

## PARENTING

# Prepare your child to enter kindergarten

By **Lori Edelson**

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One of the most vital questions parents should consider during the summer is how to best prepare their children for the coming school year.

This is an especially important and emotional time for parents whose children are about to begin kindergarten. Preparation for kindergarten involves a combination of important new social and emotional challenges alongside academic and developmental skill building.

Parents can help their children make a smoother, more successful transition into kindergarten by keeping several important concepts in mind, while focusing on specific ways to help introduce their children to a new school experience.

Foundations to help your child enjoy school and flourish throughout their educational career include the following:

- Expose children to books. Reading to your child regularly has been shown to improve literacy, which is crucial to your



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child's success throughout life.

- Model the importance of communication and language. Communication skills will help your child problem-solve and get along better with others, develop sensitivity and empathy, and enable them to let others know how they feel.

- Help develop fine motor skills. Holding a pencil and learning to use scissors are some of the key tasks kindergartners will master in their first year of school. Helping children establish a comfort level by also teaching them how to use paints and crayons before school begins will enhance their confidence.

- Begin to encourage independence. Your child will be spending more time away from you and learning to make decisions when you are not nearby. Encourage your child to make small choices on their own. Make arrangements for them to spend time with a baby sitter, a relative or family friend, to help them experience time away from their parents before the

first day of school.

There are also specific actions parents can take to help reduce their child's anxiety about kindergarten:

- Plan a visit to the school to familiarize your child with the building and show them how to find their specific classroom. It is a good idea to make arrangements to introduce your child to the teacher before the first day of class.

- Stay informed about school events and the school calendar so you can be sure to attend various events for parents and families. Your child will feel supported and more secure when the family is involved in activities with others.

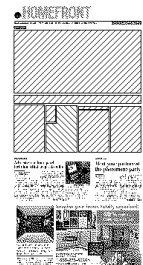
- Establish a bedtime routine so your child gets a full night of sleep and is well-rested in the morning. Teach children to prepare for the next day by packing school bags, completing work that is due the next day, picking out clothes the night before and getting to bed by a specific bedtime.

- Morning routines are important too and can be implemented as the summer is winding down before school starts. To help your child get used to the new schedule, introduce him or her to making the bed, getting dressed, washing, brushing teeth, eating breakfast and making sure to be ready to leave by a specific time.

- Make sure there is adequate time for a healthy breakfast. It is never too early to teach our kids about healthy eating habits and the importance of a well-balanced breakfast.

Kindergarten readiness skills are not only vital for a child's first year of school, but research has shown the skills and experiences a kindergartner establishes during this first year in school, can set a pattern for the rest of the child's educational years. Healthy habits that develop early often form the foundation for behaviors and social skills the child uses for the rest of his life.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF BIRMINGHAM MAPLE CLINIC

Your child will begin a journey of discovery with kindergarten, so help him/her succeed now and throughout his/her school career. Build your child's confidence in kindergarten by familiarizing him or her with crayons and other tools for school.