

# Launch Into Learning!



*An activity book to help parents and caregivers  
prepare their child for school*

By Annette Eberlein MLS

# Welcome

Believe it or not, preparing a child for school starts the day you bring them home from the hospital. The best way to prepare your infant for life in and outside of the home is by building a healthy and secure, social and emotional relationship with them.

Building on this relationship, you play an extremely important role in your child's learning and readiness for school. Fortunately, the best things you can do to prepare your child for school are also the simplest and most natural. For example:

- Your child is learning words they need to know just by you talking with them throughout your day. A good goal is sharing 30 words an hour.
- Your child is learning to read and write when you provide them with time to scribble with crayons and read together. Aim for 20 minutes a day.
- Your child is learning to be confident when you give them plenty of time to experience different environments and discover new things.
- Your child is learning math when you plan meals, cook and bake together or play board games using dice or spinners.



This book is designed for parents and caregivers who are a child's first teacher(s). We will cover the skills your child needs, so they are ready to participate and learn the first day of kindergarten. Studies show that 40% of children starting kindergarten are behind in certain skills and will stay behind through high school and beyond.

Teaching your child to be a successful learner is child's play. Really! Children learn best when they play with adults. This book covers skills that a child needs to be ready to learn in kindergarten, and suggests low-cost play activities to get you there.

**Watch for these!** *The Activity icon lets you know where activities are and the pre-flight checklist will let you know what items you will need for a successful launch!*



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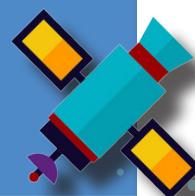
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# Social & Emotional

Parents and caregivers, your relationship with infants and toddlers is their first and most important one. A loving relationship with you helps your child develop friendships with children their own age later on. Same-age friendships and knowing how to get along are important parts of school readiness. So, helping your child form strong, stable, relationships is getting ready for kindergarten.

## *Is your child ready for Kindergarten?*

- It's normal for a five-year-old to break down in tears when they are upset. But, it's important that she knows her feelings, and can cope a little.
- They need to be aware of their feelings; knowing when they feel happy, sad, or fearful, and what might trigger those feelings.

### **Everyday activities help build social and emotional skills**

Touch your kids often with hugs, gentle strokes and rubs. Even if you are disciplining your child, hold their hand. If your child does not like cuddles, find other ways to connect, like rustling his hair or dancing together.

Reading time is a great way to get the conversation ball rolling and to start asking each other questions. Re-read their favorite book (even when you are sick of them), and include your child's name in the story.

Let your child lead in play activities. For example, when play is about pretending, let the kids develop the theme. Get into their world. Let them go with it. Ask questions. Play along. Be silly along with them and have fun!

## *Activity Pick a Face!*

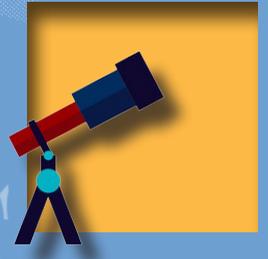
### **Build**

Have your child cut out pictures from old magazines of faces with different expressions.



## **Blast Off! Let's Play**

Sit down with your child in your lap. Have the pictures face down and the mirror near you. Have the child select a picture from the pile. Look at the picture together. First, the adult makes the same expression in the mirror as in the picture. The child is then asked to try making the same expression themselves. The goal is to connect with the child, notice different facial expressions and just play.



# Activity Storytelling with Emotion Dice

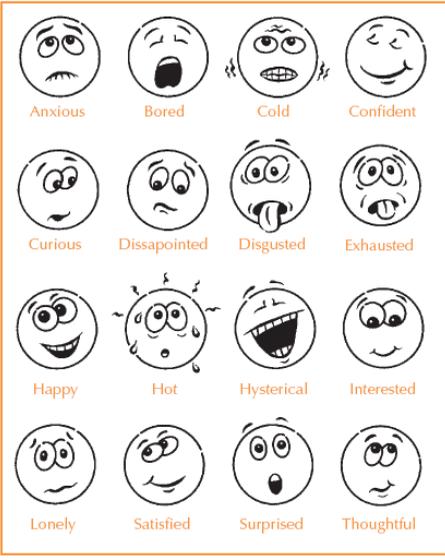
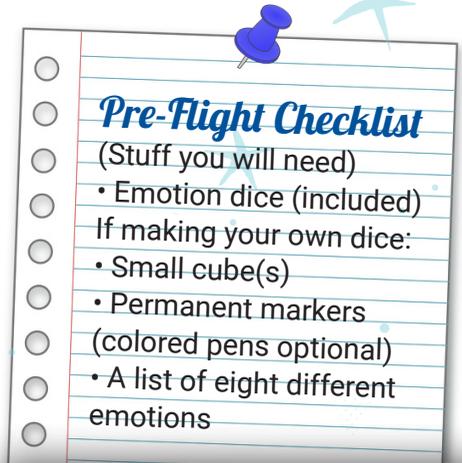
## Build

Draw a picture on each side of the dice that represents the emotion, like a happy face and sad face.

## Blast Off! Let's Play

Simply roll one dice and have you and the child name the emotion. Happy, sad, sleepy, etc.

Model the game to your child by creating a pretend story of why the face on the dice is whatever the emotion is (happy, sad, scared). For example, "that is a sad face because they were all out of my favorite ice cream." Have your child take a turn. When you find yourself running out of ideas, roll the dice again.



## More Activities

Books are a great way to discuss feelings. Below are a few book suggestions that have a plot about emotions.

- How do you Feel?* by Anthony Browne
- Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell
- Anh's Anger* by Gail Silver
- The Feelings Book* by Todd Parr
- Llama Llama Mad at Mama* by Anna Dewdney

# Plays Alone...

Play it is a powerful way kids learn so encourage it, either alone, with an adult or with groups of kids! Help them play by using simple toys, pretend situations, talking or singing. All these activities improve thinking, relationships, and language.

By the time your child enters kindergarten they will need to know how to share and take turns, but these skills take years to master. You can help develop these skills by having your child learn to play side-by-side with other children.

## *Is your child ready for Kindergarten?*

They are if they can...

- Join new groups with minimal stress.
- Use phrases like “please” and “thank you” when interacting with others.
- Share toys and take turns.

## *Everyday Activities*

Here are some daily activities to encourage your child and the children he is playing with to co-operate and work together. If the children have trouble sharing, you can encourage this by reminding them of any rules you have created. Praise and encourage them when you see them sharing and cooperating.

Here are some examples:

- “Billy, I like how you are helping Wanda make a tunnel.”
- “Wanda, it was nice of you to give Billy a napkin.”
- “Chris and Matt, I like how you are sharing the cars.”

## *More Activities*

### **Blowing Bubbles**

The ability for a child to sense his body in relation to his physical space and the physical space of other children is called spatial awareness. To help them learn this, blow soap bubbles for him and his friends. This allows him to understand the space around himself and others while they have fun jumping up to pop bubbles.

### **Be a role model**

Kids love to imitate Mom and Dad, so be sure to use words like please and thank you often. But she’ll learn to use these phrases in everyday conversations even faster when you praise her and react quickly to her polite requests and responses. If she forgets, just give her a little reminder.

# and With Others



## Cooking and Eating Together Activity



### Blast Off! Let's Play

Cooking is an excellent way to promote sharing and have fun. Children help create a snack, eat it, and clean up! You can set up the activity like a production line so each child has a special job to do. For example, if you are making a sandwich, have your child spread the peanut butter, his friend adds the jam, and ask both to put the sandwich together. Preparing and eating the sandwich as a group activity provides many opportunities to cooperate and use the words "please" and "thank you" as food is passed around.



# Follows Instructions...

In reality, most children don't behave all the time. But it's important that your child can listen and follow simple instructions.

## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

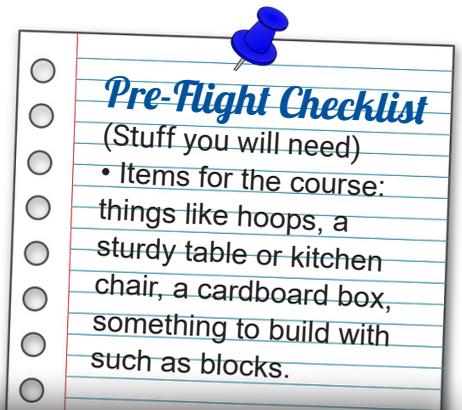
They are if they...

- Can play alone or with an adult for short periods of time and can focus on a task for about 5 minutes, even when facing obstacles (attention span).
- Can settle down for 15 minutes without playing with or touching other children. For example, they can calmly sit and listen to you read a short picture book.
- Remember and follow 3-step directions and obey simple and basic safety rules.

## Activity **Obstacle Course**

### Build

Start simple. For the first time, set a 3 or 4-part course and then increase it as your child's skills develop. This activity works best if at least a couple different steps can be done differently. For example, one step could be a cardboard box. But does your kiddo go in it or around it? He will have to listen to find out!



### Blast Off! Let's Play

To target listening skills, you give directions on exactly how to go through the obstacle course. You could set up a station with blocks and tell him he needs to build a five-block tower. Maybe include an obstacle station with a hula hoop that they can either jump in or actually do the hula.

# and Listens



## Simon Says

## Activity

### Blast Off! Let's Play

Someone is "Simon" and he tells everyone what to do by saying "Simon says....and giving an instruction." But if he tells you what to do without saying "Simon says" before the instructions—but you do it anyway—you're out. Mix it up by using your child's favorite character or a holiday theme. Does your child love superheroes? Play "Spiderman Says." If it's around the holidays (like Halloween), you can do "Scarecrow Says."

### More Activities

Listen to songs that incorporate directions like the Hokey Pokey. Below is another favorite.

#### Clap Clap Clap your hands

(Slowly clapping to the rhythm of the words)

As s-l-o-w-l-y as you can,

Clap, clap clap your hands

(Fast clapping to the rhythm of the quickly spoken words)

As quickly as you can

Repeat verses with new words and motions

Shake, shake, shake your hands....

Roll, roll, roll your hands...

Rub, rub, rub your hands .....



# Physical Milestones

Watch your child play outside. See if your preschooler is hitting the right physical milestones. Teachers may use the word “gross and fine motor skills” when referring to how physically coordinated they are. Remember kids develop differently; some will develop certain skills sooner than others. But if you suspect your child has any developmental delay, ask your pediatrician.

## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

They are if they have the following physical milestones. They can...

- Jump on one foot
- Walk backwards
- Walk up and down stairs unassisted
- Kick a motionless ball, and throw it
- Skip using alternate feet

Research shows that playing outside regularly has a very positive impact on a child’s development, especially for developing balance and agility.

## Activity Balance, Throwing, Catching

### Build

Place a strip of tape on the floor and have your child stand on it.

### Balance Play

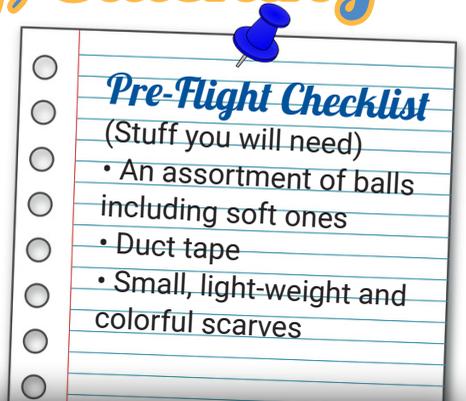
Invite your child to pretend they are a large “elephant” while trying to balance on the piece of tape.

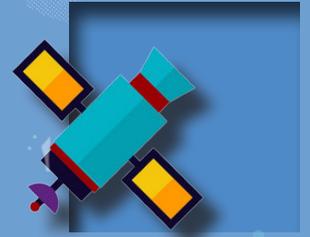
Have the elephant...

- Stand on one foot
- Wiggle its trunk (have your child pretend their two arms are the elephant’s trunk)
- Shake its tail

### Throwing Play

Have an assortment of balls readily accessible to children. Draw or tape large targets to outside walls for children to practice target throws.





## Catching Play

Small, light scarves can be thrown up into the air and caught using hands or other parts of the body. Scarves also make great tails for tail tag! Demonstrate the movements and ask children to copy the following actions with their scarves: Move scarf to different places—above their head, below their knees and behind them. Have them make the following motions: windshield wiper, helicopters, propellers, wheels, air snakes, floor snakes, butterflies. Also make spirals from left to right and right to left.

## Fine Motor Skills

These are skills used to pick-up and hold small objects, such as a spoon. Any activity that uses the small muscles of the fingers, toes, wrists, lips, and tongue helps develop fine motor skills.

## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

They are if they can use fine motor skills to...

- Cut paper with safety scissors
- Print some letters
- Copy shapes, including circles and squares
- Hold a crayon between the thumb and fingers



## Lacing Cards

## Activity

### Build

Create lacing cards. These can be purchased or made with poster board and a hole puncher. These can be made to match different themes or holidays.

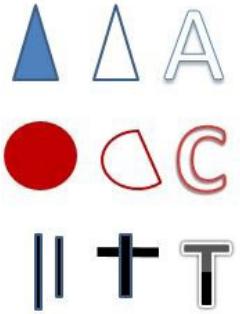
## Blast Off! Let's Play!

Tie one end of the lace to one hole of the card. Have your child lace the string through each hole.

# Pre-Reading

## Shapes

Shapes and letters have much in common. By understanding different shapes your child can get a better grasp on how to form letters. For example, look how a triangle, circle and rectangle have been turned into familiar letters in the illustration to the right. That is one reason learning shapes is a big part of pre-reading.



## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

They are if they...

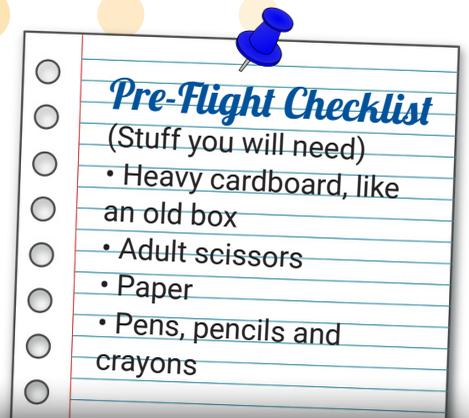
- Know these shapes: circle, square, rectangle, triangle, diamond, oval, pentagon, octagon, star and heart
- Have some exposure to cubes, spheres and cylinders
- Can name and sort objects by color, shape, size and type of thing
- Can match items that go together and can put puzzles together

## Activity Shapes to Letters

Having your child follow a curved or straight line with their finger or a writing tool is a great way to help develop a variety of skills that are necessary for success both in and out of school. The following activity will help your child get ready to form letters by making a set of stencils that simulate the shapes found in the alphabet.

## Build

1. On the cardboard, draw a variety of shapes (rectangles, circles, triangles and semi-circles) whose edges can be combined to make the letters in the alphabet. (Letters tend to be constructed from just a few basic shapes: long lines, short lines, small arcs, and large arcs.)
2. Cut the shapes out of the cardboard so your child can use them as stencils to trace around.





## Blast Off! Let's Play

- Invite your child to play with the stencils. This gives them a chance to explore and familiarize themselves with these new materials.
- Help your child to use the paper and drawing utensils to trace around some of the shapes and notice how they arrange them.
- Show your child how different shapes can be combined to make letters and have your child to use the shapes to create all of the letters in their name.

## More Activities

### Great Books to Explore Shapes

*What Am I? Looking through Shapes at Apples and Grapes* by Leo & Diane Dillon

*What is Round? and What is Square?* by Rebecca Kai Dotlich

*Shapes, Sizes & More Surprises* by Mary Tomczyk,

*Shapes, Shapes, Shapes* by Tana Hoban

## Letters

Knowing both upper- and lower-case letters is the goal, but recognize that kids see fifty lowercase letters to every upper case letter. Learning the sounds of all letters is also necessary for kindergarten.

### Simple Assessment

One way to determine if your child knows letters and sounds is to ask them. Below are two little assessments to help you know where your child is at. This should be fun, so ask your child to play—"Can you tell daddy what this letter is?" At this point your child should just be able to respond verbally.

- Point to the letter and say—"What letter is this?"

o	n	y	H	r	p	l	e	m	T
k	j	f	G	z	w	i	x	q	C
v	a	s	U	b	A	Q	B	d	E

- Point to the letter(s) and say—"What sound does this make?"

e	L	s	R	p	d	o	v	b	j
n	t	c	X	z	w	k	g	q	m
a	f	l	H	y	sh	ch	th	wh	Qu

# Pre-Reading

## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

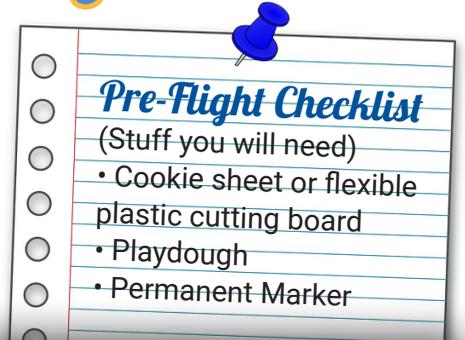
They are if they can...

- Recognize the letters of the alphabet
- Hear and make sounds into words
- Sing an ABC song
- Recognize the letters in their name

## Activity My Name with Dough Mats

### Build

Using a permanent marker, write your child's first name on the cookie sheet or plastic cutting board. Use block letters. Use upper case for the first letter and lower case for the rest.



### Blast Off! Let's Play

Invite your child to roll out the playdough into long ropes, giving them a chance to explore and familiarize themselves with playdough.

- Help your child to use the dough ropes to create the letters of their name.

Model the letter and sound. Point out words that begin with the same letter as your children's names (for example, John and jump). Make letter-sounds and ask your children to shape the matching letters in playdough.

Use another mat or the clean side of the cookie sheet, have your child repeat the process with other letters.

## Activity Letter Sounds

### Letter Echo

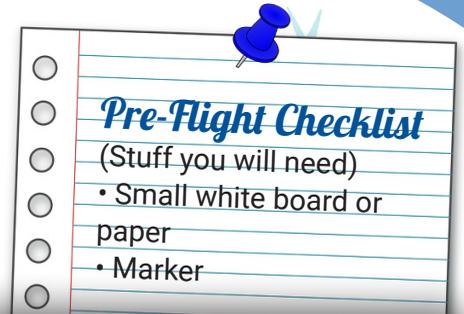
Learning letter sounds is really important, but sometimes spending too much time with just practicing the sounds can be boring. Remember, playing is learning. Here is a game that teaches the same skills, but it's more fun.



## *Blast Off! Let's Play*

Say to your child "Every time I say a word beginning with this letter, (point out the letter you have written on paper or white board) you say a word that starts with that letter." Write a letter on the board (don't forget the sounds sh, ch, th, wh). Let's have some practice. "So if I write B, I will say ball—you could say bat."

Give your child a chance to hear, think and make the connection, and let them shout it out. When your child is on a successful roll, it's ok if the word doesn't always match the letter. Your main emphasis is echoing sounds back and forth between both of you.



## *Echo Storytelling*

Storytelling game to match a letter sounds.

## *Blast Off! Let's Play*

We want the child to know when you say the sound of a certain letter, and be able to repeat it. In this case we will use the letter/sound B.

"Once there was a big, (child echo's big) black, (child echo's black) bumblebee (child echo's bumblebee). She woke up one morning, smelled the air, and got out of bed (child echo's bed)." Continue on with your own story with lots of B's.

Put a paper letter in each slot using three egg cartons until you have all the letters of the alphabet in order. Don't forget the sounds sh, ch, th, wh. Say letter-sounds and ask your children to pick out the letters that match those sounds.

## *More Activities*

Great books to explore alphabet shapes with both upper- and lower-case letters:

*Farm Alphabet Book* by Jane Miller

*Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert

*Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin Jr and John Archambault

# Pre-Reading

## Words

A child learns words through two-way conversations. Getting your child ready to speak words and sentences requires a lot of conversation on your part. Television and computer games do not provide this. They need a lot of child-to-adult and child-to-child conversation. Meeting your child's needs in this area requires a child to hear instructions, exchange ideas, and hear about thoughts and feelings. A good goal is exchanging 30 words per hour. Even if there is not an exchange, it's good to describe what you are doing. "Mommy is taking the pan out of the oven." Having a child around is the best excuse for talking to yourself because your kids are hearing you even when you think they are not.

## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

They are if they...

- Understand 4,000 words and use complete sentences
- Can recite 10 rhymes and songs
- Know groups of letters on the page make words
- Recognize the meaning of labels on 10 objects in my home
- Know the beginning sounds and letters in words
- Can clap syllables out in a word independently

## Activity Cut, Peek, and Tell a Story

Yes, a child needs to understand 4,000 words and use complete sentences before kindergarten! This activity promotes picture identification and making sentences through storytelling. Kids make picture squares from old magazines and use them to tell a story.

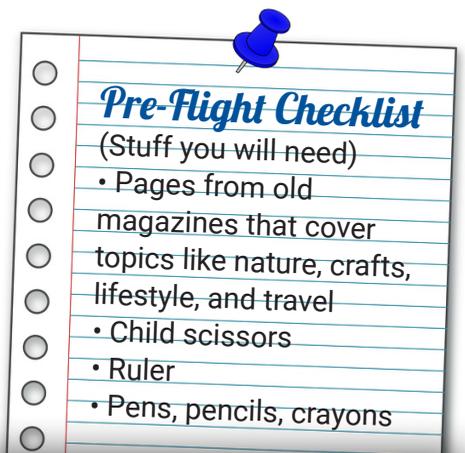
## Build

1. Lay all your magazine pages so that the sides with the most fun pictures are facing down. That's right, you can't see the pictures. Some squares may end up

with no or half of an image, so recycle those.

2. Adults: on the backside (the side without fun pictures), use a ruler and marker to draw squares about 5" on a side.

3. Kids need to use scissors in kindergarten, so have them cut out the squares without peeking at the pictures.





## *Blast Off! Let's Play*

- Give your child 10 squares with the pictures face down.
- Give yourself 10 squares with the pictures face down.
- Adults: start as the storyteller to model the activity. A storyteller begins by flipping over an image and beginning a story based on the picture. In turn, your child does the same thing.

## *More Activities*

Organize *Cut and Peek and Tell* pictures by theme, color or design, and use these new groups to tell more stories.

### **Clapping out syllables**

Your child should be able to clap out syllables in a word by themselves. The rhyme below is a terrific one to start with. Clap it out with your child and, over time, encourage them to do it by themselves. They are learning an important skill in this activity—that words are made from groups of sounds.

### **Higglety Pigglety Pop**

*Higglety Pigglety Pop*  
*The dog has eaten the mop.*  
*The pigs in a hurry,*  
*The cats in a flurry*  
*Higglety pigglety pop*

### **Books that encourage clapping out syllables.**

*Dancing on the Roof: Sijo* by Linda Sue Park  
*Where Else in the Wild? More Camouflaged  
Creatures Concealed... and Revealed*  
by David Schwartz  
*Dogku* by Andrew Clements



# Pre-Reading...

Believe it or not, it's OK if your child isn't reading when they start school. But they must recognize the letters of the alphabet and be able to hear and make sounds into words.

## Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

They are if they...

- Know how to turn pages of a book in order and know if the book is right side up.
- Have some pre-reading skills. For example, they know that groups of letters on the page make words. We read by moving through words from left to right.
- Know books have stories in them and can pretend to read by using picture cues. They can make up different endings of familiar books or retell a favorite story without looking at the book. They can answer 'what' or 'how' questions about a book.

## Activity Interactive Reading

Your child will learn to read around age seven. Learning to read well is built on skills that your child starts learning at birth—a process that is complicated and amazing. These activities work on pre-reading skills, so encourage the "reading" or "pretend reading" your child does. "Pretend reading" from memory provides practice with retelling and using books.

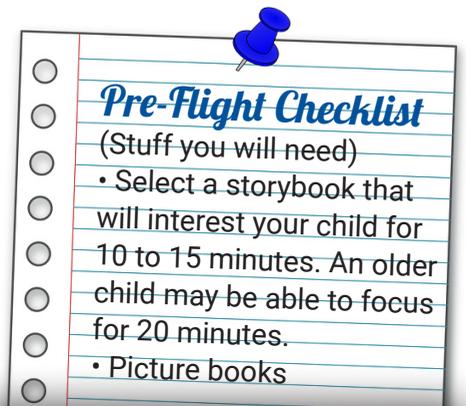
Remember, your child needs to learn and understand 4,000 words. You will be happy to know vocabulary grows very fast while reading to your child because words are learned within the context of a story.

## Free Sources of Books

Take advantage of your free sources for books. Get to know your public libraries and librarians. Librarians are a really great resource to help you select books your

child will love.

Tumble Book Library is an online collection of children's favorite story books. These are electronic picture books that you can read, or have read to your child. Many public libraries have this service available to you with a free library card.



# and Book Skills



## *Blast Off! Let's Play*

Your child may not be able to sit through the entire story. At this age, they may need to stand and wiggle. Despite the wiggles, chances are good that they are still hearing you read.

Read the title and the author of the story to the child. Use different voices and vary your tone as you read the story. Don't be afraid to ham it up a bit! Read with lots of variety in your voice. Show how words can have spirit, even though they are printed on a page.

Follow the words you read with your finger because they need to know groups of letters on the page make words and we read by moving through words from left to right. Encourage them to find letters they know or guess the next word, especially if you're reading a rhyming book.

Encourage the child to participate in the repetitious sounds in the story. Use the repetition and sound effects in a story (for example, crash, bam, choo choo) to hold the child's attention.

### **Ask your child**

Ask the child questions about the story such as, "What do you think is going to happen next?" "What do you see in this picture book?" Really use the picture book as a tool for talking with your child.

Help your child connect words to other words. This really helps with problem solving skills. So, connect a word to another word that means the same thing. For example, if your book is about dogs, build on that to include words like pooch and mutt.



# Problem Solving

## Using Counting, Patterns, Colors

Learning how to count, make patterns and learn about colors is a way for kids to start solving problems.

### Is your child ready for Kindergarten?

They are if they...

#### Counting

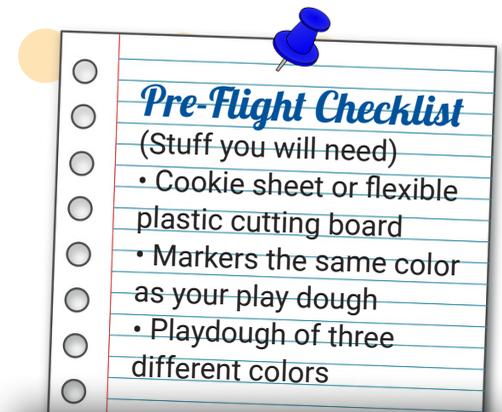
- Can count in order up to 20 and can point to numbers 1-12.
- Can recognize groups of 10 objects.
- Know about "less," "more," and "equal" using objects like blocks.
- Can do some easy adding and subtracting using objects like blocks.

#### Patterns

- Can name and sort objects by color, shape, size and type of thing.
- Can create patterns like two-step patterns (red-blue, red-blue). They recognize three-step patterns using colors, letters or objects.

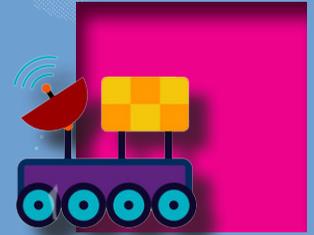
## Activity Dough Mats

Create patterns on a cookie sheet or plastic cutting board (dough mats). Kids love playdough and they should play with it a lot because it is great for developing those fine motor skills. Encourage kids to grab, pinch, pull, smash, push, and pinch dough into all sorts of shapes and to create patterns with these.



## Build

You can create a pattern to follow like two- and three-step patterns, such as red-blue, red-blue, with markers.



## *Blast Off! Let's Play*

1. Have your child roll out the playdough into different shapes using three different colors
2. Have them create different patterns using your marks on the dough mat as cues
3. Have them create their own patterns without cues

### **Counting – Extend the playdough mats to include**

- Recognizing groups of 10 objects
- Playing with ideas about “less,” “more,” and “equal”
- Include the idea of size by having kids create three balls of different sizes and with these, to create a snowman

### **Ask your child**

Ask the child questions about their collections of dough shapes and colors. On a pattern ask “What color or shape do we need next?” “What group has the most (color, shape, size)?” Use the dough mats as a talking tool to help your child learn patterns and groups.

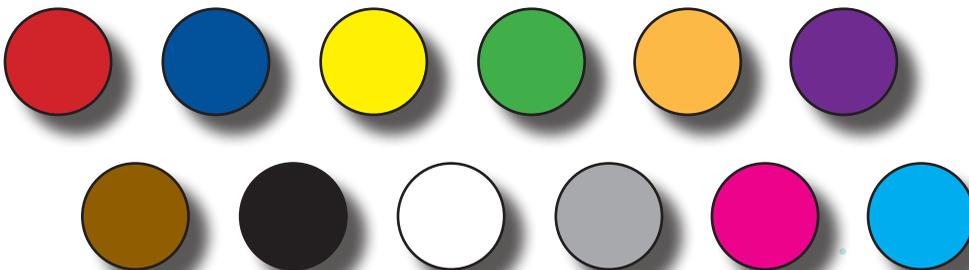
## *More Activities*

There are many websites that have free dough mat patterns if you like this activity and want to extend this play idea. Just type “dough mat patterns” into your web browser’s search engine.

Ask your child to count out things in daily life. Count the number of things we put in the grocery cart or the numbers of things we put on the table for a meal.

### Colors

- Your child should know 12 colors (red, blue, yellow, green, orange, purple, brown, black, white, grey, pink, and light blue)



# Activity Color Twister Game

Using their hands and feet have them touch the color shape.

## Build

Make the following color shapes for your kids to stand on out of 12 different colors: circle, square, rectangle, triangle, diamond, oval, pentagon, octagon, star and heart.

Make a deck of cards to match the “stand on” color and shapes. Adults use a ruler and marker to draw the shapes. Have your kids cut them out to get practice using scissors.

## Blast Off! Let's Play

1. Put the cards in a paper bag and the “stand on” shapes on the floor.
2. Adults start out the game to show how it works. Pull a card out of the bag. Verbally walk through the process. “Let’s see, this is a red heart. I’ll have to find the red heart and step on it. Yea! I did it.”
3. Have the child do the same thing. The reward for standing on the right color and shape can be cheers, points or hugs.

### Add some interest.

Make this a Twister and Simon Says game combined. For example, “Simon says put your hand on the blue square.” “Simon says put your hand on the red heart with your foot still on the blue square.” Make sure your child has a chance to lead as Simon.

## More Activities

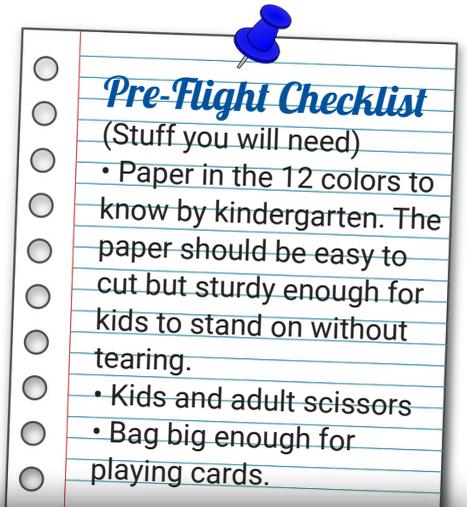
### Books that promote learning colors:

*Dog’s Colorful Day: A messy story about colors and counting* by Emma Dodd

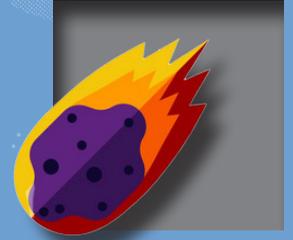
*Cat’s Colors* by Jan Cabrera

*Mouse Paint* by Ellen Stoll Walsh

*Pete the Cat. I love my white shoes* by Eric Litwin and James Dean



# Activity Supplies



## Tools

- Crayons, washable markers, pens, pencils
- Adult and child safety scissors
- Handheld hole punch
- Balls of different sizes and weights
- Lightweight colorful scarves
- Ruler
- Glue stick

## Supplies

- Paper in the 12 colors your child should know by kindergarten (red, blue, yellow, green, orange, purple, brown, black, white, gray, pink, and light blue). The paper you select should be easy to cut but sturdy enough for kids to stand on without tearing.
- Plastic handheld mirror
- Cookie sheet or flexible plastic cutting board
- Playdough of 3 different colors
- Markers the same color as your playdough
- Old travel, nature, craft, and/or children's, magazines
- Lightweight cardboard (like cereal boxes)
- Blank cube(s) to use for emotion dice
- Colored tape for floor
- Ribbon or plastic lacing
- 3 empty egg cartons
- Blowing bubbles
- A few paper bags



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For more activities and resources, visit:  
[www.CommunityLibrary.net/PreK](http://www.CommunityLibrary.net/PreK)

*Launch into Learning*  
*Written by*  
*Annette Eberlein, MLS*

