



Encouraging School Readiness From Birth to 3

Babies are born ready to learn. They are naturally curious beings who are motivated to make sense of the world around them.

The brain is the only part of the body not fully formed at birth. Between birth and 3 years of age, trillions of connections between brain cells are being made. *A child's relationships and experiences during the early years greatly influence how her brain grows.*

Adults often wonder how they can get their baby or toddler off to a good start so that he is ready for kindergarten. Remember, young children learn best through their *everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and when the learning is fun.*

Children develop at their own pace and in their own way. You can help babies and toddlers learn and grow by getting to know each child in your care and engaging in activities that match their individual skills, needs, and interests.

Four Key Skill Areas That Help Children Get Ready for School

Language and literacy skills. Learning to communicate, first through gestures and babbles and then through words, helps children connect to the people and world around them. The development of language skills is the foundation for becoming literate. Reading to children and letting them play with books helps to build their interest in books. Talking, reading aloud, and singing all nurture children's language skills and help them experience stories through listening.

Thinking skills. Children are born with a drive to understand how the world works. They start by figuring out connections such as: "I cry, Daddy comes to get me." As they grow, these connections become more complex, for example: "If the ball disappears under the couch, I can use this stick to get it back." Children learn about how the world works when they are given the chance to explore—to shake, toss, touch, listen, stack, knock down, bounce, and so on. When children are exploring and having fun, they are learning.

Self-control. The ability to express and manage emotions in appropriate ways is called "self-control." Self-control is also the ability to stop one's self from doing something that is not allowed. Very young children have little self-control. But you can help babies and toddlers work on skills like cooperating, coping with frustration, sharing, and resolving conflicts which all lead to the development of self-control.

Self-confidence. When children feel good about themselves and their abilities, they are more willing to take on new challenges—a key ingredient for school success. Self-confidence is important for getting along with others and developing relationships with peers, which are key factors in enjoying and succeeding in school.