

Lay Foundations for Future School Success

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Create a Home Environment that Encourages Learning

Teach a love for reading. Reading is key to all academic learning. Read to your child often; choose fun books that give you joy when you read them. Take frequent trips to the library. Read a lot yourself so your child sees the lifelong benefits. Tell them your favorite stories. When they ask questions, don't just answer off the top of your head – be sure to sometimes model how to look it up!

Discipline – teach rules & manners. To succeed in school, kids need to understand that there are rules they need to follow, and that some things are off limits. They should know to say please, thank you, etc.

Practice paying attention. Take your child to story time, music classes, toddler friendly shows or classes with "circle time". This gives the child a chance to practice sitting still and listening to a teacher.

Do puzzles together. This includes shape sorters, stacking toys, etc. They teach that challenging yourself to think hard is fun, and that sometimes you have to be persistent through frustration to succeed.

Make things together. Build with Duplos and blocks. Do art: paint, scribble with crayons. Cook together.

Minimize screen time. Limit screen time to when there are not interactive hands-on play opportunities available (e.g. on an airplane, in a waiting room). Ensure that content is age appropriate and interactive. (Note: skype or Facetime calls where there's a human on the other end doesn't count as screen time.)

Promote social-emotional skills. Your toddler may not yet be developmentally capable of taking turns, sharing, and calming themselves down when upset, but start to teach and encourage these skills.

Create an organized family life. Following family routines at home – like hanging your coat up, tidying your toys, and taking dishes to the kitchen – help a child learn similar rules at school. Be sure your child has the self care skills to be independent at school, such as being able to toilet and wash hands independently. Encourage good sleep habits and eating habits.

Communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations

Talk about the value of education. Talk about how someday they'll go to preschool, show them where kids go to school. If you do classes together, be there on time and attend every day.

Model a work ethic. If your child sees that you work hard, do your best, challenge yourself to continue to learn more and do better, and are responsible and reliable, it motivates them to be/do the same.

Challenge, but don't overwhelm. Be aware there is a "sweet spot" for learning. You want things to be easy enough that they're capable of doing them *with work*, but not so easy that they don't even have to think. They'll gain the self-confidence that comes with knowing that if you work hard, you'll succeed.

Praise *and* feedback. Don't give empty praise for the stuff that's easy, but DO give lots of praise where they had to work hard. Praise effort, don't imply that it's just god-given talent that helped them do well. Specific praise is better, and it's OK to give suggestions on how to improve (without criticizing them).

Strike a Balance – Avoid All Work and No Play

Remember that childhood is about more than just learning academic skills: children need time to run outside to build large motor skills, unstructured play time with other kids to learn social skills, and bored free time to learn to be creative. We know from neuroscience that kids learn better when they feel safe and happy, and they need down time to let their brain cement all the connections they've been developing. So, give them time to relax, to play, and to enjoy childhood!

*Collaborating for Success: Parent Toolkit www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/4a_Final_Toolkit_without_bookmarks_370151_7.pdf