

Suburban Pediatrics, Inc.



Preparing For Kindergarten

A child's entrance into kindergarten is an important family milestone. It's the beginning of a process of formal education that most likely will last for the next seventeen years or beyond. In some cases it's the child's first significant time spent away from the comfortable, familiar environment of home. All parents want their children to have a successful and enjoyable school experience, but you may not realize that preparation should begin several months before your child enters school. The following are some ideas for families to help build a solid foundation for future success in school.

Read Aloud With Your Children

Educators agree that a child's early exposure to literature in the home is a good predictor of reading success and helps to instill a love of reading in a child. Reading together in a relaxed, unhurried manner should be a part of your daily routine. Also, take your child to the library or bookstore on a regular basis and encourage her to make selections. Many public libraries and bookstores have special events such as story hour and parties based on literature themes – ask for an event calendar next time you visit your favorite bookstore or neighborhood library.

Limit Screen Time and Encourage Physical Activity

Preschool children should spend no more than two hours per day watching TV or videos, playing on the computer, or playing video games. Please monitor the time spent and appropriateness of what your child is watching. Too much screen time usually comes at the expense of physical activities which help develop gross and fine motor skills. Encourage your child to be physically active by playing catch, running, imitating animals, playing shadow tag, and riding a bike or tricycle. Arts and crafts activities are a great alternative to screen time and will help develop fine motor skills. Encourage your child to color, use safety scissors to create collages from magazine pictures, or learn to weave on a simple loom.

Establish Routines at Home

At school, your child will be expected to be present and on time each day. In the year before school it's a good idea to adopt a "school schedule" to help your child adapt to a new routine, especially if

your child is accustomed to rising later in the morning. Practice getting up at the same time each morning, eating a healthy breakfast together, and helping your child dress. A bedtime routine is also important because children at this age need about ten hours sleep each night for optimum growth and development. Establish the habit of bath time, reading, and tucking your child in his bed at the same time each evening.

Encourage Independence

Your child will be expected to have certain self-care skills before entering kindergarten. These include knowing her name, address, and phone number, being able to button and zip her clothes, and using the bathroom without help. In addition, your child will need social/emotional skills such as playing cooperatively, taking turns, and working independently for short periods of time. You can encourage your child to develop these skills by having her help with simple household chores, encouraging her to dress herself, and playing games requiring attention and cooperation such as “Simon Says” and “Mother May I?” Look for structured play opportunities for your child to practice social skills such as sharing with other children, and encourage your child to participate in family conversations and discussions.

Explore the World Around You

Whenever possible, take your child along for your daily activities; to the grocery store, post office, or hardware store. Everyday activities can be important learning experiences: talk with your child about different types of jobs, practice counting fruits in the market, or see how many blue cars your child can spot in a parking lot. The St. Louis area has a number of family-oriented museums and attractions to explore and each of them offers an opportunity to broaden your child’s understanding of the world in which we live.

Avoid Pressuring Your Child

There is absolutely no evidence that early formal academic training has any lasting impact on your child’s performance in school. Drilling your preschool child on math or reading skills offers no advantage and may create a negative attitude towards learning. Instead look for ways to incorporate learning into a child’s daily play. Walk through the neighborhood and compare objects by size, encourage your child to count place settings as he helps set the table, ask him to make up a story based on a picture, write letters or make birthday cards for family members. Provide your child with frequent opportunities to use new skills such as counting, sorting, and listening in ways that are fun, practical, and imaginative. Also limit the number of organized activities such as music lessons, soccer teams, and dance classes so he has plenty of time to just be a child and play.

The First Day Approaches

As school time approaches it’s not unusual for your child (or you) to feel anxious. You may see a period of negative behavior and regression as your child acts out these feelings of uncertainty. Talk about the positive aspects of school and what an exciting time she will have making new friends and learning new things. It may be helpful at this time to make a trip to visit the school, even if this has been done in the past. For that first day of school make your child feel special. Involve her in choosing what she wants to wear, leave enough time for an unhurried, special breakfast, and most importantly, don’t forget to take a picture!