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Psychotherapy for children, adults and couples

## **Preparing Preschoolers for Kindergarten**

How do preschoolers learn? The brains and nervous systems of preschoolers are not yet ready to learn by memorizing or studying for long periods of time, but the brain of a preschooler learns a great deal about the world and develops many skills through playful activities and friendly talks with adults. How can parents and preschool teachers help children prepare for Kindergarten?

1. Provide many opportunities to practice skills through play. Practice Play (puzzles, manipulative toys such as blocks and Legos, playground equipment, etc.) allows a child to improve such important basic skills as careful observation, coordination, and planning one's actions.
2. Encourage "make-believe" and creative activities. This kind of play helps children to think about many kinds of human relationships, to practice thinking up new ideas, to become skillful in cooperating with other children, and to think about their feelings – their hopes and fears, their likes and dislikes. Learning to connect ideas with feelings is actually important to later success at school. This is the way we decide what are the most important facts and ideas to understand and remember from the vast amount of information we receive in our education. Art activities provide both an enjoyable means of self-expression and preparation for later writing skills.
3. Provide exploratory activities: Children learn a great deal from just using their senses to find out about things around them. This includes the interesting things that are brought into the home and classrooms and activities in the community (walks in the neighborhood, the zoo, museums, trips to parks and other natural settings, etc.) These activities are good times for parents and teachers to talk with children and help them to understand what they are seeing. Also, make lots of time for reading books and telling stories to the children. This will encourage a love of reading.
4. Talk with your children: Young children are full of questions. They are also very eager to tell you about their thoughts and feelings. When we take time to really listen to children, to answer their questions, appreciate their observations and ideas, and add to their knowledge, we are giving them a very important gift.
5. Help your child to have better self-help skills. These skills include dressing, using the bathroom more independently, eating appropriately, caring for one's belongings, developing good hygiene, etc. Children will need these skills when they go to kindergarten.
6. Give children lots of practice with learning basic social skills such as sharing, taking turns, using toys together, expressing their feelings, asking for what they need, cooperating, helping each other, following rules, etc. Make sure that children know that it is important to be respectful of each other in their speech and actions. When children have learned to express their feelings and needs effectively and have learned good social skills, they have more energy and attention available to give to their studies in elementary school. One very important way that we can help children learn to be polite, kind and respectful is to always be that way ourselves in our way of relating to both children and other adults. Children learn so much from our examples!