

Spotlight on Kindergarten Readiness Kits

Kindergarten Readiness Kit Objective:

Research indicates that the first years of education are the most crucial to providing a solid foundation from which children can succeed in school. During this period, children develop the primary skills of literacy, numeracy, and social interaction.

Preparing your child for learning starts at home. It is vital to nurture key skills in children, including the ability to focus, think logically, recognize important words, count and perform basic arithmetic, demonstrate some self-control, and speak clearly.

There are a wide variety of ways to incorporate and encourage learning skills, from playing games to establishing daily routines, reading together to participating in arts and crafts. The most important thing is to spend quality time engaged in meaningful conversation and activities with your child whenever possible.

Common Skills that Kindergarten Readiness Kits Focus On

Pre-Literacy Skills: Children ages 3-5 are considered to be preschool-age. During this time, it is important to lay a strong foundation of language and literacy skills. Early exposure to a variety of language concepts and literacy themes can prepare your child for success in preschool and ensure they have adequate time to master skills that will help them to thrive in kindergarten. Early literacy is comprised of print concepts, phonological awareness as well as letter and word recognition. Since preschoolers are not ready to actually read entire books on their own, the focus is exposure to books and early “pre-literacy” concepts, including:

- Understanding that words are read from left to right and top to bottom.
- Orienting books to be right-side up and beginning to read on the front cover.
- Pointing to words to demonstrate understanding that the print carries meaning.
- Recognizing and producing rhyming words.
- Recognizing that words are separate units that make up a sentence.
- Blending and segmenting syllables and sounds to form words.
- Identifying the first and last sounds in spoken words.
- Recognizing and naming upper and lower case letters, especially letters in their first name.
- Recognizing the sounds associated with letters.

Book reading is an easy way to incorporate both language and literacy skills. Books can introduce new vocabulary words and feelings, grammar rules and other age-appropriate concepts.

Motor Skills

Fine Motor Skills: Fine motor skills are those that involve a refined use of the small muscles which control the hand, fingers and thumb. With the development of these skills, a child is able to complete important tasks such as writing, feeding oneself, buttoning and zippering. These abilities gradually develop through experience and exposure to a variety of toys, materials and even foods.

Gross Motor Skills: Gross motor (physical) skills are those which require whole body movement and which involve the large (core stabilising) muscles of the body to perform everyday functions, such as standing and walking, running and jumping, and sitting upright at the table. Gross motor skills are important to enable children to perform every day functions. Gross motor abilities also have an influence on other everyday functions. For example, a child's ability to maintain appropriate table-top posture (upper body support) will affect their ability to participate in fine motor skills (e.g. writing, drawing and cutting). These skills have an impact on the child's ability to navigate their environment (e.g. walking around classroom items such as a table and chair or up a sloped playground hill). Without well-developed gross motor skills, a child will struggle with many daily tasks such as eating, packing away their toys, getting onto and off the toilet or potty and sitting on a chair or stool.

Math Skills

"Mastery of early math skills predicts not only future math achievement, it also predicts future reading achievement," states Greg Duncan, PhD, of Northwestern University. Research into the importance of early math skills shows that children who are taught math early and learn the basics at a young age are set up for a lifetime of achievement in all aspects of their academic performance. Building more advanced math skills is just one of the areas in which basic math taught early on can make a difference.

Measurement: This category includes ordering and comparing objects to figure out time, weight, length and graphing. For example, Kyle held up his block tower and said, "this is taller than me." James looked towards Kyle and pointed towards the block tower. "Me too, it's taller than me," he said as he looked up towards the top of the block tower. Kyle and James demonstrated how they could compare how tall the block tower is to each of their heights.

Numeracy: This category includes saying number words, writing numbers, counting, and recognizing a number of objects. For example, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10," counted Devon as he pointed towards the cars lined up on the table. "I have more than you," he said as he pointed towards Melissa's cars lined up. "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6...oh yeah," she said as she pointed towards her cars lined up next to Devon's cars. Devon and Melissa demonstrated counting and recognizing the number of cars they each had to compare each other's quantities.

Pattern and Shape: This category includes identifying or creating patterns and shapes. For example, Jeremy and Mira sat on the carpet next to one another in the block area. Jeremy placed a magnetic block together. "I'm making a house," he said as he placed more magnetic blocks together. He took a magnetic block apart and said, "this needs to be over here," and pointed at his magnetic blocks on the floor. Mira looked towards Jeremy's magnetic blocks and pointed down toward her magnetic blocks. "I'm making a pizza," she said. Jeremy and Mira created patterns and shapes with 2D magnetic blocks to build symmetrical structures.

Classification: This category includes grouping or sorting objects by characteristics. For example, Casey placed a red horse into the red bowl. She picked up a blue pig and placed the blue pig into the blue bowl. "The blue pig goes in the blue pig pen," she said. Casey was classifying by sorting the blue and red animals into the corresponding same colored bowls.

Social and Body Awareness Skills

Emotional Self-Regulation: Emotional self-regulation, a large component of emotional intelligence, is the ability to manage one's experience and expression of emotions. With practice, children improve their capacity for emotional self-regulation. By age four, most children start to use strategies to eliminate disturbing external stimuli. In other words, they cover their eyes when they're scared and plug their ears when they hear a loud noise. Emotional intelligence encompasses awareness, understanding, and the ability to express and manage one's emotions.

Dramatic Play: Dramatic play can be defined as a type of play where children accept and assign roles, and then act them out. It is a time when they break through the walls of reality, pretend to be someone or something different from themselves, and dramatize situations and actions to go along with the roles they have chosen to play. And while this type of play may be viewed as frivolous by some, it remains an integral part of the developmental learning process by allowing children to develop skills in such areas as abstract thinking, literacy, math, and social studies, in a timely, natural manner.

Social Development through Game Play: According to Dr. Shari Nethersole, a physician at Children's Hospital in Boston, interactive games have the significant benefit of improving social skills through encouraging diplomatic and organized communication between children. When adults aren't playing, kids have to negotiate rules, follow a set system of directions and take turns to keep the game running. Learning games inspire cooperation and may even play a role in the development of conflict resolution and mediation skills.