
READY for SCHOOL Parent News:
Creating an Environment for Learning in Your Home

We all know that it is easier to sit down and pay bills, write a letter, or send an email when our work space is attractive and easily accessible. The same is true for children. The environment matters. In helping your child get ready for formal schooling, creating an environment for learning in your home helps.

Subtle environmental additions communicate that you think learning and learning materials are important. This could be as simple as setting aside a space in your child's room or a corner of the kitchen table for "school activities."

READY to WRITE: Provide a small basket or cardboard "school box" with crayons, pencils, post-its, and small pads of paper. An attractive container of colored pencils and washable markers is also likely to attract your child's attention. You could add ABC stencils, a ruler, an eraser, and lined paper for older children, if you'd like. (If you have younger children in your home, keep these out of reach when your preschool or kindergarten child is not using them). This can be the place your child can go to do his/her "school work." Keep it fun and avoid pressuring your child to use these materials. Save them for a relaxed activity where your child can practice as he/she chooses while you are busy cooking dinner or cleaning up.

READY TO READ: Another helpful addition to the environment is having reading materials readily available. We know that reading aloud to children is a key factor in their later embracing reading in their own lives. In addition, children who see their parents reading and enjoying it are more apt to want to read themselves. As you read the newspaper, for example, your child can select from a basket of books or children's magazines to look through. It is important to have books at children's levels that they can access on their own. Even toddlers will enjoy a basket of sturdy board books or plastic books at their level. When children look through the pictures in a favorite book that has been read aloud to them again and again, they often retell the story to themselves, either silently or out loud. Being able to recall and re-tell a story is an important pre-reading skill.

READY FOR MATH: The kitchen is a logical place to add materials for your child to learn math skills such as measuring. Have some plastic measuring cups and spoons for your child's use that are kept in a low, open cabinet or drawer accessible for his/her use. At appropriate times, when you are not too rushed, your child could help count and measure as you together, for example, pour cups of lukewarm water into a pot for cooking pasta. When you have less time to interact, stacking nested measuring cups (ones that fit inside each other), spoons, or small bowls is a good ordering activity for your child to work on independently.

You probably already have many learning opportunities available in your home. Consider presenting them in new and different ways to attract renewed interest from your child. Have fun setting up these learning spaces.