

Prepare Your Child for School

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One of the vivid milestones in life — for both parents and children — is the first day of school. For some, the day is one of keen anticipation; for others, a day characterized by doubt and vague fears.

Not long ago a father brought his four-year-old son to the University nursery school on the opening day, and as he entered the door, he placed his hand expectantly on the boy's back and said, "All right now, David, tell your teacher what the square root of 25 is." David's answer, "4," while it may well have mortified the father, no doubt meant every bit as much — or as little — to the boy as if his answer had been mathematically correct.

Parents who encourage their children to repeat unusual words or to give rote answers to questions that have little or no meaning to the child, are actually engaging in *parlor tricks*.

Help With Reading?

Perhaps the topic most frequently reflected in parents' questions, is reading. Should parents teach their preschool child to read? The answer is almost always no. While it is true that an occasional gifted child will learn to read by himself prior to school, there would seem little advantage to the deliberate effort to teach even the bright child to read before he enters the first grade. At this time his greater maturity will enable him to learn faster and more thoroughly so that any initial advantage he might have enjoyed as a preschool reader, would be rapidly neutralized. Moreover, some of the cautions against early "instruction" are:

1. Before the age of six, a child's eyes are seldom physically ready for the close focusing reading instruction requires.

2. If a child is forced to try to learn to read before he is developmentally ready, he may develop negative attitudes which will carry over into the period when reading skills might otherwise be easily learned.

3. Disturbing tension patterns may develop due to the child's failure to live up to parental expectations.

4. Failure due to physical and physiological immaturity may instill a sense of



A variety of blocks encourages constructive and imaginative play among preschool children. (Note adequate storage facilities for blocks and toys.)

failure, if not stupidity, in the child — sometimes with accompanying disturbing compensatory behavior.

Watch For These Signs

Some of the signs that parents can watch for, and, indeed, encourage as a logical prelude to instruction as such, are:

1. *Interest in Stories and Books:* A child's skill with words progresses gradually from single words to complex sentences. Speaking clearly and concisely to the child along with telling stories and reading to him, all aid in building the foundation for his own word skill. Appreciation for books and stories is learned. Interest will follow if care is taken by the parent not to present stories beyond the child's comprehension.

2. *Visual Discrimination:* There are many ways parents can help children build this skill so vital to later success in school. Many things can be learned in the form of impromptu games. For example, the child can play the game of telling how certain objects are the same (shape, size, color) and/or different. He can then proceed to pictures, road signs, and designs.

If careful visual discrimination is so encouraged, it is likely that there will be less confusion later on over *e's* and *c's*, *a's* and *o's*, reversed *b's* and *d's*, and between and among similar appearing words. Also, an eye examination is very much in order before the child enters school.

3. *Auditory Discrimination:* Careful, accurate hearing is essential for success in school. One way children learn to "unlock" new words is by learning sounds. This specific skill is best learned

in school; however, the parent would do well to make certain the child's hearing is normal.

It is estimated that as many as five percent of all elementary-school-age children have some hearing defect, and, of these, two percent may be serious. A child may play the "game" of closing his eyes and telling what he hears. Also, it helps for parents to vary tone and pitch when indicating different characters in a story. Nursery rhymes may help the child recognize rhyme and consonant sounds.

Adults also can contribute to the child's readiness by showing him how meaning evolves from pictures from left to right, rather than the reverse. Parents can *listen* to the child, which not only sets a good example, but helps to find out the concerns of the child. Disturbed children who have no friends or who are otherwise troubled, seldom are efficient learners.

Answer Questions!

It is also extremely important to answer the child's questions. The child whose questions are answered concerning such puzzlers as "Why doesn't the sun shine at night; Do dinosaurs like candy; Where does the sky begin; What does Daddy do," and endlessly on, will learn to find great satisfaction in the "curiosity-find-the-answer" cycle.

These are but a few of the many ways parents can help the child prepare for school to much better advantage than spending time "teaching" the child to "read" or to recite square roots.