
READY for SCHOOL Parent News:
Do Computers Help Children Get READY for SCHOOL?

Computers are now a routine part of the lives of young children. What role can and should they play in young children's school readiness? What does the research say?

- Computers can help in the development of prereading and reading skills.
- Offering young children opportunities to write on the computer encourages them to write without the limitations of their developing eye-hand skills. Children tend to write more and worry less about making mistakes on the computer.
- Children can practice math skills and develop deeper conceptual mathematical thinking through use of appropriate programs.
- Computers can encourage increased language use, particularly when multiple children are at the computer.
- While there has been some worry in the past that computer use in young children would stifle creativity, when used well, computers can actually encourage children's creativity.

With the above said, there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to encourage school readiness through technology in young children. Guidelines for appropriate computer use include:

- Select appropriate software. Prescreen programs. Programs that depict violence tend to encourage similar behavior in children.
- Limit screen time. Daily screen time should not exceed 1 -2 hours per day and probably less.
- Keep it fun – limit “drill and practice” software or programs that teach repetitive skills without putting any interest or fun into it.
- Balance time alone at the computer with time with an adult present. Computers can promote isolated activities, but accompanied by a peer or adult, the activity takes on a new dimension.
- Balance computer use with lots of experience with hands-on materials like blocks, puzzles, building toys, pretend toys and active outdoor play.

For guidance in selecting appropriate software, talk to your child's teacher. He or she can suggest some of the same software available at your child's center. New children's software comes out everyday, but some old favorites which are used at Bright Horizons centers include:

- *Mille's Math House, Bailey's Book House, or Sammy's Science House* (Edmark)
- *Kid Pix Deluxe* (Hatch)
- *Reader Rabbit* series (The Learning Company)
- *Jump Start* series

References:

Buckleitner, W. & Kalinowski, M. (January/February 2005). Trends in software for children under six. *Child Care Information Exchange*, 66 – 70.

Clements, D. H. & Sarama, J. (November 2003). Young Children and Technology: What does the Research Say? *Young Children*, 58:6, 34 – 40.