

BACK TO SCHOOL TIPS

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Preschoolers are naturally curious and ready to learn. Their world is full of opportunities to build language skills and expand general knowledge. You can enrich ordinary moments and everyday routines to help your preschooler move out into the wider world, master language, prepare to read and write, count, and develop thinking skills in the following ways:

➤ **Curiosity and Exploration:**

- Promote curiosity and creativity by encouraging your child to ask questions and investigate the answers to these questions. Sometimes it's good to turn the question back to your child and say, "*Why do you think this is so?*" or "*I'm not sure. How can we find out more about this and figure it out?*"
- Provide your child with safe objects such as sponges, sand, and bark to touch. Conduct experiments with you child such as taking an ice cube out of the freezer and watching it as it melts. Encourage your child to talk about the changes he may notice as he observes.

➤ **Early Literacy and Language Skills:**

- Help your child develop language and a love of reading by exposing her to a variety of print rich materials such as books, poems, nursery rhymes, labels, recipes, child-friendly magazines, newspapers, etc. Engage her in conversation, encouraging her to point out and describe objects, letters, and words, and express ideas. Involve your child while making shopping lists, writing letters, or filling out birthday invitations.
- Make story time a special part of the day. Set aside a special time and place to read books to your child. Bring the book to life by stopping to point out and label the pictures and words. Ask questions as you read: "*Why did the three little bears go for a walk? What do you think will happen next? How did that make her feel?*" When the story is over, continue the discussion by retelling the story, creating alternate endings, and maybe even acting out the story together.
- On your walks to school or through the neighborhood, name and describe the things that you pass. Label and talk about any print that you notice on signs or labels around your environment. Point out letters and words, while emphasizing what each letter looks like, sounds like, and what words mean.

➤ **Mathematical Thinking:**

- Understanding numbers and what numbers mean is an important part of helping to prepare your child for school. By playing counting games and exploring numbers with your child, you can help him to remember numbers and understand how to use them.
- Look for opportunities throughout the day to count everyday objects such as socks, cups, bubbles, trees, or lampposts. As you walk to school, have your child count his

steps. Encourage him to count as high as possible or even count by twos, fives, or tens.

- Using blocks or beans, encourage your child to make comparisons between which pile has "more" or "less." Then, count to find out.
- Help your child recognize patterns and encourage him to recognize and describe the patterns he sees. For example, "*Here's an orange, apple, orange, apple... What comes next?*" Help your child learn how to extend the patterns or even create his own patterns!

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Preschoolers are beginning to engage in more interactions with others, understand and express emotions, and monitor their own behavior. Your child will use these important skills to follow directions, make friends, share, take turns, resolve conflicts, and develop an understanding of the similarities and differences in others. The following are suggestions for ways you can foster some of these skills and prepare your child for the social and emotional environment in a school setting:

➤ **Sharing and Cooperating**

- The best way for your child to understand the importance of sharing and taking turns is to observe you modeling these behaviors as well. As school is approaching, look for activities in which you and your child can practice sharing and taking turns. Draw a picture together while sharing markers. Build a block tower while taking turns adding blocks. Try to reinforce phrases such as "Let's share!" and "Let's take turns!" and explain why it's important to do these things.

➤ **Labeling and Expressing Emotions**

- Help your child learn words and language to express their emotions. Make time with them, and encourage them to verbalize thoughts and feelings. Tell stories and sing songs about fictional characters who are coping with emotions. Ask your child to think of different ways they might be able help the characters let others know how they feel. This can help your child cope with difficult emotions like anger, disappointment, and frustration, which is very important as she begins school.

➤ **Coping with Separation**

- While going to school for the first time may be a very exciting experience for children and families, many preschoolers may feel anxious or fearful about separating with a parent or caregiver. If your child feels this way, it's important to validate and acknowledge their feelings. It may be a good idea to visit and walk around the school with them before the first day. Help alleviate any anxieties by focusing on all the positive and exciting aspects of what they will learn and do at school. Give your child a family photo to keep in their cubby or book bag, or make up a special song or rhyme to remind them of how much you love them. Let your child know that you will be

thinking about them throughout the day, and will be looking forward to seeing them and hearing all about day when school day is over!

HEALTHY HABITS

It is crucial for children to develop an early foundation of healthy habits starting at a young age. Eating nutritious foods and engaging in regular physical activity each day not only improves their ability to think, learn, move, and play at school, but also puts them on a positive trajectory for a healthy life as they grow older. The following are ways you can incorporate healthy habits into your child's everyday routines:

➤ **Nutrition:**

- It's important for your child to eat a healthy breakfast every morning, which gives their body and mind a great start to the day. Some nutritious breakfast foods include whole grain cereal or toast, eggs, fresh fruit, oatmeal, low-fat or skim dairy products like milk and yogurt.
- Add a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables to your child's snacks and meals each day. Remember - - young children should eat at least five servings of different colored fruits and vegetables every day.

➤ **Regular Physical Activity**

- Set aside some time each day to move and play with your child. Preschoolers need at least an hour of physical activity each day. Even when the weather gets cooler and it's too cold to play outside, find fun ways for your family to stay physically active indoors. Dance to music together! Do jumping jacks! Move and groove like your favorite animal!

➤ **Getting Enough Sleep & Rest:**

- It's important for children to get enough sleep each night to give their minds and bodies the energy they need to think and learn at school the next day. Help your child establish healthy sleeping patterns by following simple bedtime routines - - take a warm bath, brush teeth, put on pajamas, sing along to a lullaby, and tell a story about their day at school. In addition to getting enough sleep each night, it's also important for your child to engage in calm and quiet "downtime" activities throughout the day - - reading a book, drawing a picture, playing quietly, or listening to soothing music.