



PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL

**It's never too early
to start**

Starting school can be daunting for both parent and child—but there are steps you can take to make the transition as smooth as possible. Long before your child walks through a classroom door, you can begin instilling the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

Many things influence how well children learn, develop and perform in school. To have the best possible chance for success, children need a general knowledge of the world around them; basic language, comprehension and problem-solving skills; and solid emotional and physical well-being.

This brochure contains a range of activities you can do with your child to cultivate these traits. Remember, it's never too early to start!

Academic Readiness

Develop a foundation for success in the classroom

Before children start school, they should have a basic understanding of themselves, of the people, places and



things around them, and how to interact with the world. This is the foundation on which to build literacy, math and other skills that will define their academic success for many years to come.

Literacy

To prepare your child to learn how to read and write, first foster their knowledge of letters and sounds, as well as their listening and speaking skills.

- ✓ Read to your child daily. Talk about what you've read.
- ✓ Check out books and attend Storytime at your local library.
- ✓ Practice writing letters, especially the letters in your child's name.
- ✓ To make practicing letters more fun and multi-sensory, have your child write in shaving cream in the bathtub, sugar in a cake pan or in finger paint.
- ✓ Have regular conversations. Point out when you are speaking vs. listening to reinforce the rules of conversation.
- ✓ Encourage your child to listen and respond to other adults and family members.
- ✓ Play rhyming games. As you are going up the stairs, name one word that rhymes with "cat" for each step as you go up.
- ✓ Sing the alphabet song.



Patterns and Recognition

To prepare your child to excel in math, first foster their ability to identify patterns and recognize basic shapes and colors.

- ✓ Make up dances to demonstrate concepts like high and low, backward and forward or under and over.
- ✓ Sing rhyming songs and clap to the beat.
- ✓ Play with puzzles and games that require counting and problem solving.
- ✓ Teach basic colors by pointing and naming objects like green trees, red apples or blue coats.
- ✓ Help your child draw, cut and paste different shapes.
- ✓ Visit the zoo, park, grocery store, post office and pet shop. Talk about sights and sounds.
- ✓ Point out things that are different, the same, bigger, smaller and opposite.
- ✓ Count throughout the day—the crackers your child is eating or the socks that come out of the dryer.
- ✓ Make a game of finding the numbers you see all around—on food boxes or street signs. Ask your child to say the name of each one.



Desire to Learn

Children take their cues from you. If you are curious, your child will be curious. If you are having fun trying new things, so will they. Praise your child when they learn, create or share something new. Seeing that you are proud of their achievements gives your child the confidence and desire to learn more.



Social Readiness

Send your child to school confident, curious, and cooperative

Children start school with different degrees of social and emotional maturity. These qualities take time and practice to learn. Give your child opportunities at home to begin to develop the following positive qualities.



Confidence and Independence

Children must feel good about themselves to believe they can succeed. Confident children are more willing to attempt new tasks, try again if they don't succeed the first time and solve problems independently.

- ✓ Teach your child to accomplish basic self-help tasks, such as zipping their coat, tying their shoes and putting toys away.
- ✓ Let them work independently on activities such as completing puzzles.
- ✓ Guide your child to make their own choices, rather than deciding everything for them, and ask what motivated them to make that choice.
- ✓ When your child misbehaves, tell them you're angry with their behavior and why, but emphasize that they are not a bad person. For example, say, "I love you, but it's not okay for you to draw on the walls. I get angry when you do that."
- ✓ Kiss and hug your child several times a day.



Cooperation and Self-Control

- ✓ Make sure your child plays with other children.
- ✓ Help your child to consider the feelings of others.
- ✓ Talk about the importance of sharing. Ask them, for example, how they would feel if another child had a really long turn on a bike they wanted to ride.
- ✓ Role-play different situations your child might experience on the playground or at school. Discuss solutions for typical challenges while helping them to empathize.
- ✓ Set rules, as well as consequences for breaking them. Be consistent.
- ✓ Have regular routines for mealtime and bedtime.
- ✓ Discourage hitting, biting, screaming and other negative behaviors by redirecting them and showing them appropriate ways to express themselves.
- ✓ Give your child two- and three-step directions. For example: “Put on your pajamas, brush your teeth and then pick a book to read.” Encourage them to finish all three.



Curiosity and Motivation

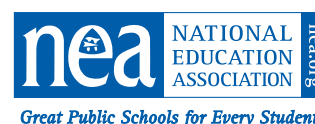
- ✓ Take your child to new places. Ask them to describe what they see.
- ✓ Introduce your child to new tasks and games regularly.
- ✓ Encourage your child to finish difficult or frustrating tasks.
- ✓ Read lots of stories and work up to reading longer chapter books—try reading one chapter each night or as long as they remain interested and focused.
- ✓ Show a positive attitude toward learning. Talk about all the things your child has to look forward to when they go to school.
- ✓ Encourage your child to work out problems by stressing positive outcomes. For example, ask, “What can we do to keep your brother from knocking over your favorite blocks?”
- ✓ Direct your child’s activities, but don’t be too bossy. Let them decide how to spend some of their time.
- ✓ Give reasons when you ask your child to do something. Say, for example, “Please move your toy truck from the stairs so no one falls over it,” instead of “Move it because I said so.”

Other Resources

There is a wide range of other Parents’ Guides to help you ensure your child thrives at school. Here are just a few examples:

- ✓ Raising Ready Readers—Helping Your Child Learn to Read
- ✓ Raising Scientifically Literate Children
- ✓ Helping Your Child with Today’s Math

For these and other guides, visit [NEA.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html](https://www.nea.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html) or [pta.org/familyguides](https://www.pta.org/familyguides)



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