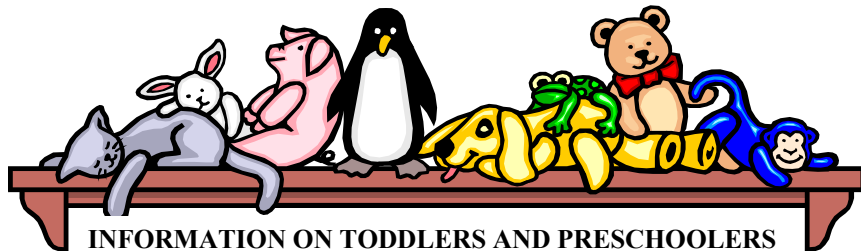




TODDLER TOPICS: 2005



INFORMATION ON TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

ISSUE NO. FOUR

Dear Parent:

Perhaps you are wondering why you should be thinking about school readiness when your child is only a toddler. Children begin to learn the day they are born. The quality of these early learning experiences has a powerful influence on their ability to start school ready to learn and succeed. Parents are the child's first and most important teachers. This issue of Toddler Topics will provide information about what you can do to prepare your child to be successful in school and throughout life.

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WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?

School readiness is a term used to describe all the early learning experiences that stimulate your child's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. Your child was born with over 100 billion brain cells or neurons. These neurons form connections called synapses, which are the "wiring" of the brain. More wiring occurs during the first few years of life than at any other time. The final number of connections is largely determined by your child's early learning experiences. Only those connections that are frequently made active are retained. Those connections not often used will be pruned or discarded so active connections become stronger. Nurturing and stimulating your child with quality early learning experiences can increase the number of synapses by as much as 25 percent.

Sincerely,

Nancy E. Crago, Ph.D., C.F.C.S.
Extension Educator

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WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Most of your child's brain development takes place after birth. You can continue to contribute to your child's healthy development in many ways.

Be responsive, warm and loving. Responding lovingly to your toddler's needs helps develop feelings of security. Touch and hold your toddler. The bond that develops between the two of you will help to shape your toddler's emotional growth and all future relationships.

Talk, sing, and read, with your toddler. The more frequently you talk and communicate with him, the faster he will learn. Make up stories about daily events. Describe what you are doing in daily routines. Sing songs about people and places he knows.

Establish Daily Routines and Rituals. Repeated positive experiences, which form strong connections between the neurons in the brain, provide your toddler with a sense of security. For example, a child knows it is almost bed time because his dad gives him a bath and reads him a book. This daily routine associated with pleasurable feelings reassures your child. It helps him know what to expect from his environment and to make sense of the world around him. Children who have safe and predictable interactions with others do better later on in school.

PLAY HELPS A CHILD LEARN

Your toddler's play is setting the foundation for future success in school. Through play, he develops the skills necessary to learn to read and write and for success in science and math. This does not mean teaching him to read and write using drills and work sheets. It means encouraging your toddler to explore and play. Give your toddler age appropriate and safe play materials to support his play. Resist the temptation to "teach" him during play. Let him be in charge of the play. Avoid interrupting your toddler's play. For example, say, "You are using the big brush to paint a red picture." or "I see you're taking your baby for a ride in the stroller. Where are you going?" As your toddler grows older, encourage him to use his imagination instead of play objects. Teach your toddler to use words to solve his problems with other children. Don't expect your toddler to share his toys, he isn't ready yet.

Watch your child at play and see how much he/she is learning.

When your toddler builds with blocks— She is improving her visual memory which is needed for learning to read. She is learning to judge distance, space and time which are skills needed to succeed in science and math. She is learning to achieve a self-selected goal which is important for success in all school subjects.

When your toddler works a puzzle.

He is learning to stick to a job, complete it, and feel good about it, which will help her develop persistence to complete school subjects. He is learning to notice the differences between the background and the picture which are the type of distinctions needed to recognize letters and to learn to read.

PLAY HELPS A CHILD LEARN—CONTINUED

When your toddler does art projects -

Mixing two colors of paint together develops his understanding of cause and effect, a foundation of science. He is learning to use symbols or pictures to represent his ideas when drawing a picture. Understanding that letters and numbers are symbols and practicing using them are needed to learn to read and write.

CHOOSE QUALITY CHILD CARE AND PROGRAMS

Choosing child care is a big step. You have many choices to make as you look for the right kind of care. Choosing high quality care and early education will boost your child's learning and social skills when they enter school. To make a good decision, visit and observe the center or home at least twice before making a decision. Observe how the provider interacts with the children. Seek a provider who is warm and caring toward the children. Look for a provider who plays and talks with the children.

Check to be sure the environment is clean and safe. The atmosphere should be cheerful with lots of laughter and child made decorations at the children's height. Staff should be trained in CPR and first aid.

Ask the provider for a certificate of compliance of a registered home or licensed center and proof of training. Ask the provider if she participates in a quality improvement program.

Ask if the children get to choose from a wide variety of activities. Look for a variety of toys and play materials that are right for your child's age. Ask how often the children go outside. Look for children who are encouraged to be creative.

Look for a center or home where you feel welcome. Ask yourself if it is a place where you would enjoy spending days if you were a child. Ask the staff how information is shared with parents.

For more information about choosing quality child care, contact your County Extension Educator. Ask for the publication, *Choosing Child Care – a guide to selecting quality care for your child*.



Read! Read! Read!

Read to your toddler every day. Make the time you spend together special. It is a special gift you can give to her. Encourage your toddler to turn the pages of the book as you read.

He will want to hear his favorite stories over and over again. Rereading may be very boring for you, but it is valuable for your child. Rereading helps your child remember the text. Pause before a familiar word to give your child the chance to say the missing word. He will begin to practice his own pretend reading. Encourage your toddler to read the book alone while you are close by to comment. Building confidence in pretend reading will help him move successfully into reading.

Take your toddler to the library. Let her select several books to bring home. Your librarian can help you find books on topics your toddler likes.

Good Books for Toddlers

Toddlers enjoy predictable books –

- *Words rhyme
- *Sentences repeat
- *Pictures closely correspond with the text

Bang, M. 1983. *Ten, nine, eight.*
 Barton, B. 1991. *The three bears.*
 Brown, M.W. 1947. *Goodnight moon.*
 Carle, E. 1969. *The very hungry caterpillar.*
 Carle, E. 1984. *The very busy spider.*
 Degan, B. 1983. *Jamberry.*
 Flack, M. 1932. *Ask Mr. Bear.*
 Fleming, D. 1993. *In the small, small pond.*
 Fleming, D. 1994. *Barnyard Banter.*
 Fox, M. 1986. *Hattie and the fox.*
 Galdone, P. 1973. *The little red hen.*
 Hudson, C., & B.C. Ford. 1990. *Bright eyes, brown skin.*
 Hutchins, P. 1974. *The wind blew.*
 Kalan, R. 1981. *Jump, frog, jump!*
 Keats, E.J. 1971. *Over in the meadow.*
 Lewison, W.C. 1992. *Buzzzz said the bee.*
 Martin, B. 1970. *Brown bear, brown bear.*
 Neitzel, S. 1989. *The jacket I wear in the snow.*
 Slobodkina, E. 1947. *Caps for sale.*
 Trapani, I. 1993. *The itsy, bitsy spider.*
 Winthrop, E. 1986. *Shoes.*
 Wood, A. 1992. *Silly Sally.*

Make Reading Time Special

- ⇒ Touch each other by letting your child sit on your lap or next to you. This closeness may be the best part of reading together.
- ⇒ Choose a time to read when there are no distractions. Bedtime is a good time to relax together.
- ⇒ Choose a location that is comfortable.
- ⇒ Hold the book so your child can see the pictures. Let your child turn the pages.
- ⇒ Allow your child to talk about the story.
- ⇒ Change the pitch of your voice when speaking for different characters.

Adapted from: Schickedanz, Judith A. 1999. Much more than the ABCs – The early stages of reading and writing. NAEYC: Washington, D.C., pp. 77-78.

A Dad's Impact on School Readiness

Guest Author: Erik J. Vecere, Executive Director, National Fatherhood Initiative's Community-based Programming

Looking back, I had no idea how important my role as a dad was in preparing my first daughter, Alexa, for adjusting well to school. But now, as my second daughter gets ready for kindergarten, I can see there were many things I did that had a profound impact on Alexa's school readiness. These were unique gifts that could only come from her dad.

First, I remember telling her dozens of bedtime stories that weren't your ordinary bedtime stories – these stories didn't come from a book. I would ask her what kind of story she would like to hear. Sometimes she would want to hear a story about her stuffed animals, a princess, or a snake. Once I created a whole story about the tooth fairy and her castle made of teeth! I would let Alexa join in and help shape the course of the events. I didn't realize how I was helping her use her imagination and creativity. We also wrote and illustrated a book together called "The Princess of Iceland." Sometimes we still take turns reading it and remembering the fun we had putting it together.

Second, we dads love to get down on the floor and play with our kids. I used to play "school" with Alexa. Sometimes I was the teacher. Other times I would let her be the teacher. This was a great way to get Alexa familiar with the idea of going to school, making it feel less scary.

A third way I helped Alexa prepare for school was by encouraging her to draw and color. She loved when we would lie on our entryway floor and color a picture together. When Alexa would draw me a picture on her own, I would express my excitement by saying, "Wow—this picture is great!" I would tell her that I couldn't wait to take it into work to show others and pin it above my desk. This was building her self-confidence.

Many of us dads also like to build things. We would spend time building different objects with her vast Lego collection. This provided great opportunities for her to learn colors, shapes, and build three-dimensional objects. I would ask her to please hand me the red square or blue rectangle. She eventually started recognizing them by herself.

The three key things we need to remember, as dads, to best help our children become school ready are: **First**, make learning fun. The interactions I described were teaching Alexa important concepts, but we had fun doing them. **Second**, I learned that my two girls were unique in their personalities and learning styles. Alexa enjoyed making up bedtime stories. Katie would much rather have me read her storybooks. Building real objects with Lego's came easy for Katie, but Alexa preferred to build an abstract object and have fun guessing what it could be. **Third**, remember that we are part of the parenting team. We need to work with mom in blending our unique parenting skills with hers. Ultimately, this will provide our kids with the best of both parents and help them embrace school and learning with excitement.

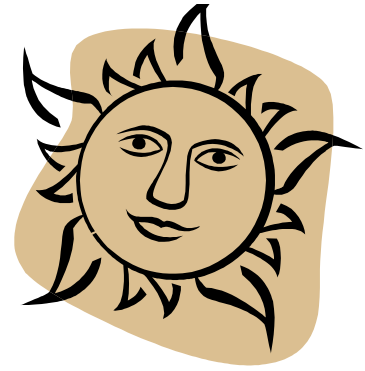
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RAIN OR SUN



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Go for a walk with your child. Take a magnifying glass to take a closer look at the things around you. Things you might look at are a spider web, a blade of grass, a spider, ants, or other insects, an earthworm, tree bark, plant stems, a drop of water, moss, hair. To help your child see more clearly, ask questions: “What does it look like?” “Does it look smooth or rough?” Is it moving?”

BODY SOUNDS

Make sounds with your body. Take turns with your child making these sounds – clapping hands, stamping feet, tapping toes.

Say the following verse:

Two little hands go clap, clap, clap.

Two little feet go tap, tap, tap.

Two little hands go thump, thump, thump.

Two little feet go jump, jump, jump.

One little body turns around.

One little child sits quietly down.

Source: Today’s Working Parent, College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State Cooperative Extension.

PAINT THE WORLD

Give the toddler a paintbrush and a pail of water outside. Sing to the tune of “Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush.”

This is the way we paint the house,

Paint the house, paint the house,

This is the way we paint the house,

Every single day.

Let your child paint the house with water. They can also paint the sidewalk, porch, car or patio tables or whatever else can be painted with “water.”