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How to Help Your Child be Successful in Kindergarten

By Tina O'Block

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Your child's first year of school should be a fun and exciting time. Children who are comfortable with and prepared for this first school experience are more likely to have rewarding and productive years, and therefore associate positive feelings with education. Since parents are children's first and most important teachers, you can play a key role in preparing your children for a successful school experience by pre-exposing them to key concepts they will experience in school. This can be done in a fun, enjoyable manner by making everyday play experiences learning experiences as well.

New learning builds on prior knowledge, therefore the more exposure or background a child has with a concept the easier it is for new learning and deeper comprehension to occur. Providing your child with pre-exposure to concepts such as the alphabet, numbers, following directions, listening, reading, cutting, tracing, etc. will help them feel more comfortable and confident when they experience these similar concepts in school, thus better enabling learning to occur. Schools are becoming more academic, dependent on standardized tests, and fast-paced. Giving your children some familiarity with concepts they will encounter can help lessen the anxiety and stress that often accompany these experiences. Children who are overly stressed or uncomfortable are less likely to be able to concentrate and learn.

Children have a natural motivation to learn and a curiosity about the world. You can enhance and nurture this natural motivation by making enjoyable play experiences learning experiences as well.

For example, children's games are great resources for combining learning with physical activity. Duck, Duck, Goose can be a way of reinforcing concepts such as the alphabet by having children say the name of a letter in place of the word, duck, and a word that begins with that letter in place of the word, goose.

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Hide and Seek can become a learning experience by hiding numbers, letters, colors, your child's name, phone number, address, etc. around the house and asking your child to find them.

Simon Says is a great game to practice following directions and positional words such as on, above, below, etc.

Bingo can be used to reinforce number recognition, letter recognition, the difference between upper case and lower case letters, letter sounds, colors, etc.

You can have a treasure hunt while shopping, driving, or at home by seeing how many letters, numbers, colors, or shapes your child can find.

You can also play I Spy where you state, "I spy with my little eye something that is..." and you describe a letter, number, shape, color, etc. that you can plainly see. Your child then tries to guess what you are describing. Your child can also take a turn describing something (this helps develop verbal skills).

Children's individual interests can also be incorporated into learning experiences.

Blocks or Lego's can be used to teach patterns (have them build towers with alternating colors), counting, sorting (separate the blocks by colors, shapes, size), etc.

If your child likes to color, have them create rainbow tracings of letters or numbers by tracing them with as many colors as possible.

Play dough can be made into shapes, letters, and numbers.

An interest in cars and trucks can be used when learning how to trace by telling your child to keep his car (crayon or pencil) on the road (whatever is being traced).

An interest in animals or dinosaurs can be used when learning how to cut with scissors by relating the opening and closing of the scissors to the opening and closing of an animal's mouth. You can pretend the animal is "eating" the lines on the paper.

Your child's surroundings can also play a part in preparing them for school. Providing a number and variety of books for your child and taking time to read to them is one of the most important things you can do for their education. Reading to a child teaches them vocal skills, vocabulary, listening skills, left-to-right orientation, cause and effect, knowledge about the world around them, and pre-reading skills. Most importantly, it instills a love for reading and books which will benefit them throughout their entire education. After all, every subject (even math) requires reading.

Our brain absorbs information from our surroundings on a conscious and unconscious level, and between 80–90% of all information absorbed by the brain is visual. Therefore,

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providing visual displays in your child's room or elsewhere can actually aide in learning. Things such as the alphabet, colors, numbers, etc. can be hung up or displayed in places where your child will see them. Even magnetic letters on the refrigerator can aide in retention and learning. This is why many schools have plenty of visuals displayed in the halls and classrooms.

Young children can also learn many concepts through music. For example, they usually learn their abc's by the alphabet song. There are many children's tapes available that teach concepts through music. Playing these while in the car or while your children play can aide them in learning. Even though they might not be singing along or seem like they are even paying attention, subconscious learning can be occurring.

You may also want to practice separating from your child for short periods of time, such as enrolling in a program or play group or having them spend time with a babysitter. Separation anxiety can be traumatic for some children if they are not used to being away from their parents, and this anxiety can inhibit

their ability to learn and relax while in school.

Lastly, no matter what methods you try with your child, the most important thing to remember is to make them enjoyable. You want your child to associate positive feelings with learning. Take turns choosing activities; give your child some choice sometimes. This makes them feel less dictated to and more willing to learn. Also, offer them some variety in activities, do not always use the same learning methods all of the time as this can create boredom and disinterest. Choose the methods that work best with your child (every child is different) and have fun!

Children are like flowers, they all bloom at different times. But, parents can help nurture them by providing experiences that enable them to blossom into children who love learning and school.

Tina O'Block holds a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction and a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She has been teaching kindergarten/preschool for 13 years.

She is the author of Now I Know My ABCs and a Whole Lot More: Alphabet Activities for Preschoolers and Kindergarteners which is available at <http://www.oblockbooks.com> .

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Keep Preschoolers Cool about School

By Jane Lake

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The first day of school is a momentous occasion for parent and child. Excitement, tinged with uncertainty, fills the weeks before September. Anxious mothers coax awkward five-year-old fingers to tie shoelaces (or give up and buy sneakers with Velcro), while proud fathers urge their children to write their own names or recite the alphabet.

It used to be that children entering the school system were expected to have mastered certain skills before arriving, but times have changed, according to Marilyn Philbrick, a primary education co-coordinator for a large, progressive school board. "We recognize that children develop at different rates, and there are no skills as such that we insist a child learn before entering kindergarten. What we like to see is a child who has confidence and a positive attitude."

Still, starting school marks a child's first step into the world outside the family. There are changes and challenges to face. It's a rare parent or child who can "let go" without some pain. To ease the transition from home or nursery school to kindergarten, practice these strategies during summer:

- Talk about school. First-day jitters are common, but being frightened may be more manageable if you encourage your child to express his or her feelings.
- Read about school or help your child to "play school" with you or with friends.
- Reinforce basic safety rules. Your child should be able to say his or her name and address clearly. Try helping your child memorize your home phone number, too; it may be easier if you sing it together to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.
- Encourage friendships with neighborhood children who are also starting kindergarten. Knowing even one child who will be sharing that first day can make a big difference.

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- Tell your child to choose something from home to take to

school. A favorite small toy or family photo can help ease homesickness.

- Take advantage of introductory days when you and your child can meet the teacher and have an advance look at the kindergarten classroom.
- Maintain a cheerful attitude towards school; chances are your child will then feel cheerful about it, too.

A kindergarten program should provide a warm, caring and fun-loving environment sensitive to individual differences, where each child has an opportunity to advance at his or her own rate. As children progress, they learn new things and meet new people. Your encouragement can help them feel good about themselves and their accomplishments; in years to come, this new-found independence will bring its own rewards, not only in school, but in the rest of the big wide world, as well.

Jane Lake is a successful freelance writer and editor of the top-ranked craft site, <http://www.allfreecrafts.com>, where you will find photos and full instructions for hundreds of craft projects. She also edits and produces <http://www.allfreeprintables.com>, which features printable recipe cards, chore coupons, school lists, check lists and paper toys.



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