

Letter to parents

Dear Parents,

School is the next major step in your child's life and preparing them with some essential skills can make the first year of school a very successful one. School is not just about learning to read, although that is, of course, very important. Taking time to encourage the development of skills in all areas: gross and fine motor, language, creativity, and general knowledge is important to your child's confidence and independence.

You will see an abundance of experimentation happening. Watch when your child is having a bath and you will see them testing the water to see what floats and what sinks. When you use kitchen utensils or tools in the garage, your child will probably be right there asking how everything works. As much as two-year-olds love to ask 'Why?', a four-year-old's favourite question is 'How?'. More often than not, when a four-year-old asks a question they want to know the answer. Keep your answers simple and direct and watch them listen.

Although it may take a great deal of time to let your child explore, experiment with and examine everything, it is the best way they can acquire knowledge. Experience and opportunities make a huge difference to your child. Your most important contribution to this hands-on learning will be furnishing materials for experimenting, providing enriched experiences and praising all attempts to learn.

Ready, Set ... Go! Off to School is about taking advantage of those teachable moments. The simple games and activities were created to help you build upon what your child can already do and enrich their intellectual growth. There is no best way to use the activities; how you use the learning games will depend on your child. The important things are to provide opportunities for challenge and to praise their every attempt and accomplishment.

At the end of each section is a page for keeping a record of milestones and achievements. This page also provides a place for you to keep photos and anecdotes of special things they say and do. This can be a special memory for both you and your child in later years.

Sincerely,

Becky Daniel

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Introduction

The value of play

Everything preschoolers do is learning. The more your child plays and does, the more opportunities they have for finding favourites. Imagine, if you will, what would have happened if Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's family had never set him on a piano bench and placed his little hands on the keys? Nothing. What a loss that would have been for the world. One of your most important jobs as a parent is to find out what natural talents lie within your child.

When a child is born, they have over a hundred billion brain cells. Through play, trillions of synapses develop, connecting these hundred billion cells in the brain. Each time your preschooler plays a game, listens to music or stories from picture books, and interacts with you, new synapses develop and the child's intellect is enhanced. Play, although it sounds simple, must be taken seriously. Play is your child's work!

Physically, a preschooler develops well-balanced fine and gross motor skills during recreation. Toys are not just for fun. It is no accident that, down through history, in all cultures, toys are a part of early childhood. Games with equipment teach the learner how to manipulate – as the old adage says, 'practice makes perfect'. Nursery rhymes, musical games and dancing about are ways of playing with rhythm and rhyme that orchestrate balance, coordination and grace.

Emotionally, play is therapeutic. Since play is a natural medium for self-expression, it provides the preschooler with a safe space to experience, express and celebrate feelings. In play, the child gradually adds increasing complexity to their world. Playing in play groups gives preschoolers the opportunity to learn social skills: sharing, taking turns and cooperation. Patterns of behaviour, acceptable ways to interact and ways of playing safely are also part of this whole socialisation process. As a bonus, through play, children develop a sense of humour and an ability to show empathy to others. The more difficult and less obvious advantage of play is that it allows a child a place to learn how to handle anger and aggression. Although this is a long process, expressing turmoil openly in socially acceptable ways is vital for a child's emotional wellbeing. Emotionally speaking, play is vital to mental health and stability.



Creativity is a tremendous gift with which human beings are born. Unfortunately, instead of being nurtured, often imaginations are stifled. As parents and caregivers of young children, we must remember: in fantasy play, children are given a stage on which they can spotlight their creative nature. Children imagine whole scenarios and assimilate their learning through fanciful make-believe. Symbolic play, in which toys and dolls are used, allows children an opportunity to practise every possible social situation. They can rehearse all the different roles and experience being whatever they choose. This exploratory play and experience with others is a prerequisite for the child to accomplish a positive self-image. It is through fantasy play that youngsters develop their sense of humour, practise empathy and celebrate compassion.

Everyone senses on some level that the ability to be spontaneous and to play are basic needs and important characteristics of healthy human beings. However, not everyone can channel this force for ultimate health and happiness. Unfortunately, learning to play is something we must do as children; if we do not learn how to play as a youngster, often it is a skill that cannot be learned as an adult. As parents and caregivers of young children, I urge you to teach your child how to use their brain, body, emotions and imagination as vehicles for celebrating their higher self. When you teach your child to play, you are showing them the path of intellectual, social and emotional transformation – a path which ultimately leads to self-actualisation!



Hand, fingers, thumbs

Fine motor development...



Think about it!

By the age of four, most children have excellent finger skills and can handle small objects. Their self-care skills include dressing and undressing. They can button and unbutton, lace their shoes, zip up their jackets, fold and put away their own clothes. They can brush their teeth, comb their hair, wash their hands and dry off with towels. Four-year-olds can usually completely feed themselves. They have no problem using spoons and forks and can easily drink from cups without spilling.

When it comes to games, preschoolers like challenges and enjoy play that involves many little pieces such as cards, board games, puzzles or building with small construction bricks that snap together: Old Maid, Go Fish, Snap, dominoes, snakes & ladders, puzzles with 6 or more pieces.

As a general rule, four-year-olds are extremely interested in arts and crafts, too. They are as excited about the process as the product. They can plan ahead and begin a project with an idea in mind. They take great pride in their accomplishments and enjoy making things to give to others.



Threading pictures

**I can, I can, I know I can
I can cut and paste, I can
I can sew, in and out,
I know I can, I can, I can**

Skills

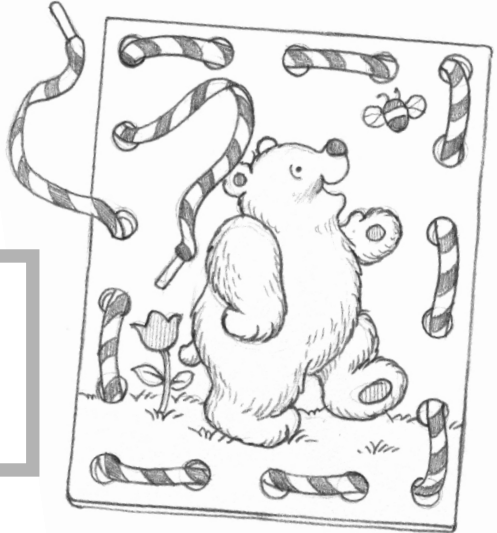


- lacing and threading
- improving eye, finger and hand coordination
- cutting and pasting



What you need

- boot
- long shoelaces
- A4 card
- old colouring books
- scissors
- glue stick
- hole punch



Hint

Lacing a boot or shoe is a great way to start this activity and develop hand-eye coordination. Lace the boot leaving the two top holes unlaced. Ask your child to finish lacing up the boot.

Vocabulary

- tie
- thread
- shoelace
- push
- pull

How to create sewing cards

1. Let your child work with you. Show them how to use the scissors, glue stick and hole punch.
2. Cut pictures from old books or a picture from a colouring book which your child has completed.
3. Paste onto card.
4. Use a hole punch to make some holes around the edges of the picture.
5. Use long, colorful shoelaces to connect the holes and make a colorful border.
6. Hang picture.

