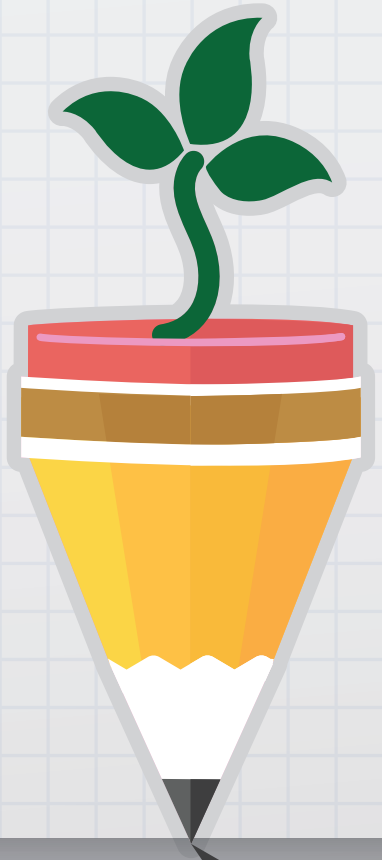
SCHOOL READINESS PARENT GUIDE

Children get ready for school at home by **listening**, **talking**, **playing** and **loving**. Simple things you can do with children can make a big difference.



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Dear parents and caregivers,

This guide was created for you! It provides easy-to-use tools to help your children successfully prepare to enter school. There is even a checklist for each activity. You can work on the same skills pre-K and Kindergarten teachers use to measure if children are ready for school.

We would love to hear from you on how you are using this guide and ways we might be able to continue to improve it to meet your needs.

Here is to every child's success in school!

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Download a copy of this guide here:
http://e3alliance.org/school-readiness-guide/

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1 BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

IMPORTANCE: Talking, singing and telling stories helps children learn about the world around them. Listening to children helps them express their thoughts and ideas. When children understand language and are able to express themselves, they learn more in school.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **STORY TELLING:**
   Tell children stories about when you were a child.
   Stories can be simple –
   - Your favorite holiday
   - Your favorite food
   - A time when you were happy or sad

2. **DESCRIBE WHAT YOU ARE DOING AS YOU ARE DOING IT:**
   Saying what you are doing, while you are doing it builds your child's vocabulary. Talking about cleaning the house, or making dinner, or driving down the road, but your words build your child's vocabulary. The more words they know, the more tools they have for language and learning! Think about how many words you could use when folding laundry:

☐ Soft	☐ White	☐ Orange
☐ Sparkly	☐ Sock	☐ Blue
☐ Metal	☐ Towel	☐ Warm
☐ Dark	☐ Purple	☐ Damp

When children touch, see or feel something they make a memory for that word. When the child has a memory of a word, they will be able to understand and use the word.

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ASK QUESTIONS:

1. Ask your child to retell a story to you.
2. Ask your child about their favorites things and listen.
3. Ask your child to point out signs with their favorite letters, numbers or colors.
4. Ask your child what they want to do and why.
5. Ask your child what three things made them happy today.
6. Ask your child what three things that made them sad today.

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help them get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child is able to express needs, for example "I want juice."
	Child is able to tell other people what to do, for example "Go away."
	Child uses language to make contact with others, for example "Let's Play."
	Child uses language to express their opinions or feelings, for example "I like ice cream."
	Child uses language to find out more about something, for example "How do airplanes fly?"
	Child uses language to create, for example "I will be a monster and you can be a dragon."
	Child uses language to convey facts, for example "The rain helps the plants grow."
	Child is able to retell or re-enact a story after they hear it.
	Child is able to speak in complete sentences, for example saying "I need help." instead of just "help."
	Child uses a variety of words.

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LEARNING SOUNDS

IMPORTANCE: Talking, singing and telling stories helps children learn about the world around them. Listening to children helps them express their thoughts and ideas. When children understand language and are able to express themselves, they learn more in school.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **SING SONGS:**

Simple Children's Songs teach children rhythm and rhyme, and children can learn the same thing from hearing you sing your favorite song.

Here are some simple songs you can try:

- *Row, Row, Row your boat, gently down the steam. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily life is but a dream.*
- *The itsy-bitsy spider went up the water spout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out! Out came the sun and dried up all the rain, and the itsy-bitsy spider went up the spout again.*
- *You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are gray. You'll never know dear, how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away.*

There are also great songs about colors that are available on youtube.com.

For more resources on music with children visit www.pbs.org.

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2. **RHYME TIME:**

Reading simple rhyming stories like "Green Eggs and Ham" or a book of Nursery Rhymes helps children hear the sounds in the words. When you read with your child, you can stop and ask them to finish the rhyme. You can do this with books, nursery rhymes or songs. You can even make up your own rhymes. Here is an example of a children's rhyme that you may be familiar with:

Adult: *Jack and Jill*
Went up the _____
Child: *hill!*

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help them get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child is able to complete rhymes most of the time
	Child is able to sing familiar songs
	Child is able to clap along with songs
	Child is able to do finger movements to familiar songs

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3 TRIP TO THE STORE

IMPORTANCE: Children learn from every day experiences. Anytime is learning time for young children. At the store, children can learn to follow rules, make plans and learn new words. These activities can be done when you are out and about with your children. Going to the park, riding the bus and going to the library are great for learning new rules and new words.

ACTIVITIES:

Important tips: Shopping can wear you out! Before you go, make sure that both you and your child eat a healthy snack. When children are hungry, they are more likely to be irritable or grab for items in the store (and you are too!). Healthy low-sugar snacks can help both children and adults focus and be on their best behavior.

SNACK SUGGESTIONS:

- ✔ Raisins
- ✔ crackers
- ✔ carrots
- ✔ cheese
- ✔ fresh fruit
- ✔ nuts
- ✔ yogurt

1. **TALK ABOUT THE ITEMS YOU SEE AT THE STORE:**
   This a wonderful way to learn new words. The produce department is a great place to talk about how different things look, feel and smell.

   First, start by describing what you see, then ask children questions about what they see. Here are some phrases you may want to try:
   - "The avocados are really soft today, want to feel? They are bumpy, but this spot – it is too soft."
   - "Oh, look those apples are so red, but those other apples are green."
   - "What color is it?"
   - "Tell me about the apple? What do you see, smell, feel?"
   - "How many words can you use to describe the banana? Let's count."
   - "I love the way oranges smell, so fresh."

2. **MAKE A GROCERY LIST:**
   Make a grocery list for you and help your child make one, too. Having a list helps children become engaged and stay interested.

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A. Help your child make his own list with just 3-4 items on it. This helps him practice his writing or holding a pencil even if just scribbling or drawing a picture of items on their list. If your child wants to write down words, help him by writing out a word for him to copy onto his list. Your child can practice letter by letter. Also, help your child write his name at the top of the list.

John
- ➜ Milk
- ➜ Bread
- ➜ Apples

B. Have your child count the number of items left on the list and cross items off when they go in the cart.

C. Have your child find items that start with letters. "Find the 'M' for 'Milk'". "Ok cross that off; we have it!" Checking items off the list helps him know how much more shopping is left to do.

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help him get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child can make marks that look like letters
	Child can write her first name
	Child can identify at least 20 upper and 20 lower case letters
	Child can tell you what comes next in a series, a plan or a story
	Child can use words to describe things in the store
	Child is able to stay on task for several minutes (making the list or looking for items in the store)
	Child is able to describe objects with a variety of words, for example "It is yellow, prickly and smells sweet."

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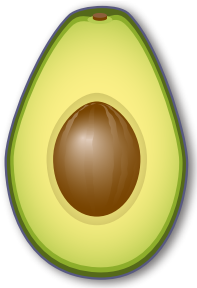
WHY RULES?

IMPORTANCE: Rules help keep children safe. Rules also give children guidance on what people expect of them. To follow rules, children need to understand and remember them. When children help create the rules, it helps them think about what they need to do. It helps children remember what the rules are, and why the rules are needed. It also gives children a chance to ask questions. REMEMBER, following rules is a habit that takes practice.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE RULES FOR ACTIVITIES:**

   A. What rules do you need for the store to be safe? Do your children need to stay next to you or hold your hand? Have your children help make the rules before you go to the store, park or library. Telling children the reasons for the rules helps them understand why they need to follow them.



   B. Here are some phrases you may want to say to your child:
   - *"We need to be safe in the grocery store. There are a lot of people, and I don't want to lose sight of you because you could get lost. What other things do we need to remember to be safe?"*
   - *"We need to buy food that helps us grow. Candy does not help our bodies grow. What foods are good for us?"*
   - Staying positive is important. Children learn best when they are calm. If children break rules, get close to them at eye level, speak calmly and briefly to them. *"Our rule is that you hold my hand, so you can be safe. Please hold my hand."*
   - What are some other phrases you could say?:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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2. **MAKE A PLAN:**

Talk to your child about what the plan is for an activity: what you want to do first, next and last. Children are less anxious when they know what is going to happen. This also helps children understand order of things. It can help develop strategic thinking, as well as patience.

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help her get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child helps develop rules
	Child can follow the rules most of the time with just a few reminders
	Child can tell you what comes next in a series, a plan or a story
	Child is able to stay on task for several minutes (making the rules or listening to the plan)

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READ! READ! READ!

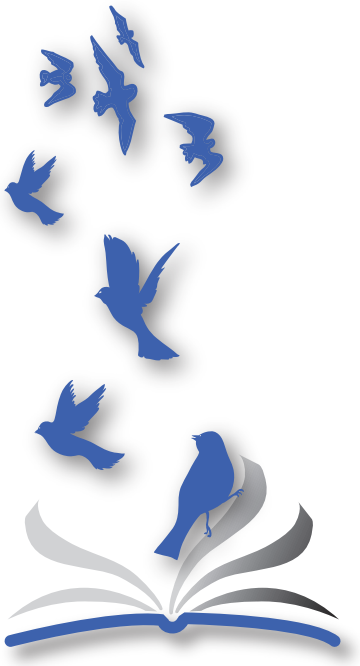
IMPORTANCE: Reading to children helps them be ready to become readers. Reading to children lets them know that letters represent words and words stand for ideas. Children also learn how to hold a book, how to turn pages and that pictures help tell the story. All of these skills put together help children get ready to read! Peaceful time spent close to children, helps them relax, feel good, and calmly process what they are learning. When you spend time with your children reading, it lets them know reading is a good and important thing to do. Reading at home, in the car or in the doctor's office is a valuable way to spend time with children.

ACTIVITIES:

READ, READ, AND RE-READ:

Children love reading books over and over again. Reading the same stories over and over helps children understand more and more about the words in the story. Children will look at the pictures and the words on the page and start making connections. They start to understand that "Once" starts with the letter "O". Stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The more stories children hear, the more they recognize this pattern. Ask your child questions about the words in the book and the story. Talk about a story before, during and after you read with them. This helps children think more about what they are hearing and seeing.

- "Can you find a word that starts with the letter 'C'?"
- "How do you think he feels?"
- "Did you like that story? Why?"
- "What do you think happens in the story?"
- "What do you think will happen next?"
- "What could have happened instead?"
- "Who was your favorite character in the story?"



NEED HELP FINDING A BOOK:

Help in choosing books for children at PBS.org

Free books are available at local libraries

Comprehensive site of free eBooks

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✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help him get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child holds a book right side up
	Child turns pages in a book, with a purpose to look at pictures or to be read to
	Child is able to re-tell a story after it is read out loud
	Child can identify characters in a book
	Child can describe the beginning, middle and end of a story
	Child understands and can identify feelings of a character in a story
	Child can pay attention to a short children's book being read out loud

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6 UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

IMPORTANCE: Children have big emotions. They are impulsive. Often children act out their feelings, and can hurt others. Talking with children about big feelings can help them think before they act. When a child can tell an adult what is bothering them, they feel less frustrated, and can get help. A child that says "I am angry!" instead of pushing someone away, gets in less trouble. Adults can show children how to calm down and be respectful and kind to others. Adults can also help children identify and understand their feelings.

ACTIVITIES:

TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS:

A. It is very important to talk through what the child is feeling with her, and to discuss and model for her what is the appropriate way to manage your feelings with others. Talk about how you are feeling every day, and ask your child how she is feeling. It is o.k. to experience negative and positive emotions and share them with your child. This can be done any time. Here are some phrases that you may want to practice with your child:

- "I am frustrated that we are running late."
- "I am so happy that you remembered to wash your hands."
- "It has been a long day; I am tired."
- "I am really looking forward to spending time with you."

B. How is your child feeling? Are they happy, sad, frustrated, angry, bored, tired, or hungry? Talk with your child about their feelings. Look and their face and tell them what you see. This helps children identify the words that match their feelings. When children can identify their feelings it helps them use words instead of actions to express themselves. It also helps them recognize how other people are feeling.

- "You have a frowny face on and your eyebrows are all crinkly. You look frustrated. "
- "You have a big smile on your face and look very proud that you made that basket."
- "I can tell you are embarrassed because you have your head down and you are looking worried."
- "You just knocked over the blocks and threw them across the room. You look very angry."

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✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help her get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child can identify and label her own feelings.
	Child can identify and label other people's feelings.
	Child will comfort someone who is hurt or sad.
	Child rarely hurts, threatens or yells at children or adults.

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7 PLAYING WELL WITH OTHERS

IMPORTANCE: A big part of school is being in the classroom with other children and getting along. There are some things that families can do to help prepare children for playing and learning with friends. Children also learn a lot from each other. Opportunities for playing with other children can be great experiences for them.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **PLAYING WITH OTHER CHILDREN:**
   Children can play with other children at parks, pools and places of fellowship. These interactions can help your child build important skills for school. If children are not getting along, encourage them to work things out together by asking them simple questions:
   - "It sounds like you both want to be the leader, how are you going to work that out?"
   - "What do you each think would be fair?"
   - "How can you play together without hurting each other?"

2. **WHAT TO DO WITH BIG FEELINGS:**
   Make plans with your child about what you can do with BIG feelings: excited, happy, angry, sad. When children have a big emotion they can become very physical. It can help them to have a plan a head of time to express their emotions.

   Strategies for big emotions:
   - Take a deep breath and blow it out slowly, like you are blowing out a birthday candle. Repeat until you feel calmer.
   - Rub your hands together back and forth.
   - Squeeze a pillow or soft object.
   - Jump up and down in place.
   - If it is safe to, run around for 10 seconds.
   - Count to three slowly, then talk about what you are feeling.
   - Talk with your child about what helps her feel calmer, and help her use this strategy regularly.

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✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help him get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child will share space with other children.
	Child will share toys or food with other children.
	Child participates in problem-solving to resolve conflicts.
	Child will follow the lead of another child.
	Child will take on a leadership role in a group.
	Child rarely hurts, threatens or yells at children or adults.

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ROUTINES HELP

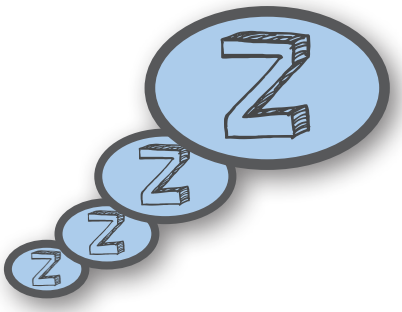
IMPORTANCE: A regular routine can help children move from one activity to another more easily. In school children will have a very regular schedule. At home, having a regular routine can help children feel safe. Children are more comfortable when they know what will happen next. Children who are able to follow a schedule and routine, will be better prepared for school.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **ROUTINES DO NOT HAVE TO BE EXACT** or a down to the minute schedule; just a predictable sequence of events. For instance, a simple morning routine could be:
   - First we wake up
   - We make our bed
   - Next we use the potty and wash hands
   - We get dressed
   - Then, we eat breakfast

   Letting your child know the routine and then sticking to it helps her understand and plan for the day and lets her know what you expect. Does she need to make her bed? Or wash her hands? Clean up toys? If she knows it is part of a regular routine, she gets used to her responsibilities. Of course, not every day is the same, and the unexpected will happen. Letting your children know that there may be a change of plans is always a good idea.

2. **NAP-TIME AND BED-TIME ROUTINES:**
   Make sure that your child gets the sleep he needs. Typically children between 3 and 6 years old need at least 10-12 hours of sleep every day. For children who have to be at school at 7:30 a.m., that means a bed time of 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. As any parent knows, bed-time can be a difficult transition time for children. A routine helps them make that transition more easily. A typical bedtime routine could be:
   - Dinner
   - Short activity (building blocks, playing games, singing songs)
   - Preparing for the next day (clean up, putting away dishes, laying out clothes, etc)
   - Bath
   - Reading books in bed
   - Lights out



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3. MORE HELPFUL ROUTINES IDEAS:

- Ask your child to help you create a daily routine
- Post the daily routine on the fridge at your child's eye level
- Have a symbol (sun for morning, moon for night, flowers, animals) for each routine
- Take a photo of your child doing each activity and put it next to the routine on the chart
- Empower your child by asking him "What is next on your chart?"
- Praise the effort, not the child. Instead of saying "good girl" or "good boy" focus on his work, e.g. " You brushed your teeth tonight, right after your bath. You must be proud you remembered that."

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help her get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child can move easily through different activities.
	Child is able to tell what activity comes next in a sequence of events.
	Child is able to complete activities in her regular routine (cleaning up a room or brushing teeth), with just a few reminders.
	Child is able to complete all the steps to use the toilet and wash hands without assistance.
	Child is able to complete two-step directions regularly, for example "Put on your shoes and brush your hair."
	Child is able to complete three-step directions often, for example "Pick up the trash on the floor, put away the toys and go to the bathroom."

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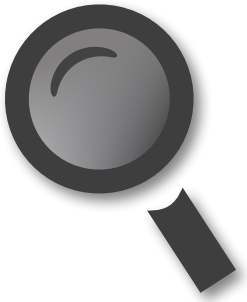
CHILD'S PLAY

IMPORTANCE: When children play games, they learn a lot! Children learn to follow rules. They pay attention. They use self control. Playing games can help a child improve memory and increase and problem solving ability. Being physically active also helps children build balance and coordination. Plus, it is fun!

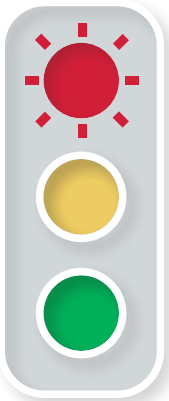
ACTIVITIES:



There are many **SIMPLE GAMES** that you can play with children:

1. **I SPY**
   - Play with at least two players.
   - Players try to guess what another player sees based on clues, questions and answers.
   - Player 1 looks for something they can see. This can be a car, a bike, a building, a book, a toy, a shirt – anything. Player 1 begins the game with saying, "I spy with my little eye something ____ _____." They add a clue about the object such as the color of the object, the shape of the object or what you can do with the object.
   - The other players ask questions about the object (taking turns if there is more than two people playing). "Is it big?" "Is it green?" Player 1 can only answer "yes" or "no".
   - Once a player thinks she knows the answer, she can guess if it is the object. "Is it that book?" If she guesses correctly, she gets to find something and give the next clue, "I spy with my little eye something _____." If she is incorrect, play continues until a player guesses correctly.

2. **RED LIGHT/ GREEN LIGHT :**
   - Play with at least two players.
   - One person is the "stop light" and the other players try to touch him.
   - At the start, children form a line about 10 feet away from the "stop light".
   - The "stop light" faces away from the line of children and says, "green light". At this point the kids are allowed to move towards the "stop light".
   - The "stop light" says, "red light!" and then turns around. If any of the children are caught moving during a red light, they are out.
   - The "stop light" turns back around and says, "green light".
   - The first child to touch the "stop light" wins.
   - The stop light wins if all the children are out before anyone is able to touch him.



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3. **SIMON SAYS:**

- Play with at least two players.
- One person is the leader, "Simon".
- "Simon" orders the other players to do things (usually very silly things).
- Players only obey the command when Simon uses the phrase "Simon says _____." For instance if the leader says "Simon says, touch your head," all the other players must touch their heads.
- If the leader says, "Touch your feet" but does not say, "Simon says, touch your feet," any player who touches his feet would be out.
- The leader keeps giving commands until there is one person left.
- That person wins the game and becomes the new leader.

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help them get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child takes turn in a game
	Child can wait her turn
	Child can follow directions
	Child understands the rules of the game
	Child can tell you the rules of the game
	Child is kind to other players in a game
	Child does not get overly upset if she loses the game
	Child can resolve conflicts that come up during play
	Child can stand on one foot and hop
	Child uses a variety of words

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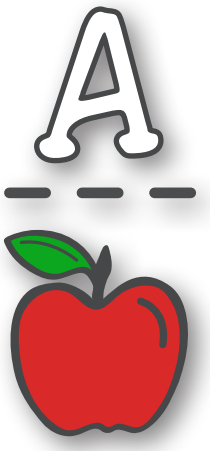
A,B,C'S

IMPORTANCE: Letters are the building blocks to words. Knowing your A, B, C's is much more than singing a song. Children who can recognize their letters and identify the sounds that letters make are getting ready to become readers!

ACTIVITIES:

- Sing the Alphabet song over and over and over with your children.
- Show children upper and lower case letters (in books, magazines, newspapers, on signs or billboard, on products in the grocery store).
- Encourage your child to draw a picture and tell you a story about it. Write the story down next to the picture.
- Write your child's name for her and encourage her to practice writing her own name.
- Teach letters through names- your child's and those of siblings, parents, and other people who are important to your child.
- Encourage your child to use any letter sounds she knows to try to write ("Bdy" for "Birthday")
- Compare letters that look similar (M and N) and sound familiar (V and F.)
- Play a game where you take turns thinking of words that start with an "A" sound like "Ant" or "Apple, a "B" sound like "Bread" or "Banana", and so on.
- Read books with your child and point to the words you are reading. Ask children to identify letters they see in books.
- Label everyday objects around the house. Take a piece of paper and make labels for things like "table", "chair", "couch", "TV", "sink".



For more ideas on learning letters visit PBS.org.

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Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh

Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp

Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Xx Yy Zz

✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help them get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child is able to identify at least 20 Upper Case letters
	Child is able to identify at least 20 lower case letters
	Child is able to identify all the letters in his or her name
	Child is able to write his or her own name

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SORTING

IMPORTANCE: Children that can classify items are able to understand how things are a like, or different. It helps them make connections. This helps them better understand our world. When children can describe what they see and what they know, they do better in school. It also helps them become problem solvers.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **SORT LAUNDRY:**
   Ask your child to help sort laundry.
   - "Can you find all the socks?"
   - "Can you find all the shirts?"
   - "What makes them alike?"
   - "What makes them different?"
   - "How many do we have?"

2. **GATHER ITEMS FROM AROUND THE HOUSE (buttons, cans, boxes, forks, spoons, rocks, acorns, etc.):**
   Ask your child to describe and sort the objects.
   - "Can you put all the red objects together?"
   - "Can you put the objects that are alike together?"
   - "How are these objects alike?"
   - "How are these objects different?"
   - "What shape are the objects?"
   - "Can you sort the objects from biggest to smallest?"
   - "How many objects are there in each group?"

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✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help them get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child can sort a collection of objects into groups
	Child can describe how things are alike
	Child can describe how things are different
	Child can compare items by size, shape and color

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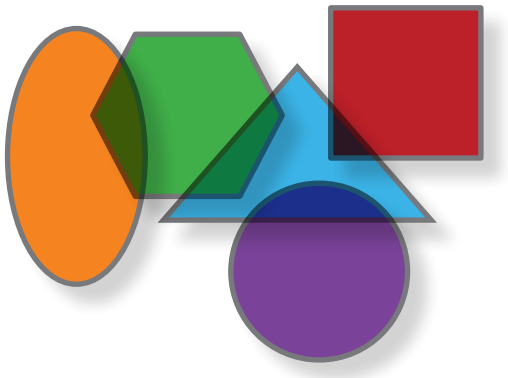
12 NUMBERS, SHAPES & COLORS

IMPORTANCE: How many are there? What color is it? What can we make? Before children can add or subtract, they count,identify, and build things. These skills the basics of math. Numbers, shapes and colors help children understand and talk about their world in meaningful ways that build learning and help them be ready for school.

ACTIVITIES:

1. **FIND THE NUMBER:**
   Ask your child to find numbers all around him and count everything!
   - "Do you see the number 3 on our door? Show me."
   - "Lets count the people on the slide."
   - "Press the 2 in the elevator."
   - "How many do we have?"

2. **LOOK FOR DIFFERENT SHAPES WHEREVER YOU ARE:**
   - "Can you find a circle in the house?"
   - "Can you find a square on the bus?"
   - "Can you find a triangle outside?"



3. **LOOK FOR DIFFERENT COLORS WHEREVER YOU ARE:**
   - "Name three things that are blue."
   - "Can you find something yellow?"
   - "Show me the red flower."

4. **PLAY WITH BLOCKS:**
   Ask your child to describe what they are building.
   - "What shapes did you use to build it?"
   - "Why does this shape fit best here?"
   - "Can you stack it this way?"
   - "Can you put all the blocks that are alike together?"
   - "How are these alike?"

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✔	CHECK LIST
	As you try these activities, reflect on the skills your child is building that help them get ready for school. These skills can help children start school strong!
	Child can identify a square
	Child can identify a circle
	Child can identify a triangle
	Child can identify a rectangle
	Child can identify the color red
	Child can identify the color blue
	Child can identify the color yellow
	Child can identify the color orange
	Child can identify the color green
	Child can identify the color purple
	Child can identify the numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
	Child can count to ten
	Child can give you ten things by counting them out

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