**What Parents Can Do to Help Prepare Children for Public School**

A great deal of variability exists in developmental and skill levels within young children. This is normal, and many children will not have developed to the level of others at the same age. Nevertheless, parents can help their children develop the skills they will need to be ready for school. The following list is a collection of activities that parents can do with their children to increase their child’s general readiness for school:

* Read books to and with your child.
* Spend time with your child, including playing, cuddling, and hugging.
* Create and enforce a routine within your home that your child needs to follow (i.e., times of meals, naptimes, and bedtimes).
* Take time to talk to your child.
* Encourage and answer questions from your child.
* Engage in informal reading and counting activities at home.
* Promote your child’s cognitive development by showing and encouraging your child to think about the world around them.
* Promote play that helps develop literacy skills, problem-solving skills, creativity, and imagination.
* Familiarize children with the alphabet and with numbers.
* Ensure opportunity to develop social skills through playgroups or more formal preschool activities.
* Encourage behaviors that demonstrate respect, patience and courtesy.
* Encourage children to accept responsibility and build competence through simple chores such as putting toys away and picking up clothes.

**Promoting Readiness to Read**

Children’s readiness to read, in particular, has gained greater attention recently from educators as the developmental precursors to reading have become more evident.

Children are ready to read when they have developed an ear for the way words sound, can identify rhyme and alliteration, can blend sounds, recognize onset rhyme (initial sounds), and can identify sound units in words. Together these skills are called *phonological awareness* and usually emerge in children between ages two and six. Children with good phonological awareness skills usually learn to read quickly. Children who are poor readers often have weak phonological skills.

*Phonological awareness.*There are many things that parents can do to facilitate phonological awareness and improve their child’s readiness to read:

* Read nursery rhymes, sing songs, and clap along with the rhythm.
* Play games with words that sound alike as you experience them in everyday life. (“We’re passing ‘Mike’s Bikes.’ That’s a funny name because the words sound alike!”)
* Demonstrate how sounds blend together in familiar words. (“Let’s sign your name on Grandma’s card, T-o-m --- Tom.”)
* Play a game where the goal is to find objects with names that begin with a certain initial sound; this is a great game for walks or car rides.
* Play clapping games and clap with each distinct sound. (“‘C-a-t’ is a three clap word; so is ‘fam-i-ly.’”)

*Comprehension.*Here are ways parents can build comprehension skills:

* attending to short stories by reading short high interest books and reading the same favorites over and over;
* connecting story and titles by predicting the story from the title;
* making predictions about stories and following simple plots by asking questions while reading (“What’s going to happen now?”)
* allowing children to retell stories;
* communicating feelings and ideas by allowing children to talk and tell stories even when they do not appear to make much sense.

*Print awareness.*Another important readiness skill that helps children learn to read is called print awareness.

Print awarenessmeans that the child:

* Knows the difference between pictures and print
* Recognizes environmental print (stop signs, McDonald’s, Wal-Mart)
* Understands that print can appear alone or with pictures
* Recognizes that print occurs in different mediums (pencil, crayon, ink)
* Recognizes that print occurs on different surfaces (paper, computer screen, billboard)
* Understands that words are read left to right
* Understands the lines of text are read top to bottom
* Understands the function of white space between words
* Understands that print corresponds to speech word-for-word
* Knows the difference between letters and words

Parents can build print awareness by pointing out print as distinct from pictures in everyday life (e.g., “That’s a sign for ‘women.’ That says ‘women.’”); pointing out store and restaurant marquees; pointing out print with and without pictures (e.g., “Here’s a page with just words!”); pointing out words written in different media and on different surfaces (e.g., “Look, someone wrote on that wall with spray paint!”); occasionally tracing words with your finger as you read; note that we begin reading at the top (point to the top and say, “Here’s where we start!”); playing find the word games with your child; and teaching the alphabet via songs and rhymes and talking about which letters make up familiar words.

*Book handling.*Children also need to learn book handling skills such as orienting a book correctly and recognizing the beginning and the end. Giving children their own books or letting them take books from the library helps. Allowing children to hold books while being read to and asking them to open the book at the beginning and close the book at the end of the story facilitate book handling skills.