



What Can Teachers Do to Get All Children Ready for Kindergarten?

Tips for Helping Children Learn Some of the Basic Skills

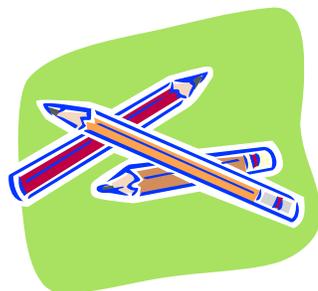
Each tip sheet in this group provides strategies for teaching one of the skills commonly needed for school readiness.

- Carpenter, L. (2008). **Helping Children Learn to Recognize Their Name**
- Cole, P. (2008). **Helping Children Learn to Follow Rules**
- Cross, A. F. (2008). **Helping Children Learn to Give First and Last Name, Age, and Gender on Request**
- Cross, A. F. (2008). **Helping Children Learn to Recognize Colors**
- Cross, A. F. (2008). **Helping Children Learn to Follow Directions**
- Cole, P. (2008). **Well-Rested Children – Challenges and Recommendations**
- Cole, P. (2008). **Helping Children Develop Nutritionally Sound Diets**

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Helping Children Learn to Recognize Their Name



As with adults, many activities in a child's typical day require the ability to recognize his or her name independently. For example, the child can function more independently in the classroom if he or she can find his/her own cubby independently upon school arrival.

In addition, name recognition is related to early reading and writing skills. For example, accomplishment of name-writing is a beginning step in developing awareness of the alphabetic principle (i.e., matching sounds with letters). Children learn that there is a difference between scribbling and letters grouped together, that words and letters have meaning.¹ It is difficult to tease apart the process of recognizing one's name and writing one's name, because these two distinct skills build on each other². Developmentally, children will be able to recognize their name before they can write it. Despite a lack of perfect handwriting, children may still benefit from practicing writing their name with the end goal being name recognition rather than signature skill.

Activities to Support Name Recognition

- Place names of children around the classroom-on cubbies, for "job" assignments, on lockers, etc.
- Encourage children to write their own names on projects. If they cannot, have an adult write while the child dictates letters. The adult may also encourage the child to trace over his name once it is written by the adult.
- Encourage children to "sign in" when arriving in the classroom. Again, tracing or dictation can easily modify this activity.
- Encourage children to connect letters they know from their names with letters in words they do not know to facilitate literacy and sound-to-letter matching.²
- Encourage children to help their peers with recognizing letters from their own names. For example, Adam identifies "A" for Ben.²

- Encourage children to use letters from their names and peers' names

Parent Activities to Support Skill Development

- Demonstrate writing your child's name.
- Have your child trace over your version. It may be fun to use multiple colors of crayons/markers for a "rainbow" effect.
- Have your child trace his name on fine-grit sandpaper using chalk or markers.
- Look at books involving different letter identification.
- Have your child play with letter blocks and encourage him/her to trace the shape of the letter following the route he would take to write the letter- i.e., top-to-bottom and counter-clockwise.
- Encourage your child to practice tracing or writing his name on a vertical surface such as an easel or chalkboard.
- Have your child form the letters of his name using rolled-out Play Doh.
- Point out letters that are in your child's name when you are driving and see letters on a billboard- make a game out of it to see if your child can recognize the letters.
- Using cards with letters on them, provide cards to your child with them scrambled and have him try to place them in the correct order to spell his name.

Resources

¹Neumann, S.B. (2006). Literacy development for infants and toddlers. In Rosenkoetter, S. E., & Knapp-Philo, J. (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years*. Zero to Three Press: Washington, D.C.

²Bloodgood, J.W. (1999). What's in a name? Children's name writing and literacy acquisition. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34(3). 342-267.



Helping Children Learn to Follow Rules



A child's ability to follow directions, including rules, is critical to cognitive growth.ⁱ Consideration of the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of self-control of children to follow directions and rules is critical when developing expectations. When a child's compliance is coerced, it undermines the development of inner control.ⁱⁱ

Provide clear rules.

A child's response to classroom rules is affected both by nature, their personality, and nurture, their experiences. Understanding a child's temperament and past expectations for following rules can help the teacher know who may need more gentle reminders to successfully follow classroom rules. Some general guidelines for increasing a child's potential for following classroom rules are:

- Make sure you have the child's attention when the rule is stated or reiterated;
- Use as little verbalization as possible, uncomplicated, simple phrases or single words are best;
- Present rules in different ways (for example using pictures, using words, or using materials they can touch), and in the child's home language;
- Assume this is the child's first time hearing this rule; and
- Tell what you want to happen in steps, ask for repetition from the child to check for their understanding of the rule.

Set Expectations as Guidelines

Rules, stated as the behavior desired, help a child know what they need to do to fit in and be safe. Young children are more likely to give peer support for following positively stated guidelines than peer pressure to conform to rules stated "negatively."ⁱⁱⁱ

Classroom rules should:

- Be created with child involvement;
- Be clear and simple;

- Be few and relevant;
- Be based on a rationale that can be shared with children;
- State what behavior is appropriate;
- Be presented orally and visually;
- Referred to often; and
- Reviewed by the class often to ensure understanding and to check for the need for changes or additional rules.

Responding when rules are not followed

The consequences for not following rules should be

- Consistent,
- Logical,
- Close to the time of the event, and
- Instructive in nature.

It is important to review rules that are not followed by a number of children to determine if the rule is easy to understand, relevant, and is presented in pictures as well verbally.

Parent activities to support a child's ability to follow rules:

- Share classroom rules and the rationale for them with parents.
- Create a display or newsletter about characteristics of rules that children are more likely to follow; positively stated, short, uncomplicated, co-developed by parent and child.
- Encourage parents to talk with their child about examples of rules that they follow at work or in traffic.

References

ⁱ Piaget, J., & B, Inhelder. (1969). *The psychology of the child*. New York: Basic.

ⁱⁱ Lepper, M.R. (1983). Social control processes and the internalization of social values: An attributional perspective. In E.T. Higgins, D.N. Ruble, & W.W. Hartup (Eds.), *Social cognition and social development: A sociocultural perspective* (pp. 294-330). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gartrell, D. (2004). *The Power of Guidance*. Canada: Delmar Learning.

Helping Children Learn to Give First and Last Name, Age, and Gender on Request



This skill is important for the child's safety, talking with teachers, taking part in learning activities, and making friends.

Begin with helping the child to give his or her first name when asked. Then help the child learn to give the other information. How?

Use your learning environment to provide many chances for the child to hear, see, and say his or her name, age, and gender.

- Put the child's name on his or her personal storage area, coat hook, or cubby.
- Use an attendance chart for each child to sign.
- Label the child's art with his or her name.

Use the daily routines as natural opportunities for practice.

- When sending children one at a time to wash hands, get coats, or go to snack, ask each child to say his or her name, age, or gender.
- Ask all the boys (or girls, threes, fours, etc.) to have first choice of which part of the room to tackle at clean-up time.

Use learning activities as natural opportunities for practice.

- Ask child for his or her name before you write it on a picture or other product.
- Use large motor activities, like rolling the ball to each child in turn who must say his or her name, age, or gender.
- The words of fingerplays and songs can be modified to offer opportunities for children to state their names.

Use prompting when a child has difficulty learning to say his or her name when asked.

- Ask child for his or her name, wait for answer, then cue or prompt. If child's name is Jonah, ask, wait and prompt by saying the starting sound "Jo."
- Have another teacher ask the child's name and then you quietly prompt the child.

Provide a communication device for the child who is unable to speak his or her name.

- Ask the child to point to his or her name picture on a communication card.
- Help child to push the button of a communication device that says the child's name for him or her.

Suggest activities to families to support their child's ability to give name, age, and gender. They could:

- Practice with the child knocking on the door or ringing the bell and the person inside asking, "Who is there?"
- Ask brothers or sisters to show child how to answer these questions. Each child can ask the others, "What is your name?" or "How old are you?" and then answer in turn.

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Helping Children Learn to Recognize Colors



When children recognize colors they are noticing, matching, sorting, and labeling the characteristics of things in the world around them.

Recognizing colors is a skill that is often difficult for children because it is necessary to know

the color words, as well as to identify the abstract characteristic of color.

Mentioning colors and pointing out colors is helpful, but not enough. Children often know more color words than colors and so mislabel colors. For example, a child might say, "I wanted the red one," but be referring to the green car.

- Listen as children use color words in daily activities. Ask children to bring or use items by color word. Put out a blue rug and an orange rug by the door. Then say, "Let's put our shoes on the orange rug." This will help you assess which colors they recognize for planning your teaching.

Children will learn to recognize colors more quickly when you intentionally teach them the color words and color recognition at the same time.

- Begin with a focus on two or three color words and colors, and then add more.
- "This is black. Here is black paint and here is a black marker. This is red paint. Can you find the red marker?"
- Use bright, clear primary or secondary colors, that is— red, yellow and blue, and orange, green, and purple.

Help children notice color and how it is separate from shape. Children tend to notice the shapes and uses of objects before they notice color. Use identical objects that are different colors.

- Provide a color sorting activity using Counting Bears, which are only different in color.
- When pouring a drink, use cups that differ only by color. Ask, "Do you want the red cup or the blue cup?" while you hold one cup in each hand.

Respond to children's learning styles to help them learn.

- Set up an obstacle course with different activities to do at the "red station," "blue station," etc. for children who need to move to learn.
- Children who learn through music could benefit from songs about colors.

Correct children's mistakes by referring to items in their environment.

- This helps a child learn: If a child labels his red shirt as blue, say that his shirt is red, but the ball over there is blue.
- This doesn't help a child learn: If a child labels his red shirt as blue, and you just say, "No, its red," he doesn't have anything to help him understand why his answer was wrong.

Activities families can do to help their children learn to recognize colors

- Families can play the game, "I see something you don't see and it is 'yellow'."
- Folding laundry is a good opportunity to practice colors. "I'm going fold all of the white clothes. What color would you like to fold?"
- While reading a story together, the parent and child can find various colors in the pictures.

When children seem not to be learning colors (particularly red and green) by the age of four, they can have an eye exam that will accurately check for color blindness (see http://www.schoolhealth.com/shop/pe_11115.asp#articles).

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Barnhardt, C., Block, S., Calder, A., & DeLand, P. (2006). Color vision screening for individuals with intellectual disabilities: A comparison between the Neitz Test of Color Vision and Color Vision Testing Made Easy™. *Optometry - Journal of the American Optometric Association, 77*(5), 211-216.



Helping Children Learn to Follow Directions



Following directions involves several other skills. It requires a child to pay attention, understand what has been asked, remember what has been asked, and to take or stop actions.

First, check how you give directions, then, modify your teaching strategies as needed.

- Make a tape recording of yourself as you teach the children. When you listen to the tape, count how many steps you include in your directions. Are there two, three, or four steps? Are your directions clear or confusing about what you expect children to do?
- Watch out for hidden steps in your directions. When you say, "Wash your hands," are you actually asking them to go to the sink, turn on the water, use the soap, rinse, dry with a paper towel, and throw the towel away?"

Next, observe the children to learn how to focus your teaching on following directions.

- Do several children need to work on following directions or just one? This will guide your decision about providing instruction during small group time or individually.
- When a child seems unable to follow directions, watch carefully to see which part of following directions might be the problem. Is the problem with paying attention, understanding your language and directions, remembering them, or taking action?

Help the children to pay attention. Alert the children that directions are coming and they should listen.

- "Listen. I'm going to tell you what to do. Ready?"
Get a book and sit on the carpet."
- Consider using a visual signal, such as putting on a ball cap, to let children know you are going to give directions.

Use visual cues to help understanding and recall.

- Use photos of children doing what you are directing them to do. For example, hold up two photos, one of children putting on their coats and one of children standing in line, to help them follow directions for getting ready to go outside.
- Ask the children to repeat your instructions. "What are we going to do first? Then what?"

Practice remembering.

- Help children use self-talk. That is, children should repeat the directions to themselves to keep the steps in mind.
- Have children help you tell stories, such as *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, to work on memory.

Match the number of steps in a direction to the child's development.

- Children, who are learning English, are younger, or have cognitive or language delays may benefit from hearing fewer steps in a direction.

Play games that ask children to remember and start and stop actions.

- Play Simon Says
- Use finger plays and action songs that require listening, remembering and acting.

Activities families can do to help their children learn to follow directions.

- Children can learn to follow directions by helping with chores. They could ask the child to feed the cat and put fresh water in its bowl.
- A child can put away his toys and call his siblings for dinner.

References:

McClelland, M. M., Cameron, C. E., Connor, C. M., Farris, C. I., Jewkes, A. M., & Morrison F. J. (2007). Links between behavioral regulation and preschoolers' literacy, vocabulary, and math skills. *Developmental Psychology, 43*, 947-959.

Well-Rested Children - Challenges and Recommendations



Researchers do not agree on the correlation between the amount of sleep and school readiness or school success. Neither do they agree on the amount of sleep needed for

pre-school age children. There is agreement that children typically require more sleep than adults to remain healthy. Many studies have found that lack of adequate rest for children and adults has the potential to cause behavior change, negatively impact health status, and decrease learning capacity.

Signs of inadequate rest vary by child

Children that have failed to obtain a sufficient amount of rest during the night may appear lethargic and may even fall asleep in a quiet area of the classroom. Conversely, inattention and hyper-activity due to sleepiness may occur and it is more likely to be exhibited by boys than girls. Additionally, an increased risk of injury due to insufficient rest is ten times more likely in boys. Aggressive behavior and bullying, likely to have multiple causes has also been attributed to undiagnosed sleep-related breathing disorders that inhibit sleep.

Causes of inadequate rest may be psychological, physical, or a response to environmental conditions.

The reasons children fail to achieve an adequate amount of rest vary as greatly as the symptoms associated with the condition. For some children earlier bedtimes with accompanying routines that help a child relax prior to sleep is the only change needed. For others, the remedies are much more complex.

Children with chronic health conditions such as allergies and asthma may exhibit symptoms of sleepiness on an intermittent basis. However, children that are overweight (BMI greater than 85th percentile for their age), often experience sleep disorders and consequently act lethargic and disinterested in physical activities.

Stress caused by a variety of events affects children's ability to sleep just as it does adults. Researchers have found that children exposed to violent events, living in poverty, and experiencing abuse/neglect in the home often develop sleep disorders as a result of the psychological trauma. Counseling is often necessary to enable the child to overcome the fears that prevent sleep. School related pressures, imagined or real, can also be a cause of insufficient rest.

Noting if a child's apparent lack of adequate rest is intermittent or on-going is important to determining potential strategies for meeting the child's sleep and rest needs.

Classroom and Teacher Strategies to facilitate well rested children in the classroom

- Schedule quiet and active activities intermittently throughout the day;
- Provide an inviting quiet, soft, semi-secluded area where children can rest or sleep if needed;
- Read and discuss children's stories like *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, *The Sleep Book* by Dr. Seuss; and
- Help children recognize their need for rest during the day.

Parent Support and Activities

- Organize a parent forum about the importance of sleep. Invite a pediatrician and facilitate a discussion about challenges and solutions to providing adequate rest for children; and
- Provide information about the importance of bed time routines; quiet activities in the evening, consistent bed time, and bed time stories.

References

American Academy of Sleep Medicine (2007, August 2). Sleep Is The Right Ingredient For Academic Success. *Science Daily*. Retrieved February 14, 2008, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/08/070801122222.htm>

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Helping Children Develop Nutritionally Sound Diets



A nutritionally sound diet for children requires a joint effort between early education professionals and parents. Studies suggest that poor nutritional status can adversely affect brain function and impact

on cognition and behavior.ⁱ Child care represents an untapped rich source of strategies to help children acquire positive health habits to prevent obesity.ⁱⁱ A nutritionally sound diet includes access to and consumption of a variety of nutrient dense foods in appropriately sized portions. If staff knowledge of sound nutrition practices is limited, utilizing community health professionals for staff training, parent education and/or child activities is advisable.

Nutrition Education Concepts

There are four basic concepts about nutrition that young children are capable of understanding and need to know;

- Food is essential for growth and health;
- Nutrients come from food and that's what supports growth and health;
- A variety of foods need to be eaten daily; and
- Foods must be carefully handled before they are eaten to ensure they are healthy and safe.

Nutrition Activities

Literature suggests that nutrition education should be a combination of spontaneous discussions and intentional lessons. Active engagement of the children is important in both types of situations. Language, social/emotional, small motor and cognitive skills can be an integral part of nutrition education.

Questions that might be used to begin a spontaneous discussion at meal or snack time are:

- Which fruits and vegetables are we having for lunch today? Why do we need fruits and vegetables? What grain are we having?
- What hot foods are we having? What ones are cold? Why do we keep milk cold?

Intentional lessons to increase awareness of food sources and food safety could include;

- Following a recipe to make a nutritious snack
- Visiting an orchard or farm
- Planting and tending a garden
- Assisting in snack preparation

Food Service Considerations

It is imperative that all foods served, prepared by the program or by parents for special occasions, are nutritious and of appropriate portion size. Failing to do so undermines the goal of helping children develop sound nutrition habits. Foods and their portion sizes should follow the USDA recommended guidelines for 3-5 year olds. Planning meals that provide a mix of colors, textures, and the introduction of new foods are important considerations. Limiting processed meats, sweets, and fried foods is recommended by nutritionists. Using healthy snack foods like fruits/vegetables cut in unique ways and served with dip for birthdays and holidays is healthier than serving cupcakes or other sweets. Consider celebrating special occasions in non-food ways to decrease the emphasis on food consumption.

Community Resources

Many resources for educational materials and child and family nutrition programs are available for little or no cost in most communities.

- Purdue Cooperative Extension Service
- WIC Nutritionist
- Hospital nutritionist
- CACFP (Child and Adult Food Program)

Involving Families

Sharing information with families about classroom activities focused on nutrition and suggesting a follow-up activity for completion at home is an effective way to provide nutrition information in a non-threatening way.

Investigate the possibility of offering classes in healthy cooking for families. Differences in economic status and ethnicity of families should be considered when making arrangements.

Provide parents with recipe book of the children's favorite healthy snack recipes. Include illustrations drawn by the children.

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