School readiness: How to support children’s development

School readiness includes the many skills that develop over time from a child’s birth through school entrance age. School readiness includes the areas of social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy, and physical development. Another important aspect of school readiness, approaches to learning, includes a child’s ability to maintain focus on a task and show interest and curiosity in learning. The interactions children have with caring adults inside and outside of their families, each child’s developmental history and each child’s unique make up, all influence the development of school readiness skills.

Social and emotional development includes:

Developing self-control, building problem-solving skills, forming relationships with others and identifying feelings in yourself and others.

**Why it matters:**

When children develop strong social emotional skills, they are better able to form and maintain friendships and better able to focus attention on learning.

**How to support development:**

- Notice and talk with children to support building positive relationships.
- Help children make connections with one another to support developing friendships.
- Talk about feelings and identify feelings throughout the day.
- Model and support ways to help children calm down, identify a problem and talk about how to solve the problem calmly.

Cognitive development includes:

Building thinking skills, reasoning skills, problem solving skills and memory skills.

**Why it matters:**

Developing cognitive skills forms a foundation for all learning.

**How to support development:**

- Play games with children that support memory: matching pictures, letters or number cards.
- Provide games and materials that require children to problem solve: counting to figure out how many blocks fit in a toy truck, arranging items in a pattern during a game, or grouping items by color, size or shape.
- When children are playing, building and creating, ask children questions about why they think something happened, or what they think might happen.
- Allow time for discovery activities (science experiments, cooking activities). Talk with children about their predictions. For example, before mixing cornstarch and water, ask children what they think will happen when the ingredients are mixed.
Language and literacy development includes:
Building language skills, vocabulary skills, comprehension skills, and letter knowledge.

Why it matters:
Building strong language and literacy skills supports growth in cognitive and social emotional development, and is related to later school success.

How to support development:
• Read to children every day and have conversations with children about books, asking questions about what might happen next in the story, how the characters are feeling, and how something might relate to a child’s own experience.
• Have conversations with children throughout the day, for example, at mealtimes, playtimes, and during routine times. Any time of day is a great time to talk with children!
• Play games that support letter knowledge, like “I spy a letter” or letter matching games. Point out letters in everyday life throughout the day.
• Read rhyming poems and stories, sing rhyming songs and play rhyming games.

Physical development includes:
Building large motor skills and fine motor skills.

Why it matters:
Building large motor skills is important for physical growth and development. Developing fine motor skills is important for successful completion of small motor tasks.

How to support development:
• Allow children time for large motor activities. Provide toys and equipment that support large motor development like bikes, balls and swings.
• Provide opportunities for individual and group games.
• Play games with children that promote running, skipping, jumping and crawling.
• Provide opportunities and materials for fine motor skill development like cutting with scissors, painting, gluing, writing, stringing beads, tracing, and doing puzzles.

References: