against disease at the recommended ages. Keep a chart of the immunizations that children have had.
- Encourage children to exercise: jogging, walking, jumping rope, riding bikes, roller skating, dancing, and swimming.
- Teach children how to handle stress through exercise, getting enough sleep, talking about problems, and breaking big jobs into small parts.
- Teach children how to protect themselves by saying *no* in dangerous or uncomfortable situations, walking away from fights and talking about dangerous situations with trusted adults.

## Large Motor Development

Running, jumping, climbing, skipping, hopping, throwing and balancing are great fun for young children, but they need lots of opportunities to practice. These large motor skill activities are an important part of your child's day. With daily large-motor experiences, children learn basic movement skills that help them to develop good self-esteem, physical abilities through muscle control, and coordination.

Large motor development can include physical fitness and giving children a chance to:

- walk on balance beams
- throw, catch and kick balls
- ride wheeled toys
- use large house paint-sized brushes and large buckets of water to "paint" the driveway or sidewalk
- toss and carry bean bags
- push, pull and haul large cars and trucks
- climb on jungle gyms or playground equipment or in and out of large cardboard boxes
- push and pull wagons and doll strollers
- use child-size rakes, watering cans and shovels

Large motor activities can also help with physical fitness and, as exercise, can help children to reduce stress. (Yes, children can be stressed.)

# Developing Listening Skills in Children

Listening skills go hand-in-hand with a child's ability to socialize, develop effective speech and vocabulary, follow directions, and develop an interest in reading. Children call upon listening skills when they speak, play, interact with others and learn from the sounds around them. One of the most important life skills – socialization – is developed by building the skill of listening. Another important part of listening skills is building an awareness of the sounds of letters. Recognizing like and different letter sounds, rhymes and word patterns contributes to successful reading skills!

## Age of Child

## Activities for Developing Listening Skills

| Age of Child  | Activities for Developing Listening Skills   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Infant</b></p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gently shake rattles, bells, and other noisemakers.</li> <li>• Play tapes of lullabies or children's songs as background music.</li> <li>• Talk to her as you tend to her needs, describing what you are doing, asking her questions and using any type of response as an answer.</li> <li>• Sing and chant to him.</li> <li>• Imitate sounds she makes. This will encourage her to make more.</li> <li>• Provide chime balls which make music when rolled gently.</li> <li>• Pretend to talk on a toy phone and encourage her to do so. Even simple babbling, if repeated, is like having a conversation with her.</li> <li>• Put life into stories you read by using different voices for different characters and being expressive as you read.</li> <li>• Use your hands to act out stories and rhymes (e.g. Itsy Bitsy Spider).</li> <li>• Use hand gestures with ordinary words and phrases, like waving bye-bye and with words like <i>hot</i> and <i>all gone</i>.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Toddler</b></p>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let her listen to tapes of her favorite songs.</li> <li>• Speak in short, simple sentences.</li> <li>• When he mispronounces a word, repeat and say the word correctly while indicating you understand his thought.</li> <li>• Encourage language development by asking her to describe, explain, and expand on what she has said.</li> <li>• Ask him to give a message to another child or adult. ("John, can you come to get your snack?")</li> <li>• Play a simple version of <i>Simon Says</i> by asking him to follow the usual commands without helping him by using hand gestures.</li> <li>• Take field trips or invite guests to add to his knowledge and vocabulary.</li> <li>• Read aloud daily. Children learn language best when they hear it.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Preschool</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to read out loud each day. Invite children to read along with you.</li> <li>• Use songs and fingerplays as part of your daily routine.</li> <li>• Bring attention to rhyming words in stories/poems. Play silly rhyming games where children make rhymes that may not make sense.</li> <li>• Provide pretend microphones as part of dramatic play.</li> <li>• Provide prop boxes to encourage role playing of different occupations as well as social functions such as birthday parties.</li> <li>• Play "which one doesn't belong" by using categories of objects with one that doesn't belong and asking him to identify it.</li> <li>• Provide toys such as farms, airports, schoolhouses, so that she can act out conversations, voices and noises as she plays with the toys.</li> </ul>   |

# Developing Observation Skills in Children

By developing observation skills in children, you encourage strong powers of observation, ability to remember what is seen, and good eye-hand coordination. All of these skills are important to preparing children to be successful in school. The observation skills acquired during the early years of a child's life help a child recognize, recall, and reproduce what is seen through fine motor skills such as drawing or painting. These motor skills help when they observe, memorize and recreate.

| Age of Child   | Activities for Developing Observation Skills  |
|--|---|
| <p data-bbox="167 485 248 512">Infant</p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspend colorful mobiles over cribs/attach busy box or activity center.</li> <li>• Make frequent eye contact with him.</li> <li>• Make a finger puppet by drawing a face on your index finger and make a game of him following the wiggling finger with his eyes.</li> <li>• Place him in the center of activities where he can observe.</li> <li>• Spend time in front of a mirror with him making faces and pointing to the various reflections.</li> <li>• Provide large, washable cloth blocks for him to study, manipulate and stack.</li> <li>• Provide large, colorful rings that stack from largest to smallest.</li> <li>• Use “kiddie” links for him to pull apart and reattach.</li> <li>• Play peek-a-boo hiding your face, his face, or a toy beneath your hands and then make them reappear.</li> <li>• Play “where are your eyes,” “where are teddy bear’s eyes,” etc.</li> </ul>                         |
| <p data-bbox="167 942 272 970">Toddler</p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a shape-sorting toy with shapes that insert into a matching opening.</li> <li>• Provide snap together blocks for using eyes and hands together.</li> <li>• Provide different sized toy barrels which stack/fit inside each other.</li> <li>• Encourage scribbling using various items: chalk, crayons, and markers.</li> <li>• Teach her to “pump” the handle of a top to make it spin.</li> <li>• Provide puzzles with handles on pieces for easy manipulation.</li> <li>• Roll a lightweight ball to her. Remind her to keep her eyes on it to catch and roll the ball back.</li> <li>• Use boards with simple pictures and have her point to objects.</li> <li>• Allow her to work with clay or play dough.</li> <li>• Visit the park or zoo and point out and name animals and objects.</li> <li>• Use “life and look” books and have her remember where certain pictures are and show them to you.</li> </ul> |
| <p data-bbox="167 1400 297 1428">Preschool</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide magnetic fishing sets and many different types of blocks.</li> <li>• Take children for walks. When you return ask them to recall what was seen, such as what color was the big truck, was the dog big or little, etc. Record answers with picture drawings and words.</li> <li>• Provide stringing beads and lacing boards.</li> <li>• Engage children in sorting activities with small items such as shells, keys, and buttons. Sort by color, size, or design.</li> <li>• Provide large, soft sidewalk chalk to draw and scribble on driveways and sidewalks.</li> <li>• Finger paint on large pieces of paper.</li> <li>• Allow him to use scissors to cut on thick cutting lines.</li> <li>• Play “eye-spy” games.</li> <li>• Place writing materials within easy reach of your preschooler.</li> </ul>  |



**Remember:** Children develop physically and mentally at different rates. For example, a three-year-old child may not have all the skills of another three-year-old. However, giving a child time and many learning experiences usually will help him develop those skills.

## *The Sound of Music*

Kids of all ages are naturally drawn to music. Infants coo at lullabies, toddlers bang on pots and pans with a wooden spoon and preschoolers sing and dance to music. Children learn a variety of skills from musical experiences. Shaking, tapping, and beating instruments enhance fine motor skill development, while listening for a beat, the sounds of different musical instruments, tones and lyrics help to develop auditory discrimination. Music can be funny, exciting or soothing, which relates to emotional development.

Try making these inexpensive “instruments” to encourage children’s exploration of music:

**Kazoo** – Let children decorate a toilet paper tube with construction paper and crayons. Help them to put a square of wax paper over one end and secure it with a rubber band. Blow through one end while humming a tune.

**Tambourine** – Using two sturdy, luncheon-sized paper plates, place a small quantity of dried beans or rice in one plate, then glue the plates together and let dry. Let the child decorate the plates with crayons, paints or scraps of ribbon or material. Shake the tambourine with one hand or tap it on the heel of the other hand.

**Sand Blocks** – Sand two small pieces of scrap wood to prevent splinters. Help the child glue coarse grit sandpaper onto one side of each block and then let dry. Rub the blocks together to make noise.

## *Entertain and Teach Children at the Same Time!*

Children love to listen, and move, to music. Singing is fun, too. That’s not the only ways to enjoy songs:

- 1) Draw songs. Have a child close her eyes and listen to the beginning of a song. Then, have her open them and draw a picture of what she thinks the song reminds her of.
- 2) Copy each other. Hum part of a song the child knows, or play it on an instrument. Then, have him copy you by humming the song himself. You can copy something he hums, too.
- 3) Change songs. Help the child make up new words to a familiar tune, such as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. The new words don’t have to rhyme or even make sense. Just have fun.
- 4) Adjust the volume. Sing a favorite song, but sing some parts more loudly or softly than usual. You might start a song loudly and fade off at the end or do the opposite. Try changing your volume to the match the meaning of the words or phrases in the song, too.
- 5) Make up songs. Decide to sing instead of talk for part of the day. Don’t worry how you sound. You can sing directions and instructions to a child, such as singing, “Now let’s clean up the toys,” or “We’re having cereal for breakfast.”

## *Moving to Music*

Young children are natural dancers; even infants bounce up and down to the beat of music! This creative movement helps children learn balance and coordination through challenging moves and postures. It teaches rhythm and beat as children change movements to suit the music. It even promotes a child’s ability to predict what comes next by hearing repeated musical phrases. It develops children’s body awareness, helps with self esteem and is a great way to get some exercise!

- Turn on the radio or put on old tapes or CDs and enjoy singing and dancing with the children.
- Add to the experience by using movement props, such as scarves, streamers or just glue ribbon or paper streamers to short pieces of wooden dowel rods.
- Rhythm sticks, used to keep the beat of music, can be made by using foot-long wooden dowel rods that can be sanded or left bare.

# The World of Art

A child becomes totally engrossed and immersed in the process of making a work of art. When a child grapples with the challenge of drawing a person or an object, she is engaging in a task that is both demanding and satisfying. As he draws, paints, and sculpts, he thinks creatively, makes decisions and solves problems. His fine motor skills are developed naturally through the use of brushes, crayons, scissors, and clay. All of these activities help to prepare children for writing in later years. Language also is developed as he talks about color, shape, and size and as he describes his art treasure to another child or adult.

To encourage a child's artistic attempts, provide large blank paper (ends of newsprint rolls can be purchased for little cost from your local newspaper or you can recycle paper leftover from offices or computers) water colors, markers or chalk.

Value her efforts at art. Let her see quality artwork at museums and in art books from the library. Young children learn in a variety of ways and creative activities such as art provide positive, satisfying experiences for all children. Be sure to have lots of materials readily available:

- crayons, markers, chalk
- wallpaper books, magazines
- paint
- paste, glue
- materials for collages
- cotton balls
- yarn, pipe cleaners
- paper plates, paper cups
- ruler
- clay, play dough
- fabric scraps
- large table
- paper scraps
- cardboard forms
- clean-up supplies

## *Use Leftover Holiday Materials for Art Projects*

You may have lots of extra wrapping paper, greeting cards, and crushed bows after any holiday. Give them to a child and watch what she creates!

With some glue and construction paper, this pile of leftovers can keep her busy for a while. If she needs help cutting things out, be sure to be close by to help. Otherwise, let her imagination go. Lots of imagination is the best material to inspire a child's activity.

## *Go Beyond "Refrigerator Artwork"*

After you have encouraged him to create art masterpieces, there are two ways to show him just how proud you are of his efforts. Both are relatively inexpensive:

1. Mat and frame a piece of child's art using a ready-cut mat you can buy at the store to use as a frame. Or add an inexpensive frame with the mat and you can hang it for everyone to view.
2. Distribute to everyone. Using a copier at a local office supply store, make duplicates of her art. Then share it with family and friends. Send it by mail to distant relatives.

## *Tell a Child Stories with Stand-Up Drawings*

Telling stories is a favorite activity for children and adults. Here's a new way to do it:

- Have her draw several things (whatever she wants) on a poster board or large piece of paper.
- Cut out the drawings, but leave some space below each one.
- Fold the drawings back at the bottom so that they can stand up.
- Encourage your child to arrange the drawings and tell a story about them.
- Add more drawings or rearrange the pictures and tell a new story.

**School readiness skills include paying attention, emotional development, positive self-esteem and making choices.**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Building Your Child's Attention Span Through Simple Activities</p> | <p>Children who can pay attention have lots of advantages in school. They can enjoy longer activities, follow directions, and concentrate on projects. It's easy and fun to build a child's attention span using simple activities like these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Teach your child a song or poem.</b> First recite it out loud. Then let her fill in some blanks. For example, "Old McDonald had a ____." Keep letting her complete different parts and soon she will know the whole thing.</li> <li>▪ <b>Read a story to your child.</b> After finishing a page, ask her something about it. Start with simple questions, such as "Where is Bobby going?" With practice, she will be able to answer more difficult questions. Try reading more pages before asking question, too.</li> <li>▪ <b>Give your child practice following directions.</b> Begin with one. "Pick up the book." Then add more: "Pick up the book and bring it to me." Make directions more complex as you watch your child's skills improve.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Work With Children to Help Them Face Their Fears</p>               | <p>Fear is a healthy emotion. It tells us when we are in danger. Sometimes children's fears can be unrealistic and overwhelming. Adults can help children to conquer these feelings with these tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Don't make fun of your child's fear.</b> Look for solutions instead of saying things like, "You're silly. There's nothing to be afraid of."</li> <li>▪ <b>Ask for details about the fear.</b> The solution will depend on his answer. If he's afraid of the dark, he may need a night light or he may want you to check under the bed for monsters.</li> <li>▪ <b>Read children's books about your child's fear.</b> Many books ease childhood worries and show kids they're not alone.</li> <li>▪ <b>Avoid passing your fears along to a child.</b> It's natural to be nervous when your child tries something new. If you're brave, your child is more likely to be, too.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Celebrate A Child's Successes By Dedicating Special Meals</p>      | <p>When children succeed, they should feel proud of themselves. You can encourage this by celebrating your child's achievements. A good time to do this is at dinner with the whole family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Dedicate a food to the child.</b> If you've made muffins or pasta, say, "This is Scott's spaghetti in honor of how well he cleaned his room or Tonya's muffins in honor of how well she picked up the toys today." You can dedicate meals or snacks to adults, too.</li> <li>▪ <b>When a child does well, let her use a special snack, lunch, or dinner plate.</b> It may be a different color or special pattern. Use it when your child is brave or learns a new skill. Make sure each child gets a chance to use it, though.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Preschool Age Children Often Mean Power Struggles</p>              | <p>One way to help eliminate power struggles is to give him choices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offer two acceptable choices for meals, clothes, and activities and give your child the opportunity to pick which one he prefers.</li> <li>▪ If you want cooperation, don't ask children something. Tell them. Asking gives children a chance to say no. Instead, say "Please pick up your toys. We can't go to the playground until all the toys are put away."</li> </ul>   |

**School readiness skills also include reading, problem-solving and being organized. Spending time with a child helps, too!**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Time Spent With Your Children Is The Best Gift You Can Give</p>     | <p>The best gift that adults can give to children is their time. Here are some suggestions for making the most out of your busy schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If the child likes to cook, teach him how to prepare a simple snack or simple, inexpensive meal for family or small group of friends. Sit down and plan the menu with him. Look up recipes; make a shopping list. Then prepare the food together.</li> <li>▪ If a child loves sports, summer is a great time to brush up on a favorite sport or learn a new one together. Find a sporting event nearby that fits your budget.</li> <li>▪ If the child loves to read or should read more, talk to the local librarian to get a list of age-appropriate books. Then set aside some time to read the books together.</li> <li>▪ If a child enjoys the outdoors, plan an afternoon at a nature center, county or state park or perhaps plan an overnight camp-out.</li> <li>▪ If the child enjoys family games, find a favorite board game and set up a family game night. Look for a new game you can learn together. Check out a book of card games on your next visit to the library.</li> </ul> <p>New skills and experiences learned and enjoyed together make for happy memories and special moments you both will treasure.</p> |
| <p>Take Time To Work Directly With Your Child On Reading</p>           | <p>You don't have to be an expert in reading to help your child excel in reading. All you have to do is to take the time to work directly with her. Doing things like these can greatly improve her reading achievement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listen to your child tell stories and read aloud.</li> <li>▪ Help your child sound out letters and words.</li> <li>▪ Watch as your child copies letters and words.</li> <li>▪ Say a word and let your child spell it.</li> <li>▪ Read to your child.</li> <li>▪ Play letter or word games with your child. Ask the librarian for ideas.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Teach Your Preschooler To Tackle Major Tasks One Step At A Time</p> | <p>By the time your preschooler begins school, he will have to have enough attention span to complete simple tasks. Help him by breaking tasks into small steps. For example, suppose he wants to make breakfast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ First step is to set out his spoon, napkin, cup and bowl. When done, praise him for a job well done.</li> <li>▪ Start step two by having him get out the milk, cereal, and juice. Praise him again.</li> <li>▪ Step three would be pouring the cereal into the bowl with milk on top.</li> <li>▪ Step four is pouring the juice.</li> <li>▪ Step five is sitting down and digging in! Congratulate your child for each step completed. Explain that those five small steps added up to the big job of making his/her own breakfast.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Practice Organizing With Your Preschooler</p>                       | <p>Being organized does make life easier in general and even in school. Preschoolers are not too young to practice organizing. Try these ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Scatter items around a room, such as shoes.</b> See if she can spot them and put them away.</li> <li>▪ <b>Make a pile of two kinds of things, such as blocks and crayons.</b> Can she separate them into two piles?</li> <li>▪ <b>Sort laundry with your child.</b> Suggest that she match socks to each other or divide clothes by color and size.</li> </ul>  |

## News Flash!

### Expensive Education Toys Aren't Needed to Help Children Learn

Children learn just as well (and perhaps even better) when they play with simple household items and simple toys. You don't need to spend lots of money. The trick is to start seeing things "through a child's eyes." Early childhood professionals who have been working with children for years know this trick! Early childhood professionals who have been working with children for years know this trick! Don't throw away an empty paper towel tube -- toddlers love to look through the tube. And for children who are walking, an old purse you no longer use may be just the thing to carry around their "treasures." Here are more suggestions for free or inexpensive playthings any child will learn to love:

- ✓ Aluminum pie tins
- ✓ Balls of all sizes (except those small enough for a child to swallow)
- ✓ Pots and pans with lids
- ✓ Boxes, boxes, and more boxes
- ✓ Wooden spoons
- ✓ A special drawer or cabinet filled with safe objects and within the child's easy reach
- ✓ Sponges
- ✓ Measuring spoons and cups
- ✓ Child-size pails and shovels
- ✓ Dolls
- ✓ Wooden blocks
- ✓ Music boxes
- ✓ Stuffed animals
- ✓ Plastic dishes
- ✓ Old telephones
- ✓ Old clothes for dress-up (boys and girls!)
- ✓ Sand
- ✓ A pan of water and cups to fill and dump the water
- ✓ Blocks that fit together
- ✓ Transportation toys such as cars and trucks

**Remember:** The safety of the child is of utmost importance. Some activities in this booklet are meant for specific age groups. Safety and supervision should be based on the child's age and ability.

### Tasted anything good lately?

Children use all of their senses, including taste, to learn about the world. That's why kids put so many things in their mouths. Help a child learn to use his/her sense of taste by doing a taste test.

- ❖ Collect things with different flavors, e.g., sweet, salty, bitter.
- ❖ Have the child try each item with his eyes closed. Ask him to describe each one.
- ❖ Then, think of other flavors, such as spicy and bland.
- ❖ Talk about what he likes and what makes different foods taste good.
- ❖ Think of different flavors to combine, such as salty chips and spicy salsa or sweet cooking and bland milk. Which tastes better together?

# Just Checking!

Adults can help to prepare children to enter school ready to learn in a number of ways. How are you doing in these areas? Review how you are doing by answering these simple questions. Give yourself five points for something you do often, zero points for something you never do and any score between one and five for things you do occasionally.

## Are you teaching about teamwork?

- 1. I practice cooperating with my child/the children in my care.
- 2. I encourage children to take turns.
- 3. I let my child/children experience winning and losing.
- 4. I teach my child/children in my care about sharing.
- 5. I arrange time for children to play with each other.

A

## How well are you teaching about math?

- 1. I count things with my child/children in my care.
- 2. I use math words, such as dividing an apple into four parts.
- 3. I play math-related games, such as cards.
- 4. I use numbers in my conversations.
- 5. I sort things with my child/children in my care, such as laundry, books, and toys.

B

## Are you giving responsibilities

- 1. I give my child/children in my care daily tasks to do that are age appropriate.
- 2. I allow my child/children in my care to make choices, such as what clothes to wear or what activities to do.
- 3. I let my child/children in my care do things that each is capable of doing, such as washing her own hands, pouring her own milk.
- 4. I teach my child/children in my care to help solve problems. For example, “Where should we keep the library books?” or “How should we put these Toys away so everyone can reach them?”

C

## Are you teaching concepts?

- 1. I describe things by color, shape, size.
- 2. I look for different shapes with my child/children in my care.
- 3. I compare sizes with my child/children in my care.
- 4. I talk about colors with my child/children in my care.
- 5. I help my child/children in my care sort things by color, shape, and size.

D

How did you score? Be sure to score sections A, B, C, and D separately. If you scored 20 points or above on any single section, you're doing well. 15-19 points is average. Below 15 indicates that you should focus on doing more in this area.

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- Learning Partners, Guide to Educational Activities for Families
- School Readiness Workshops by Anne Arundel Public School Teachers

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