

Ready or not

The path to school readiness

As parents we all want our children to have a smooth transition through each developmental phase. One of the more conspicuous phases is that from toddlerhood to formal education where we want them to thrive academically, socially and emotionally. But what does it mean to be “school-ready”? And how can we as parents, support and prepare our little ones for this exciting and often daunting journey?

Historically, readiness has been defined as two separate concepts: readiness to learn and readiness for school. Readiness to learn is regarded as being observable and measurable traits and indicates a young child’s ability to receive purposeful instruction, whereas readiness for school indicates that the child is likely to be successful in a “typical” school context as related to workload, pace and curriculum. This assumes that school readiness is both inherent to the child and that the child should be able to adapt to manage a school program and environment.

School readiness can be regarded as the product of the interaction between a child and the range of environmental experiences and human support provided, to maximise their development. This view of readiness echoes the underpinnings of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s theory of socio-cultural constructivism. The theory regards readiness to learn as the instance where and when children are successfully able to interact with their peers and their environments. An individual’s development is thus, to a significant extent, a product and not a prerequisite of education and consequently, the result of their social, emotional and cognitive and cultural experiences. These are the very factors that parents are able to facilitate in many ways.

While one might think that academic skills such as counting and letter recognition are most important, school readiness extends far beyond these fundamentals. One such crucial aspect of school readiness is the development of social and emotional skills. Encouraging your child to engage in cooperative play, sharing and taking turns can help build important social proficiencies. Likewise, helping them identify and manage emotions will contribute to their overall well-being and allow them to navigate the ups and downs of life with greater ease. Academic propensities are given vigor when children feel confident and have the belief that they can master difficult tasks. To acquire this, children need to have had exposure to opportunities where they attempt challenges on their own and learn how to navigate not getting it ‘right’ the first time. If children don’t do things for themselves (e.g. carrying their own bags, putting on their

shoes and having responsibilities at home), they develop the perception that they are not capable enough.

Second to social and emotional development is the importance of nurturing language and communication skills. Actively engaging with your child in conversation, without your mobile device competing for attention, consistently reading them bedtime stories and exposing them to opportunities to hear vocabulary in music and audiobooks, are some ways to meaningfully enrich their language development. Interaction with other children, in spaces other than their own homes, is important and will support language and social progress. When children are able to express themselves verbally, they generally have better emotional regulation. If you are concerned about language delays it is important to contact a speech therapist to determine any inconsistencies.

Engaging your child in activities which promote problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills is essential. Box constructions, building blocks, cooking and food preparation, chores such as making their beds, setting the table and sorting the laundry can meaningfully support

this without becoming an additional thing to buy or tick off a list for parents. The body is as essential as the mind and physical development plays a significant role in school readiness. As a parent you need to set the tone for prioritising and teaching movement. Outdoor play, sports, arts and crafts can all support both gross and fine motor development. This includes the encouragement of healthy habits such as regular sleeping patterns, balanced

meals and consistent limitations of screen-time and device usage. If you have any concerns regarding this, please contact a pediatrician, educational psychologist or occupational therapist for more specific information.

Above all, foster a love for learning in your child. Encourage their natural curiosity and provide them with opportunities to explore their interests. Show enthusiasm and excitement about their achievements, no matter how small. Play with your children – this is the cheapest way to promote all facets of their development. As with everything, consistency is key. By instilling a positive attitude towards curiosity and learning, regardless of the outcome of a particular task or skill, you lay the foundation for perseverance and determination. 🌀

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