

## Early School Preparedness

The US Department of Education reports that only 40% of children ages 3-4 were enrolled in preschool in 2020. This means many children showing up for seven hours of kindergarten are not used to being away from their parents for even a few hours. Teaching social skills is a good way to prepare children for a successful school experience. Some of the most helpful social skills for school are:

- **Getting along with others.** Getting along is easier if we are respectful of others. Part of getting along with others is the ability to take turns and be considerate of other people's feelings.
- **Taking Turns.** Setting up age-appropriate rules about taking turns and modeling this behavior is an effective way to teach children how to strike this balance. Simple rules for young children like "We take turns with our toys" is a good place to start. In this way, we are teaching children to solve their own conflicts as they work out a fair way to take turns, but this will require some guidance and definitely some modeling.
- **Following Directions.** Children who are taught to follow directions will make a smoother transition to life at school and cause fewer disruptions in class so everyone can get to learning! Not to mention it makes life easier at home.
- **Saying "Goodbye" to Parents.** It is recommended that parents develop a quick ritual when saying goodbye. A drawn-out and emotional goodbye will only increase the child's anxiety. Parents should let their children know when they will return. It is good to get children accustomed to goodbye by taking short trips—the more a child sees a parent leave but then return, the more confidence they have that "goodbye" is not forever.
- **Following Routines.** Just like adults, children have a fear of the unknown. A consistent routine means the child knows what to expect and when. Balance is the key—there can be some flexibility but following basic routines for things like breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime is a good way to get children used to following routines.
- **Sticking with Difficult Tasks.** Children can be easily frustrated when things don't come easily. Learning perseverance at home prepares children for school and life. Providing children with lots of encouragement helps them to stick with a difficult task and model positive self-talk.
- **Considering Other People's Feelings.** Being considerate of other people's feelings does not come naturally to children. Parents must model the behavior and encourage children to do the same. Showing children what they have in common with others can help foster empathy.
- **Having Positive Ways to Express Feelings.** It is important for parents to help children find positive ways to express negative feelings rather than hitting, biting, screaming, or other negative and disruptive behaviors. There are many self-calming methods parents can teach their children to help them calm down enough to communicate their feelings.

Next month we'll discuss the emotional intelligence children need to perform well in school.

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the **ACFC website**, click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.

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