

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR

Kindergarten

advice from a veteran teacher



There are certain questions that I get asked over and over again as a literacy specialist and teacher. One of them? How to prepare for kindergarten. What to do with toddlers, preschoolers, even babies to be sure that they're ready for kindergarten when the day comes. Ironically, I was answering this question LONG before I had an entering kindergartener of my own.....but now, I can confidently say that I did all of these things with Lydia. I'm sharing 13 things you can do at home to help prepare your child for kindergarten.





Before sharing what I suggest you DO, I'd like to share what I suggest you DON'T do. Please don't treat your child as if they are in elementary school before they actually are. Flashcards and memorizing words, elementary school worksheets, work that is appropriate for older children? Younger kids just aren't developmentally ready for this type of activity. They need play and language based opportunities to learn kindergarten readiness skills. I PROMISE, if you are providing younger children with language and print rich activities that are appropriate for their age along with opportunities to function in a group setting and follow a schedule....they WILL be ready for kindergarten. The goal is for that transition to be smooth, easy and enjoyable!

How to Prepare for Kindergarten: 13 Things You Can Do At Home To Get Ready

1. Read to Your Child EVERY single day. Statistically, children who are read to for 20 minutes everyday enter kindergarten with stronger senses of print and larger vocabulary. These are precursors for reading and comprehending skills. Does it have to 20 minutes at once? Absolutely not. Try a book in the morning, a book before nap if you are at home with your child, and a book before bedtime. For us? It's a book in the morning, a book or two after we pick Lydia up from daycare, and two books as part of our bedtime routine.
2. Teach concepts of print while reading. What does that mean? This is fancy teacher talk for demonstrating that print moves from left to right and showing which direction pages turn. As you read, point to the words. Ask your child to help you turn the pages. Point out the cover, discuss the illustrations.
3. Discuss story structure. Fancy teacher talk again for TALK ABOUT THE BOOK. Very simple, discuss who the story is about. Ask what happened at the beginning, middle and end of the book. Can you do the same thing with movies? Absolutely. But don't assume it replaces this activity with a book. Bonus if you have these discussions with BOTH.
4. Set up playdates at your home and in other places. Children are the center of their parents world (trust me, my daughter is the center of mine). Especially oldest or only children. It is important that they learn to play with other children their age without adult instruction. This takes time, and practice (you can expect to see toddlers interact with each other and slowly move away from parallel play around the age of three to three and a half).
5. Allow your child to have relationships with other adults besides their parents. Babysitters, preschool teachers, other moms you are close to, a nursery caregiver at your place of worship....find a situation that you are comfortable with, and let your child slowly develop relationships with those adults through short times away from mom and dad. This will make the transition to preschool and kindergarten easier. Don't rush, this can be a very little bit of time in the beginning! You want to create a positive experience for everyone.
6. Practice counting. A lot. Count puzzle pieces, count crayons, count bananas at the grocery store. Count shoes as you clean up your child's room. This constant counting will give them a sense of numbers and create a foundation for advanced math skills.
7. Play catch on a regular basis. This will develop fine motor skills and give your child confidence on the playground.
8. Engage in imaginary play (with your kiddo). This creativity? One of the most important skills in LIFE. So, wear the dress up clothes. Let your child direct imaginary play and enter the world of make believe. This is a highly important part of childhood and development.
9. Teach your child the colors....this can easily be done through art projects together. No need for color flashcards. Talk about the crayons and paints you are using. Go on a color of the day hunt (look for all red things one day and yellow the next). The key? TALK about colors together.
10. Practice following multiple step directions. This can be a ROUGH one for little kiddos (and let's be real, some not so little kids too). Start with simple one step instructions and give a LOT of positive reinforcement. Around age three, try two step directions (ie can you please take off your shoes and put them in your room). By age five, and entering kindergarten.....following multiple step directions should be a norm (ie Lydia can you go upstairs, put on your shoes, grab your backpack and meet me at the front door).
11. Practice asking for help verbally. In a classroom of students, it is VERY important that a child is able to express their need for help. Encourage your child to ask for help when necessary at home, and respond positively when they do (ie "thank you SO much for explaining what you needed, now it's EASY for me to help you!")
12. Letter Recognition: this is a hot topic....should your child know the names of the letters? It is required in most kindergarten classes. However, there is NOT a direct correlation between letter naming and more advanced reading skills. There IS a correlation between letter SOUNDS and reading skills. But, letter names are a language children are expected to speak. So, my suggestion? Don't go nuts. Play letter games. Get toys that sing the names of the letters. Use blocks with letters on them. Make it a part of your everyday conversation. Don't drill and kill. It just causes stress.
13. Talk about school in a positive way. So many adults tell children school will be HARD or stressful. At times it will. But it will also be fun. And during those challenging times? The adults at school and at home will work together to make it easier.