

## Language & Learning

### Getting Ready For School

#### Early Preparation For Later School Experience

Some early school skills are easy to teach. Your child may be saying or signing the alphabet, counting, even recognizing some words by age 3 or 4. However, letters and numbers are only building blocks. Unless a child learns how to build a wall, a house, a sidewalk, or a school with those blocks, they will not be very useful. We say that a child who can count, name colors and shapes, and sing the alphabet song, but who has trouble with language and problem solving, has developed splinter skills.

To really prepare your child for school, you also want to provide other learning opportunities including language experiences, hands on experiences and print experiences:

**Language Experience:** Language is your first priority. No one learns reading without understanding the stories, no matter how well he knows the alphabet. No one understands mathematics without understanding the story problems, no matter how many numerals he can write. Social studies, science, even the rules of the game in P.E. are all very language based, and to fully participate in any classroom, your child needs to be able to communicate meaningfully on an academic level, which is different from conversation.

The language experiences that lead the 2 year olds to academic language later on come from following their leads and labeling their discoveries. Don't try to "teach concepts" beyond their cognitive level. If a child experiences all of the important parts of early development, then the next stage will have a good base. Be sure to mark the passing of time (wait, now it's time, after your nap), spatial concepts (look inside, all over the floor! Eat in your highchair), seriation (That's BIG! Look how tiny! You have more), classification (Yes, that's a fruit, and that's a fruit, too. Look, I have your blue shirt and your red shirt), and causality (Uh-oh, I dropped it and it broke! Light on, light off). Do it when they are attempting to call your attention to these aspects, or when the time is appropriate. You don't need to sit down and think, "Now how can I get seriation into my life today?" Rather, in any situation, think, "What does she/he seem to be noticing? How can I label the concept?"

**Hands On Experience:** Experience is the basis for later school learning. We learn to read, write, and figure about things, actions, and relationships that we have experienced. To learn well in school later, your child needs to simply interact with a rich environment now. Does he have safe plastic containers of varied sizes, with and without lids, spouts and handles, to pour out of and into and squirt with in the bathtub or wading pool? Does she sit in the shopping cart and see the food come off the shelf, go through the cash register line, into bags, home, and onto shelves in cupboards and refrigerator? Do you go for walks and take time to notice leaves emerging or falling, or bugs, or interesting animals in yards? In any experience, no matter how ordinary, notice what she is attending to, and attend to it also, with body language, words, and actions. You are telling him, "Noticing is important. What interests you is worth learning about. Curiosity is a virtue." Of course, by creating the opportunities, and taking a turn at calling attention to things yourselves, you will open up her horizons even more. Just don't have all the ideas yourself. She needs to have many of her own.

**Print Experience:** Awareness of interaction with print in the environment is vital. Don't assume that your child knows that you read, not only books, but directions, signs, logos, recipes, labels, newspapers, magazines, closed captions (don't wait until he starts school to have that available), and telephone directories. Communicate what you are doing overtly. "I need to look up the number in the phone book." Get out the book in his line of vision. "It's heavy." "There are a lot of names." "Here it is!" "I hope that I remember the number: 555-9678, 555-9678."