



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Helping Your Preschooler Be Ready for School



Going to “big kids’ school”—pre-kindergarten or kindergarten—is an important step in most young children’s lives. As a grandparent raising your young grandchildren, you may wonder how to help your four- or five-year-old be ready for school. How can you help them learn the skills they need to succeed in school? The following information will help you prepare them for that important transition into elementary school.

What Is “School Readiness” Anyway?

Children need to be ready to learn when they start kindergarten. But how can you tell whether a child is ready? It’s important to remember that preschool-age children learn best through play and exploration. They don’t need long hours of drilling in spelling, writing, or math to be prepared for kindergarten. Don’t try to rush children through the early years by expecting 6-year-old behavior from children who are only four or five.

What do children need to be ready to learn? Here are a few of the basics:

- **A healthy start.** Children need to be well nourished, immunized, and protected. Make sure your grandchild starts off every day with a healthy breakfast and a good night’s rest. Immunizations prevent lots of diseases that might keep children out of school. Help your grandchildren feel safe by providing a home with consistent rules and love. When these basic needs are met, children will be more ready to concentrate on reading,

writing, and arithmetic when they get to school.

- **Empowered grandparents.** You are your grandchild’s first and most important teacher. Learning doesn’t happen only in the classroom; children are learning long before school even starts. Talk to your grandchildren regularly, beginning when they are infants. Read books together every day, and spend time singing, dancing, and playing together.

When your grandchildren do begin school, build a bridge between home and school. Find out what is happening in your grandchildren’s classrooms. Volunteer to read a story once a week or help with a cooking activity. Being involved with the class shows your grandchildren that you value their education, which encourages them to value it too.

- **Quality early care and education.** Children who attend child care or preschool need to be in high quality settings. High-quality early childhood programs encourage thinking skills, social skills, and physical skills, all of which are needed for school success. Children who stay at home also need opportunities to play, sing, hear stories, and interact with other children. (For more information on choosing a high-quality child care program, see “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Child Care Concerns.”)

- **Quality television viewing.** For many families, the television is second only to parents or grandparents as the child’s most influential

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teacher. Pay attention to what your grandchildren watch on television. Keep television watching to a minimum, and choose a few good-quality shows for children. If your grandchildren are watching TV, watch some shows with them and talk about what they are watching.

Basic School-Readiness Skills: A Checklist

Being ready to learn isn't just about understanding reading and math. Encourage your 4- or 5-year-old grandchildren to:

- sit quietly for short periods of time
- follow two- and three-step directions (“Go get your coat, put it on, and stand by the door.”)
- cooperate, take turns, and occasionally solve disagreements with other children
- eat their own lunch, use the bathroom alone, and dress themselves independently
- explore their environment safely
- feel confident of their abilities

All of these are skills that can be learned at home or in child care. Look for ways to practice these skills during day-to-day routines. But don't get discouraged if your grandchildren can't do all of these things. Learning takes time and practice! Here are some practical ways to help children get ready for school:

• **Practice self-help skills.** Help your grandchildren practice things like tying shoes, getting dressed, and cleaning up after meals and playtime. When children can handle these basic skills themselves, the teacher has more time to focus on teaching.

• **Give children simple directions.** Ask your child to do things like set the table or lay out

his clothes for the next day. Following these simple directions at home will help children get used to following directions at school.

• **Help children develop confidence.** One of the most important things you can give your grandchild is the confidence to try new things. Children who feel good about themselves are less afraid to ask questions in school or try a math problem that looks really hard.

Encourage your grandchildren to try new things. Congratulate them when they accomplish a new skill, and praise their effort even when they don't succeed. Don't compare your grandchildren to each other or to other children. Instead, focus on their individual efforts and abilities.

• **Talk positively about school.** Let your grandchildren know that being old enough to go to school is exciting. Take them to visit their new school before the first day. Let them help pick out school supplies. Talking positively can help children be enthusiastic about school and learning.



• **Include simple math concepts.** Young children need to know how to compare, sort, classify, measure, and put things in order. Cooking together can help children practice measurement. Play games that require children to count out spaces or

match colors or shapes. Again, don't push children too hard; make math a fun part of playtime for them.

Learning to Read and Write

Learning to read is an important milestone for children in the first few years of elementary school. Children have a natural desire to communicate with others. Language allows

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children to learn about their world and share their thoughts with others. Long before children can actually read, they are learning skills they will need for reading and writing. Early language skills may not be easily recognizable, but they are important first steps in literacy.

How does reading help children? Good readers become good writers. Children who are read to and read themselves are exposed to story ideas and creative ways to use language. Reading develops concentration skills as children learn to pay attention to words. Children's vocabulary expands as they learn the meaning of words. Most importantly, children learn that reading is fun!

What kinds of skills do children need to know before they read and write? They need to understand that spoken words can be written down. They need to know that English writing goes from left to right and that letters stand for different sounds. They also need to learn basic book-handling skills: which way to hold a book and how to turn the pages one at a time. And they need to understand how stories are organized, how to predict what happens next in a story, and how to tell or retell a story.

Most of these skills can be learned at home. When you read to your grandchildren, you are helping them learn these skills they will need to become readers. Talk with your grandchildren, beginning in infancy. Do things together and talk about them later. Make up stories with your grandchildren. Make books, draw pictures, or make puppets. Set up a special place equipped with writing materials (pencils, paper, etc.) and plenty of books. Take your grandchildren to the library. Let your grandchildren see you read and write out grocery lists, recipes, and "to-do" lists. Let them practice writing thank-you notes, lists, and stories. And most importantly, read with your grand-

children every day. This is the most important thing you can do to help your child learn to love reading. Reread books when children want you to, and talk about the stories after you read.

Getting Off to a Good Start: The First Day of School

The first day of school is exciting for you and your grandchildren. But the first day can also be scary, especially if your grandchildren have not attended preschool or child care. You can help calm their fears with a little preparation.

Before school starts, talk to your grandchild about what school will be like. There will be a new classroom, new children, and a new teacher. It may help to talk about what your first day of school was like. Check out library books or watch movies about the first day of school. Knowing what to expect will help children feel more comfortable.



Knowing other children in the class may make school feel more comfortable. Find out who else is in your grandchildren's classes and introduce them. Talk about children your grandchildren know who will be in their classes. If possible, visit the school and meet the teachers before school starts so your grandchildren can become familiar with the new setting. Show your grandchildren where they will sit and eat lunch every day. These little steps can help children feel less nervous about starting school.

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A few days before school begins, start practicing the morning routine of going to school. Take your grandchildren through the steps of going to bed earlier, waking up earlier, eating breakfast, washing and dressing, and walking to school or to the bus stop. Practice for several days if possible, because this will help create a familiar routine.

In Summary

Above all, relax and enjoy your grandchild's new school experience.

Helping preschoolers be ready for school doesn't have to be difficult. Expose them to new things, read aloud every day, and make sure they have plenty of time to play and explore. Above all, relax and enjoy your grandchild's new school experience. If you seem happy and excited about school, your grandchild will probably pick up your enthusiasm.

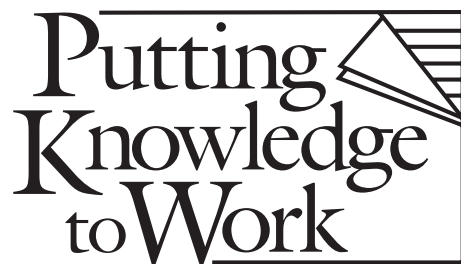
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