

It's Not Like Kindergarten When You Were In School!

Requirements for kindergarten have changed drastically over the past years. Long ago, say 30 years ago, kindergartners spent an hour napping, an hour at recess, an hour either snacking or eating lunch and an hour playing in housekeeping, blocks, puzzles, and an art corner. If they learned most of their letters and numbers to 10, a few shapes and their colors, they were doing fine!

Now, they need to know letters and sounds by mid-year, read on their own and understand higher order questions about stories they hear or read. They should be able to write at least one sentence on a topic. In math, they need to not only be able to name shapes including both 2-D and 3-D, but also describe how they know and how the shapes are alike or different. They need to know numbers to 20 and how to solve equations like "If Bob has 7 cars and 4 are red, how many are blue?"

Feeling overwhelmed, especially if you are a first time K parent? Don't worry, it's not as scary as it sounds and you can help at great deal with some simple steps at home.

For language arts skills:

- Read nursery rhymes and help them pick out and repeat the rhyming words. Works well with many Dr. Seuss books too.
- Read aloud to your child every day. If they don't already have a library card, go get one and enjoy the world of books free!
- As you read aloud, point to words and make note of the fact that you need to turn the page or move on to the next one so your child sees how the print goes top to bottom, left to right.
- Play letter and sound recognition games. You can buy commercial products or use the ones we provided. Try activities like matching upper and lower case letters, matching the letter to a picture that begins with that sound, or even sounding out and building the word by saying the word, sound by sound and having them pick out the letter for each sound.
- As you read, talk about the story. Mention who the author and illustrator are and talk about what each does. Ask them questions such as who the story is mostly about, how they think the character feels and why they feel that way. Ask them to retell the story using the pictures. Have them guess what the word you are pointing to might be given the rest of the sentence and using the picture as a clue. Before you turn the page to continue the story, ask them to guess what will happen next and even have them tell why they thought that would happen. Don't accept "Because" or "I just knew" as answers. Dig a little deeper and ask them if they used the picture, remembered something from another story, thought about a certain event.
- Talk to your child and really have conversations. Encourage them to speak in full sentences. Try to get their opinion. If you ask what their favorite color is and all you get is "Blue", rephrase as a complete sentence such as "Your favorite color is blue." Don't stop there. Ask why they like it best. If they struggle, give ideas such as "Does that color make you feel good, do you know something you like that color?"
- Writing can be a tough skill. Some children don't even realize that letters are needed to form the words they have to write while others are already beginning to understand not only that letters make up words, but also are getting to know some of the letters that go with a given sound. Try having a fun area where your child can work, or even a tub or box with fun things for writing. It can have wipe off boards and dry erase markers, crayons, markers, colored paper, a journal, stickers, magazines for pictures. At school, our first step is to get them to say a sentence out loud. Start with fun topics. How would they put together an ice cream sundae? What did they do at the beach the other day? What do they like about their favorite book? Once they can tell you a sentence, draw yellow lines, one for each word. Then, have your child try to figure out the first letter and write it on the line before moving on to the next word. As they become better at this, work on adding the ending sound, finishing with the middle vowel. If they aren't ready to write on their own, write it for them lightly and have them trace over your words. Work on drawing pictures to match their sentence. Have them make sure people have heads, bodies, facial features, arm, legs, hands and feet. Add details such as grass, trees, clouds, sun for outdoor pictures. Make sure the person is doing what they sentence tells about. If they are fishing, are they holding a pole that goes into the water?

For math skills:

- ❖ Have them count things. How many plates do they need to help set the table? How many blocks did they use to build the tower they made? How many jumping jacks can they do? Make sure they are counting one time for each object or movement. Sometimes children count faster than they jump or touch the object they are counting.
- ❖ Play games to match numerals to sets. They can make their own flash cards by writing numbers 0-20 on index cards, then drawing or using stickers to draw sets with that number of objects. Once they are done, they can play games to match like a memory game. Name a number and have them count out a set of things with that many. It can be pennies, blocks, whatever is handy.
- ❖ Play "I Spy" games for shapes.
- ❖ Set out cards with various shapes and have them guess which shape you are thinking of when you give clues like "My shape has 4 sides and all 4 sides are the same." As they get good at this, take turns where they describe the object and you guess the answer.
- ❖ Eat shapes. You can simply point out the shape of foods such as "Did you notice your slice of pizza looks like a triangle?" Or you could play a game. Assemble various small snacks of various shapes. Cereal might be circles or spheres, some crackers are squares, others are rectangles. Malted milk balls are spheres. Put a variety on the plate and describe or just name the shape of one. If they get it right, they get to eat the snack.
- ❖ Make up story problems as you drive in the car and have them solve them. Keep the numbers small, 5 or under for each, so they can use their fingers as needed. Try some easy, some harder, talking them through the steps as needed. For example, it can be as easy as "I gave you 3 cookies, you ate one. How many are left?" If they don't know what to do, ask them how many they had to start, then tell them to put up 3 fingers. Then ask them if they ate one, did they get more or lose it? Explain since it is gone, they have to take it away, then count what is left. If you are at home, they can use fingers, draw circles, or use counters to solve problems. You can try to see if they can solve at least 2 during a commercial as you watch television, have them try them as you cook, whenever you have a couple minutes.
- ❖ For measurement, have them see which toy car is longer/shorter. Can they build a tower of cubes longer than yours? How about one that is shorter?
- ❖ Sort things. Put together things that are all the same shape or color. They could make a collection or even cut out pictures from old magazines. Can they put their books on the shelf from tallest to shortest?

Computer games can really help your child with many skills:

- ✓ Starfall.com has some great reading skills that your child can play for free. For a small fee, they can access many more reading and math skills that really align with FL standards
- ✓ Destination Success is available on the St. Lucie school website. Once they have their student ID number (the long one that starts 561...), they can access this by using that number for their user and password. Click on the globe to explore content. For math, they can use Millie's Math House or the Destination math course 1. For language arts, Destination reading course 1 and Bailey's Book House both offer skills your child can use at no cost.
- ✓ Earobics has also been available on the school website. In the past, their ID number has been the user ID and their lunch number is the password.

We just want you to understand that even small things that are little more than talking to your child about the world around them can make a huge difference. Just pointing out things to them makes them more aware of similarities and differences in objects around them.

You are our best assistant in our goal of helping your child achieve their full potential. You are your child's first teacher and with your help, you will be amazed at what they learn during their kindergarten year.