
READY for SCHOOL News:
READY for SCHOOL for Babies and Toddlers: Part II

In the current social climate of “earlier is better”, we may feel pressure to think about school readiness with even the youngest children. While we all know that an “academic push” is not appropriate with infants and toddlers, at the same time, there may be alternative developmentally appropriate interactions with young children that can set the stage for school readiness. Some examples follow:

Building Skills for Language and Reading

- It has been found that around 18 months of age, a toddler adds a new word to his/her spoken vocabulary about every two hours. That is an amazing rate of vocabulary growth! And the words they understand grow even more rapidly. Children flourish in environments where adults model and expand on what they say. (The toddler points to a father carrying an infant and says “Baby!” and the teacher responds with “Yes – That Daddy is getting ready to give his baby a bottle.”)
- Repetition counts. The synapses between brain neurons that are activated most frequently are the ones that tend to become permanent. It is not only important to introduce new words, but to reinforce the ones a child already knows through conversation and reading. Toddlers LOVE and benefit from hearing the same story (whether read or told), song, or rhyme, over and over and over.

Building Skills for Writing

- Children become interested in writing instruments around one year of age. Provide children with writing tools like fat crayons and chalk. Painting with water on the sidewalk or creating open-ended creations with playdough builds the small muscle control needed later for writing.

Building Skills for Math

- Mathematical language should be a part of how we talk to even the youngest children. “You just ate two Cheerios.” OR “I am going to cut your banana in half so it is easier to manage.”
- Using the early language of measurement (“Let’s see which one is bigger”); of volume (“the big cup holds more milk”); and one to one correspondence (“You get one pretzel and I get one pretzel”) helps children build mathematical thinking from the earliest years.

Building Skills for Science

- The roots of scientific inquiry start early. Responding to the many, many, many questions children ask as their language emerges can be tiring at times, but helps children make sense of the world. When you don’t know an answer, introducing even very young children to the idea of research, (“I don’t know, but let’s see where we can find that answer”) helps set a life-long attitude and appreciation of the quest for knowledge.

To read more: Wolfe, P & Nevills, P. (2004). *Building the Reading Brain*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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