

READY FOR LEARNING?

Over the years I've been asked many times by parents 'how do I help my child to be ready for school?'

I frame my response in the context of how we can support children to be ready for learning.

The Australian Primary Principals Association has developed 'Thrive with Five' as a guide to the areas that support children to do well in learning.

1. Play

Make time to play with your child, including inside and outside play. Play develops key motor skills such as running, balancing, throwing and catching. Play helps develop game skills as children follow instructions, take turns, share with others and build resilience. As well as having fun, children increase their fitness, muscle strength and flexibility, and enhance their creativity and imagination. Simple activities can be rolling and tumbling, visiting a playground, building a cubby indoors in wet weather, throwing a frisbee or enjoying nature play in our beautiful outdoor environments.

2. Talk

Talk with your children to build their speaking and language skills. Through conversations they increase word vocabulary, pronounce words better, understand instructions, and develop imagination and knowledge about the world around them. We know that by developing oral language skills we lay strong foundations which help children to learn to read. Talk during car rides about what you can see, sing along to children songs on the iPod, talk out loud as you prepare dinner or work in the garden.

3. Read

Reading with, and to your child, sets up attitude and behaviours for later learning. Modelling reading too, influences your child's reading habits. Reading is more than books; it's reading the packaging on a breakfast box, the signs and notices around us and the stories your children write. Through books, children boost their imagination, creativity and knowledge.

4. Eat well

When children eat well, they have energy for learning and play. They concentrate better and achieve more. Limiting your child's sugar intake, drinking water rather than soft drinks and

ensuring plenty of fresh food sets up the right habits for later in life. Eating well yourself is the best way to influence your child's attitude to eating.

5. Sleep

Children need sleep to give their body and mind a chance to rest and grow. Limiting screen time and putting in place routines and behaviours for a good night's sleep will see your child alert and ready for the day (see the recommendations below from the World Health Organisation). Model the behaviour you want by turning off your screens and ensuring you get enough sleep.

In addition to these five, another important skill that supports learning is self-regulation. This is the ability to manage emotions and behaviour appropriate to the situation. It includes being able to calm yourself down when upset, handle frustration without a tantrum and stick at a goal you want to achieve. The latter is important in learning a new skill or concept. Studies have shown that self-regulation skills are more important than IQ in achieving academic success.

Dr Kate Williams of the Queensland University of Technology says that better self-regulation skills in early childhood result in

- Better social skills across the life span
- Better relationships with others
- Better transition to school
- Better academic outcomes – even long term
- Less risk-taking in adolescence
- Lower risk of adult gambling.



So, what can parents do to increase this skill?

- Support your child to problem solve; act as a coach rather than a rescuer. Making mistakes is part of developing knowledge about the world and being confident to 'have a go' is an important element of learning.
- Praise the effort in play and activities and not the outcome. When a child learns a new skill (ie climbing to the top of the slippery dip) praise their problem solving and their persistence.
- Dr Leonard Sax speaks of the parent role in 'Educating desire; instilling a longing for something better, more lasting;' This can mean reading good books, solving a jigsaw puzzle or constructing increasingly complex models in Lego or out of spare parts.
- Play card games with young children such as Go Fish, Uno and Snap. Help them positively handle defeat; we can't win all the time and there is power in losing well. Ash Barty and Roger Federer modelled this so well at the recent Wimbledon tennis championships.
- Play board games such as Battleship, Checkers and more complex ones as they get older such as Chess, Mahjong or even Minecraft.
- Get them playing physical activities such as Musical statues, Duck, Duck, Goose, What time is it Mr Fox? Teach them yoga (check out Cosmic Yoga on YouTube) or enroll them in team games such as soccer. Provide a skipping rope and praise them for the persistence in developing mastery and increasingly long sequences of skips.
- Teach them songs and learn to sing Row, row, row your boat as a round.
- Encourage quiet time where children can persist without help for increasingly longer periods of time; mazes and wordfinds can be useful.
- In the car play I spy or hunt a particular colour car or number on a number plate. Create a family ritual such as saying 'high five' or 'mission accomplished' when the hunt is successful.

Being able to effectively self-manage ourselves and emotions is a great life skill. I grew up as one of five children to a very active mother. We learned very early on to never say 'I'm bored' as when we did, my mother would shriek with delight 'how wonderful as I have a job for you!' This job was usually some dull chore so finding an activity we were happy to self-manage in was a much better alternative.



Self-management is a term in the Australian Curriculum used by all public schools. It appears in the *Personal and Social Capability Continuum* and identifies key skills in self and social awareness and self and social management. For example, by the end of the Reception year a child should be able to identify a range of emotions and describe situations that may evoke these emotions and identify positive ways to initiate, join in and interrupt conversations with adults and peers. In schools we would expect a 6-year-old to be able to persist with a task for 10-15 minutes and to be able to screen out distractions as they do so.

The more a child practices self-regulation, the better they get at it, and when they see it modelled by those around them, the more likely they are to develop it themselves. It is important as life provides lots of opportunities to use the skill! Think of lining up at airports and school canteens, of saving for your first car or for a holiday, losing a game with grace and not overreacting when someone cuts us off in traffic. It is also an important skill in developing positive and healthy relationships. Knowing that someone can recognise their signs of becoming overstressed and can do something about it (keep it together) makes them more dependable and trustworthy and therefore easier to be around.

Self-regulation makes self-control possible and has lifelong benefits. It is a great gift for your child.

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