

Getting Ready for Preschool

Helpful Suggestions for Parents

Many parents believe that getting their child ready for preschool involves teaching them the alphabet and how to hold a pencil correctly ~ take it from this experienced preschool teacher that it's more helpful for children to start school knowing how to care for themselves and how to have positive interactions with others. Parents can help their child have a happy, successful preschool experience by following these suggestions...

- Help your child develop independent life skills such as washing and drying hands, eating without help, cleaning up after playing, dressing himself including putting on his own coat and shoes, being responsible for throwing away her own trash.
- Help your child learn how to use the potty independently - help him let adults know (other than parents) when he needs to use the potty; learn how to pull her pants up and down without help and wipe properly. Explain the importance of washing hands after using the bathroom.
- Give your child practice in spending time away from you. Schedule some activities that require your child to separate from you and interact with other adults (not just Grandma), before starting preschool.
- Help your child develop communication skills - parents often say "use your words" but young children don't always know what words to use. Make an effort to provide words to explain what she needs, and how she could say it. Provide words for the emotions he may be feeling, "I can see you're feeling sad," or "angry," etc. Explain that talking is the best way to let others know what you need, and help you get what you want.
- Encourage your child to play and work on projects on his own, on a regular basis - help your child learn to look at a book by herself, to make a drawing or build with blocks, without adult direction.
- Provide opportunities for your child to participate in group activities with other children. Story-time at the library will help prepare her for circle-time at preschool. Play dates and organized group activities give children practice in sharing, taking turns, and help them develop patience and empathy. Reinforce the importance of telling others what you need, asking for a turn with a toy, etc. Try to minimize your own interactions - try not to mediate, direct, or control the play unless it's necessary (to maintain safety or to avoid a major problem).
- Help your child develop listening skills (listening to other children as well as adults) by listening quietly to stories and singing songs, as well as playing together. Poems and finger plays (songs with corresponding hand motions) not only help children learn how to listen but also how to follow directions. Ask your child to repeat what another child said, to be sure your child truly listened to that child.
- Create regular routines that your child can count on at home. A daily schedule and clear expectations (such as cleaning up after play) will help prepare him for the structure at preschool. Going to bed early, at the same time, with a consistent routine each night, will help her wake up ready for school the next morning. Sharing a mid-morning snack each day will be a daily occurrence at preschool too.

Starting preschool is a big step for both children and parents, and it takes time for everyone to adjust. Be patient and try to embrace this special time in your lives. I tell parents it's like climbing a mountain - you may experience a little stormy weather on the way up, but once you get over the hump, most everyone has fun and enjoys preschool - parents too!

~ written by Dotty A. Meyer