

La Plata Elementary School
La Plata, Missouri

Off to a Good Start!

Ways Parents Can Help Children Get Ready to Begin School



A Booklet for Parents



A Big Day is Coming . . . And It's Very Exciting!

Can you believe it? Your little one is about to start kindergarten! It's an exciting time for everyone. He may already know his name, address and phone number, but what else can you do to get him* ready to learn? This booklet is filled with lists of what your child should know and things to do at home to get him ready.

In it, you'll find everything from tips on promoting reading readiness to brain-boosting math activities. You'll even discover ideas on how best to work with your child's school.

Remember: You're not only your child's first teacher, you're also a partner in his education—both in the classroom and at home.

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"Studies continue to show that regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background, parent involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining success in school."

— National PTA

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**Every child is unique, so we often use singular pronouns. We'll alternate between "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.*

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Is My Child Ready?

Not everything your youngster needs to know for school has to do with academics. In fact, kindergarten teachers say that a child's social and personal development are the best predictors of her success in the classroom.

But keep in mind that your child will mature *throughout* kindergarten. Her social skills will sharpen. Her "sense of self" will grow.

Build a Love of Learning

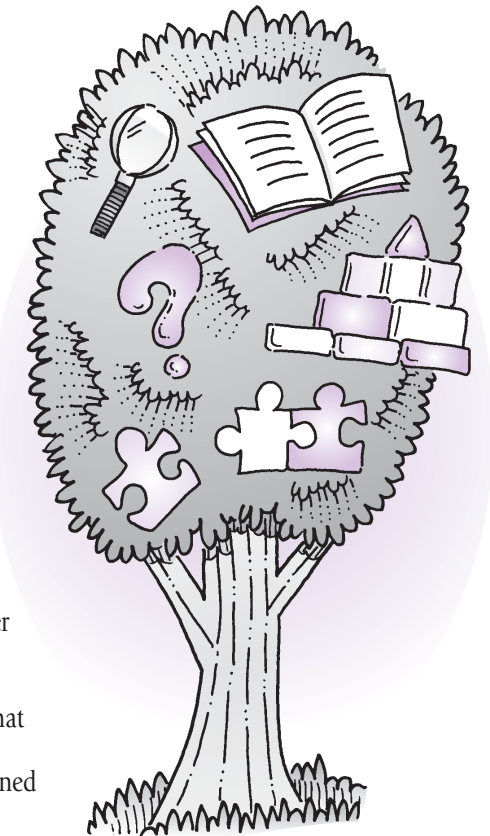
Spark your child's passion for discovery. From kindergarten on, eager learners make eager students!

Your child is ready to learn if he:

- Enjoys exploring new things.
- Asks lots of questions.
- Is confident about speaking up.
- Isn't intimidated by tough tasks.

To boost your child's love of learning:

- Take a new route home. Talk about what you see.
- Play thinking games like "I Spy."
- Celebrate his efforts. Sure, his tower fell. But not before he stacked all six blocks!
- Challenge him. Go ahead, tackle that twenty-piece puzzle together.
- Get excited yourself. "Mommy learned the coolest thing today!"



Prepare your child for classroom success

Kindergarten teachers must deal with a classroom full of children. The more your child can do by herself at school, the better. So help her become independent—and watch her confidence soar!

Your child should be able to:

- Get dressed on her own.
- Use the bathroom by herself.
- Blow her nose; cover her mouth when she coughs or sneezes.
- Eat neatly (okay, sort of neatly).
- Follow two-step instructions.

To help your child become independent:

- Have her dress herself. Be playful. Set a kitchen timer and see if your child can get dressed before it goes off.
- Let her practice using the bathroom (including lowering/raising her pants and washing her hands).
- Role-play. "Daddy's going to sneeze! What should he do?"
- Pretend your kitchen is a nice restaurant. Practice table manners.
- Give silly directions. "First quack like a duck. Then hop!"



Teach your child to get along with others

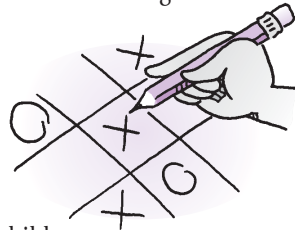
Even in kindergarten, your child will be part of a class. He'll need to get along with others so he can focus on learning once the school bell rings!

Your child should be able to:

- Take turns and share.
- Compromise.
- Handle disappointment.
- Understand that others have feelings, too.

To help your child build social skills:

- Invite other children to spend time with your child.
- Practice give-and-take. Help your child think of what to say and do when another child wants his toy.
- Don't always let him win. From "Tic-Tac-Toe" to "Old Maid," let him lose sometimes.
- Talk about feelings. "Mommy's sad that her favorite bracelet broke. Do you ever feel sad?"

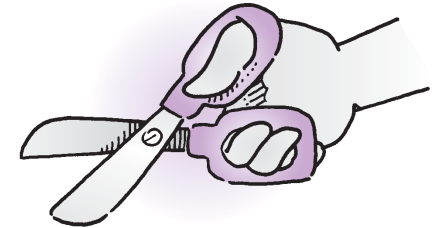


Build your child's motor skills

From cutting with scissors to tying their shoes, kindergartners are expected to master many tasks that involve both their large and small muscles. Teachers often refer to these abilities as a child's *motor skills*.

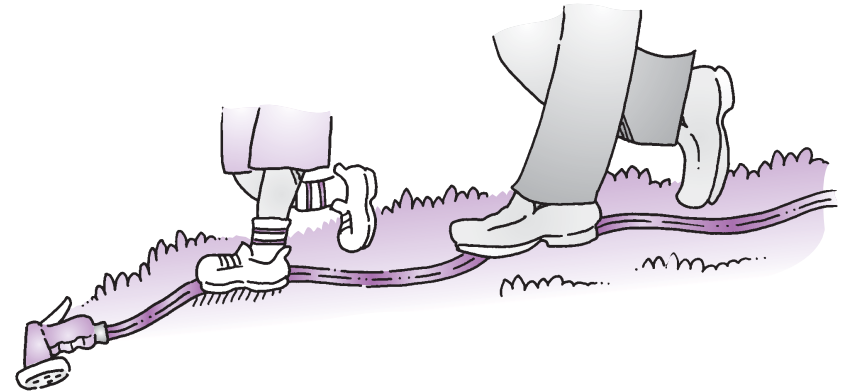
Your child should be able to:

- Color and scribble.
- Cut with safety scissors.
- Trace simple shapes.
- Paste.
- Bounce and throw a ball.
- Walk in a straight line.



To help your child build motor skills:

- Color and draw together. Keep pencils, crayons and paper down low where she can reach them.
- Show her how to use safety scissors. Have her clip coupons for you. It'll make her feel grown up—and save you money!
- Let her trace your hand.
- Play with modeling clay. Help her roll it into snakes and other shapes.
- Fill a spray bottle with water. Have her squirt the houseplants.
- Make pasta necklaces. Have her thread dry macaroni onto yarn.
- Play catch with everything from beanbags to beach balls.
- Be acrobats! See if she can walk along the garden hose "tightrope."
- Have a balancing contest. Who can stand on one foot the longest?
- Practice tying shoes (even if she usually wears Velcro®).



Help your child develop language skills

Developing language skills will prepare your child for reading. Everything your child knows about language—from how it's spoken to how it sounds—comes into play during kindergarten.

Your child should be able to:

- Carry on a conversation.
- Ask questions and listen to answers.
- Retell stories and talk about past experiences.
- Recognize rhymes.
- Listen.

Here's what you can do with your child:

- Talk, talk, talk. Chat about your day. Share something funny.
- Make up stories. Act them out with puppets.
- Introduce new words. "This ice cream is *delicious*!"
- Sing the alphabet song. Sing the letters in his name.
- Recite familiar rhymes or invent your own.
- Play games like "Simon Says" or "Mother, May I?"



Have fun with writing readiness, too!

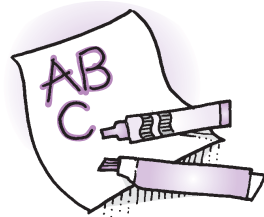
Even in this day of computers, writing is still an important skill. And one thing's for sure: It all starts with pencils, paper and lots of scribbles.

Your child should be able to:

- Understand that words run left to right.
- Hold a pencil correctly.
- Print a few letters.

To develop your child's writing skills:

- Give her lots of writing tools, from chunky crayons to markers.
- Let her help you "write" the grocery list or a letter to Grandma.
- Play office. Have her address envelopes and fold papers.
- Have her write the ABCs with sidewalk chalk or shaving cream.
- Help her use water to "paint" letters on dry pavement.



It's important to read to and with your child

Reading is the foundation skill for all learning. Teach your child to love books and you'll build a lifelong reader. So plant the seed and watch it grow.



Your child should be able to:

- Hold a book and turn its pages correctly.
- Understand that letters make sounds.
- Listen to stories without interrupting.
- Recognize a few simple words ("sight words" such as *a*, *and*, *the*).
- Recognize his printed name.

To promote reading readiness:

- Read to your child every day. Have the whole family join in.
- Keep books where he can get to them.
- Label a few objects in his room, like "dresser" and "bed."
- Help him explore magazines, comics and maps in addition to books.
- Make letter cards. Have him match uppercase/lowercase pairs such as B/b.
- Skip the text. Have your child invent a tale to go along with a book's pictures.
- Read for pleasure yourself. Show him that books matter.
- Attend library story time often. Get him used to sitting quietly.

Monitor TV, computer and video game time

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children limit their "screen time" to no more than two hours daily. This includes time spent watching television, playing video games and using the computer.



To help your child use technology wisely:

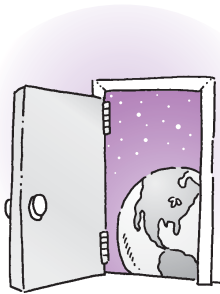
- Set limits on the amount of time your child spends watching TV and playing computer or video games, even if they're educational.
- Watch TV with her. Choose appropriate shows. Don't let her "channel surf." Talk about what you see.
- Make sure any video or computer games your child plays are age-appropriate.

Open the door to new experiences for your child

Your child doesn't need any formal training in social studies before kindergarten. Just make him aware of the world around him!

To expand your child's world:

- Explore other cultures. Nibble ethnic foods. Attend a community festival. Listen to music from other countries.
- Take your child to visit some places in your town such as the airport, a farm, the police station, the post office, a bakery, the railroad station or even a car wash. Then talk with your child about what you saw.
- Learn about your own neighborhood. Is it hilly? Flat? Are we in the country or are we in the city?
- Embrace your heritage. Whether through food, dress or music, help your child delight in where he comes from.
- Learn together. Visit the library to find books about faraway people and lands.



Foster your child's creativity through the arts

Learning experiences in kindergarten go beyond the three R's. Your child may not become a Beethoven or a Picasso, but she can still reap countless rewards from the fine arts.

To introduce your child to the arts:

- Fill her world with melodies. Expose her to the brain-building power of music.
- Get messy. Finger paint. Squish clay. Glue sticky collages. What's a little dirty laundry in the name of creativity?
- Move to the music. Waltz around the room together. Feel the beat right down to your bones.
- Act out stories together. Be dramatic. Use funny voices and facial expressions.
- Draw songs. Play a lively tune. Have your child imagine what the song might "look" like.
- Introduce her to the stage. Take her to a kid-friendly theater production. Let her be wowed by it.

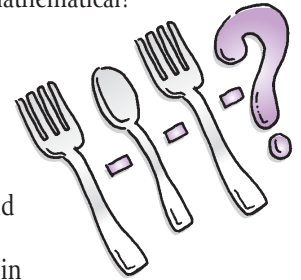


Numbers + curiosity = math fun!

Understanding basic math concepts begins in kindergarten. This is the perfect time to gear your child up for all things mathematical!

To get your child ready for math:

- Play with blocks. Help your child sort them, stack them, build a tower. Blocks are a great example of hands-on math.
- Ponder patterns. Set down a fork, a spoon, another fork, then another spoon. Ask your child what should come next.
- Start counting. Whether it's the number of eggs in the carton or the stripes on his jacket, encourage your child to count!
- Be bankers. Help him learn about money. "One dime is the same as 10 pennies. Five nickels equal one quarter."
- Study shapes. Help him draw a square and a rectangle. How are they alike? How are they different?



Help your child develop critical thinking skills

To help your child succeed in school, go beyond asking your child "yes" and "no" questions. Get her to think critically. It'll prime her mind for a lifetime of learning!

To develop your child's thinking skills:

- Embrace the *why*. Prompt her with thought-provoking questions. "Why do you think we can't see the moon tonight?"
- Ask "What happens next?" When you finish reading a story, have her use her imagination to continue the tale.
- Play "sink or float." Fill a bucket with water and gather several small objects. Which might sink? Which will float? Find out!
- Introduce concepts like *more*, *less*, *empty* and *full*. All you need are plastic cups, some uncooked rice and a broom to clean up.



A healthy child is ready to learn

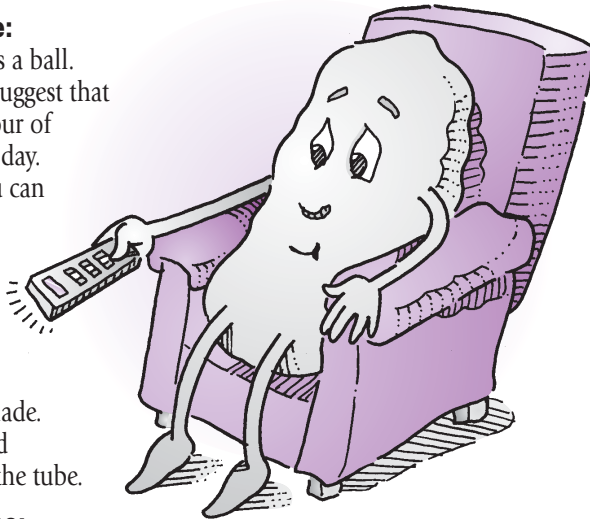
A healthy body supports a healthy mind! So nurture your child's physical well-being:

To teach your child about good nutrition:

- Offer him a variety of foods each day. Include a mix of fresh fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products.
- Limit sweets. Treats like candy and cake are just that—treats.
- Offer water. Don't go overboard on juice and sweetened drinks.
- Eat together. At mealtime be a role model for proper eating habits.
- Don't label foods as "good" or "bad." Instead, talk about healthy portions and making smart food choices.

To promote exercise:

- Go out and play! Toss a ball. Take a walk. Experts suggest that kids get at least an hour of physical activity each day.
- Don't drive when you can walk. Is the store just around the corner? Skip the car and grab your sneakers.
- Limit TV time. Couch potatoes aren't born, they're made. So don't let your child "veg out" in front of the tube.



To preserve rest time:

- Be sure your child gets 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night. That's the amount experts recommend for school-age kids.
- Enforce a regular bedtime.
- Adopt a nightly routine that includes quiet activities (no TV).
- Beware of hidden caffeine in things like cocoa.

Prepare your child to cooperate in the classroom

When she was in preschool, your child probably had a "meltdown" once in a while. But now that she's starting kindergarten, she'll need to control herself. The key? Self-discipline. And even though the emphasis is on "self," you can do a lot to help her along.

To teach your child self-discipline:

- **Offer choices.** Milk or juice? Blue socks or striped? Show her that she can't have everything she wants, but she does have some control.
- **Give her responsibilities.** Have her pick up her toys or put her books back on the shelf. Responsibility is part of self-discipline.
- **Have her practice sitting still.** Remind her to sit quietly at dinner or during library story time. It's an important kindergarten skill.
- **Rely on routines.** Have her follow predictable patterns throughout the day. It may make her less impulsive.
- **Praise her when she behaves.** Did she do what you asked without fussing? Tell her you appreciate her "big kid" behavior.
- **Avoid tantrums.** Teachers use routines to maintain order in their classrooms. Regular routines will help you avoid meltdowns, too. Show your child that throwing a tantrum will *not* get her what she wants.
- **Review the basics.** Explain the idea of "keeping your hands to yourself" and respecting other people's belongings.



Be ready to register your child for school

When you enroll your child in kindergarten, you'll need to bring a few things with you. Not all school systems have the same requirements, but here are some of the items you may need:

- Your child's birth certificate.
- His immunization records and medical forms.
- His Social Security Number (SSN).
- Proof of residency (such as a utility bill).
- Proof of custody (if applicable).

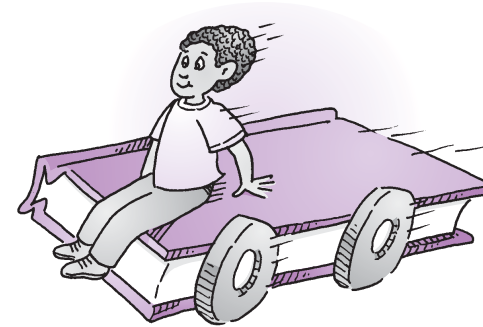
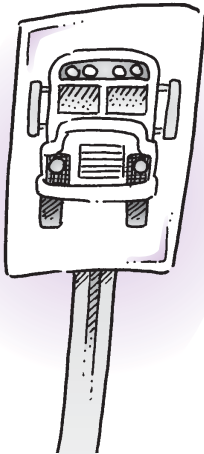


Review school bus safety rules before the first day

Each day big yellow buses transport millions of kids to and from school. Although riding the bus is the safest way for children to get to school, it's still important to review school bus safety rules with your child.

To help your child become a smart bus rider:

- Walk her to the bus stop each morning. Meet her bus each afternoon (in many school systems, this is mandatory).
- Stand a safe distance from the street. Don't inch up to the curb.
- Remind her to wait her turn to board. Never push or shove.
- Tell her she must *never* walk behind the bus or run to catch it.
- Let her know that when she's on the bus, the driver is in charge.
- Have a "Plan B." Practice what she should do if you aren't there to meet her at the bus (for example, go to a neighbor's house, etc.).



Use books to ease your child into the first day of school

Get your little reader ready for class! Share these fantastic stories with him. They all revolve around the first day of school.

- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes (HarperTrophy). When this little mouse starts school, she learns to embrace her unique name, despite teasing from her classmates. She also learns that she will always have the love and support of her family.
- *I Love You All Day Long* by Francesca Rusackas (HarperTrophy). Reassure your little one that no matter what she's doing at school, your thoughts are with her.
- *Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!* by Nancy L. Carlson (Penguin Group). Henry is a mouse who is excited—and nervous—about his first day of kindergarten. Read about how Henry gets over his nervousness and makes a new friend.
- *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* by Joseph Slate (Dutton Children's Books). It's a rocking, rhyming time as animals A to Z prepare for the first day of school.
- *Tucker's Four-Carrot School Day* by Susan Winget (HarperCollins). Tucker is a bunny who discovers that making mistakes is just part of learning.
- *The Twelve Days of Kindergarten* by Deborah Lee Rose (Harry N. Abrams, Inc.). From feeding fish to building with blocks, count (and sing!) all the neat things there are to do in kindergarten.
- *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow). Tiny Wemberly worries about everything! But nothing makes her stomach flip-flop like the thought of starting school!

Make the Big Day a Happy One

The first day of school is nearly here! There's plenty you can do to make your child's first day in class a happy one:

- **Visit the classroom.** Check to see if your child's school has a "Meet the Teacher" event which you and your child could attend.
- **Ask about her concerns.** Find out if your child has a specific worry about school. If she does, talk it out.
- **Focus on the positive.** Tell your child what a big girl she is. Let her know how proud you are of her.
- **Remind her that you** (along with her room, her stuffed animals and her toys) will be waiting for her at the end of the day.
- **Get ready the night before.** Get her into a routine of laying out her clothes, arranging her supplies and packing her lunch.
- **Don't rush.** On the morning of the big day, leave enough time for a relaxed breakfast. Racing around stresses everybody.
- **Reassure her that there's a bathroom at school.** She can use it anytime she needs to.
- **Don't linger when you drop her off.** Her teacher is trained to deal with first-day jitters. Give a quick hug and go.



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Be a Partner in Your Child's Education

All done preparing your child for kindergarten? Not quite. There's one simple—but critical—thing left to do: *Commit to staying involved in his education.* Don't forget: He'll have dozens of terrific instructors over the years, but you'll always be his most important teacher.



To become a partner in your child's education:

- Volunteer in class. Chaperone field trips. Make cupcakes for the bake sale. Participate however—and whenever—you can.
- Attend back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences.
- Read every handout and paper your child brings home.
- Make school a priority. Schedule appointments and vacations *outside* of school hours.
- Expect your child to succeed in school. Children try hard to meet their parents' expectations.
- Respect homework. Sit with your child as he works. Show him that you take it seriously.
- Speak up. If there's a problem at school, talk to your child's teacher immediately. Work together on finding a solution.
- Show and tell your child often that you love him.
- Celebrate! Your child is learning more every day!

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