

Lay Foundations for Future School Success

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Create a Home Environment that Encourages Learning

Teach a love for reading. Reading is key to all academic learning. Read to your child often; choose fun books that give *you* joy when you read them. Take frequent trips to the library. Read a lot yourself so your child sees the lifelong benefits. Tell them your favorite stories. When they ask questions, don't just answer off the top of your head – model how you use reading to look it up.

Discipline – teach rules & manners. To succeed in school, kids need to understand there are rules they need to follow, and that some things are off limits. They should also know to say please, thank you, etc. If they say "I don't want to..." a lot, teach them that sometimes we need to do things we don't want to.

Practice paying attention. Take your child to story time, music classes, toddler friendly shows or classes with "circle time". This gives the child a chance to practice sitting still and listening to a teacher.

Do puzzles together. This includes shape sorters, stacking toys, etc. They teach that challenging yourself to think hard is fun, and that sometimes you have to persist through frustration to succeed.

Make things together. Build with Duplos and blocks. Do art: paint, scribble with crayons. Cook together.

Minimize screen time. Limit screen time to when there are not interactive hands-on play opportunities available (e.g. on an airplane, in a waiting room). Ensure that content is age appropriate and interactive. (Note: skype or Facetime calls where there's a human on the other end doesn't "count" as screen time.)

Promote social-emotional skills. Your toddler is not yet developmentally capable of consistently taking turns, sharing, and calming themselves down when upset, but start to teach and encourage these skills.

Create an organized family life. Following family routines at home – like hanging your coat up, tidying your toys, and taking dishes to the kitchen – help a child learn similar rules at school. Be sure your child has the self care skills to be independent at school, such as being able to toilet, wash hands, open snack packaging, and put on a coat independently. Encourage good sleep habits and eating habits.

Communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations

Talk about the value of education. Talk about how someday they'll go to preschool, show them where the big kids go to school. If you do classes together, attend every day, and be there on time.

Model a work ethic. If your child sees that you work hard, do your best, challenge yourself to continue to learn more and do better, and are responsible and reliable, it motivates them to be/do the same.

Challenge, but don't overwhelm. Be aware there is a "sweet spot" for learning. You want things to be hard enough that they have to stretch themselves, but not so hard that they always feel overwhelmed. You want them to learn that you can always succeed, but sometimes you have to work hard to succeed.

Praise *and* feedback. Don't give empty praise for the stuff that's easy, but DO give lots of praise where they had to work hard. Praise effort, don't imply that it's just god-given talent that helped them do well. Specific praise is better, and it's OK to give suggestions on how to improve (without criticizing them).

Strike a Balance – Avoid All Work and No Play

Remember that childhood is about more than just learning school readiness skills! Children need time to run outside to build large motor skills, unstructured play time with other kids to learn social skills, and bored free time to learn to be creative.

We know from neuroscience that kids learn better when they feel safe and happy, and they need down time to let their brain cement all the connections they've been developing. So, give them time to relax, to play, and to enjoy childhood!