



Getting the most out of Preschool at home... ... and getting ready for Kindergarten.

Google these terms for some background:

- Play in preschool
- Academics in preschool*
- David Elkind
- NAEYC

*Note that websites that promote “academic preschool” are most often selling a product.

Read with your children- every day and every way you can. Read storybooks, chapter books, wordless books, magazine articles, catalogs, recipes, instructions, labels, signs, ingredients, labels in stores, photo albums... Wander around the children’s section in a library. *Keep books easily accessible to encourage your children to read on their own. Talk about whatever you are reading, look at the pictures and the text, encourage them to “interrupt” you with questions, occasionally ask them to make predictions about what will happen next. After you read a book, ask the child if they want to play a scavenger hunt and look for letters they know on the pages (hints; larger fonts are easier, children are most interested in the letters in their own names.)*

Write with your children – Make shopping lists, label their toy boxes, use a dry-erase board to write out a schedule for the week / month (note home days /center days, appointments, parties) send notes in their lunchbox, put their name on and date on their drawings, encourage them to “sign” (it will start with a dash or a squiggle, progress to the first letter of their name, eventually growing to include all the letters of their name) on cards, letters, gift tags, use post-its to put up temporary labels around the house. *Make writing tools available to your child all the time. Children need to explore the tools freely and develop pre-writing skills fully BEFORE they can be writers. If they ask how to write something show them, but don’t push or get ahead of them. Their fine motor muscles are still developing and they need time to strengthen them.*

Work with your children- Have them set the table with you (count out plates, forks, napkins...) collect/ sort laundry together, have them help you put it in the machine, measure the detergent, fold, sort socks, have them clear the table with you and wash some unbreakables, ask them to help you put sheets and pillowcases on their bed, give them a cloth and show them how to “dust”, let them vacuum, put groceries away...

Play with your children / set them up near you when they play so you can check in and support / extend their “work” (wow! Look how tall you made that building. You are using so many colors in your picture. Do you think your doll needs something to eat? Can you tell me about your building, picture, play do, game, book...?) Children do not need fancy toys or equipment; just space and some uninterrupted time to play! When you spend time sitting on the floor or at play with them, you show you value time with them and their play.

Encourage your children - “I see you are working very hard/ really concentrating on that puzzle... building with Legos... rolling out that play doh.” “Sometimes it’s hard to do things, do you want to try again?” “You cleaned up all your toys! Now they will be ready for you when you want them next time.”

What do they need to play? Some basic items to encourage constructive play:

- Blocks and / or building toys
- Vehicles (fabric or plastic car mats can extend the scope of the play and define the play area.)
- (A box of) art and writing supplies – paper (lined and unlined – kids love notebooks and pads!) pencils, crayons, markers, watercolor paints, scotch tape, post-its, blank forms, envelopes, stencils, a copy of the alphabet (include upper and lower case letter) play doh, scissors. These can be two separate boxes or you can combine.
- Puzzles / matching and sorting games
- Dolls
- Dramatic Play / Dress up Clothes (you do not need expensive costumes!) Save your old kitchen utensils, tools, office supplies, clothes, shoes, hats, use hand me downs that are still too big for your child.)
- Empty boxes! Inserts and foam from packages for collage or 3-D sculpture.
- Personalize based on your child's interests and preferences - Musical instruments, magnifying glasses, magnets, art supplies, cooking tools, trains, a dollhouse... Ask your child teachers what he/ she really enjoys during the day.

Avoid toys that need batteries (children should make their own sounds and movements!) and single purpose toys (designed to be played in one proscribed manner rather than allowing children to exercise their imagination and creativity. Single purpose toys are often tied to TV shows or characters.)

Limit TV and screen time, know what they are watching and playing. PBS Kids, (Ch. 13 and 21 locally) offer some really appropriate options. Some of the Nick Jr. shows on Nickelodeon are good as well, but beware; many Nickelodeon shows are NOT for preschoolers (sorry SpongeBob!)

If you find you need screen time to keep your child occupied while you make dinner or take care of paperwork, consider instead a “Kiswork Box” that is only available at these times. Fill it with high interest items (which vary for individual children.) Kids love opportunities to use what they see adults using. Include materials from your work or school like order forms, an old stethoscope, notebooks, x-rays, stamps, stickers, an old phone, keyboard, briefcase, maps, a notebook for your child to work alongside you.

Helpful hint: Children are more likely to cooperate if we tell them what to DO instead of what NOT TO DO. For example; instead of saying “Don’t walk around with your food,” say “Sit down in your chair while you are eating.” Instead of “Stop yelling,” try saying “Please use a lower voice in here” or “I can hear you better when you talk in a regular voice.”

Finally, become an active participant in your child’s classroom learning experience; ask your children to give you a “tour” of their room, to tell you about the displays on the walls, show you their favorite book, toy or activity area, read the “Today We...” boards in the classroom and use that information to talk with your child about their day, take a few minutes to look at the wall displays in the classroom and hallway on your own. You will learn great deal about what they already know just by having conversations with them and hearing their new vocabulary as they describe their experiences.

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