



Getting Your Child Ready for School

A parent's toolkit



First 5 Orange County receives funding from the 1998 Tobacco Tax (Proposition 10) that was passed by California voters to improve the health and early education of children from birth to 5-years of age.



Dear Reader: Although this booklet is called, “A Parent’s Toolkit,” it is intended for everyone: from guardians, grandparents and extended family, to service providers. The toolkit is a resource to support children’s readiness to learn.



Introduction

Getting Your Child Ready for School is a parent and family resource that is based on the Early Development Index (EDI) and Kid Builders. The EDI is a teacher-rated measure of kindergarten children's readiness to learn at school in five areas of early childhood development. Kid Builders are activities designed to support children's health and development. This parent toolkit provides tips, information, and Kid Builder activities for each of those five EDI areas.



Communication Skills and General Knowledge 02

Your child can communicate his or her needs and takes part in imaginative play.



Emotional Maturity 04

Your child pays attention to directions and is willing to help others.



Language and Cognitive Development 06

Your child is able to read simple words and write his or her own name.



Physical Health and Well-Being 08

Your child can hold a pencil and sustain energy throughout the full school day.



Social Competence 10

Your child gets along with others and follows rules and instructions.



The beach ball means that activity is a Kid Builder activity.

Communication Skills and General Knowledge

What is it? Communication is the ability to clearly express one's needs and to understand others (both talking and listening). General knowledge is an interest in the outside world.

Why is it important? Children who can communicate well—as both listeners and talkers—and who are curious to learn about the world around them, are children who are prepared to succeed at school and throughout life.

Don't just talk—spend time doing active listening

- Really pay attention to what your child is saying.
- Look for opportunities to model good listening skills. Be flexible and know how to read your child's cues. Giving your child your attention will encourage him or her to open up and talk to you.
- Talk about the weather, what your child did in school, plan a trip together, or talk about your day—whatever is of interest to you and your child.

Be available to your child

- Enjoy your meals together at the dinner table. This shows your child that “we always have time for one another.” Eating together also promotes a sense of belonging within the family.
- There are many things that demand our attention, but none are as important as your child.

Ask your child about his or her day

- Find a comfortable time to talk about your child's day. Model this for your child by talking about your own day.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as “What happened at school?” and “What did you do outside?” Asking such questions will lead to more conversation than asking a question that only has a simple “yes” or “no” answer.
- Try making a meal together. You can find out about each other's likes and dislikes, as well.

Encourage your child

- Children need encouragement to feel good about themselves. Children who are confident are more likely to try new things.
- Communication requires confidence, so it is important to respect your child's efforts and never make fun of his or her mistakes.
- Modeling works best when you are trying to teach children something new. From learning a new sport, new song or new language, to going to a new place for the first time, life is full of opportunities to learn new things together!



Develop an open, honest relationship with your child

- Let your child ask questions and express his or her fears. This teaches your child to talk about things that are troubling him or her.
- Be open about issues that directly involve your child's frame of mind and emotional well-being.
- If your child is interested in something, show him or her that you are available to help and to give guidance and answers.

Be aware of things that are important to your child

- Create "A Story About You." Make up a story about your child, using their names as often as you can. Reading and re-telling the story together will help him or her learn about words, reading and writing. 🌍
- At the end of each day talk to your child about "Here's What We Did Today." Give as much detail as you can and learn a few things your child enjoys doing each day. 🌍
- Talk about your child's favorite books, toys, and movies. In turn, your child will want to learn about the things that are important to you and others. This will benefit your child as he or she learns how to socialize, make friendships, and communicate with peers.

Model communication skills from the very start

- When holding your baby, respond to what she or he does—if she giggles, you giggle; if he smiles, you smile. Change your voice to match different facial expressions.
- Put a variety of safe and interesting things near your baby (for instance, touch-and-feel books, a child's mirror, a colorful mobile). Describe to your baby what he or she is seeing and touching.
- Play "Let's Keep Talking": Wherever you are, try guessing what your baby is saying and respond as if they are sharing some great news. Give them time to respond with a sound or face and continue the "conversation." 🌍

Encourage imagination, curiosity, and problem solving

- While reading your child's favorite book, change some of the most important words in the story. Do it in a fun and obvious way so that your child will catch on and then provide you with the original story line.
- Put an item that will make a distinct sound into two matching containers (for instance, two containers with dry rice and two with water). Let your child shake the containers and match the sounds.
- Play "Name That Emotion": In books and on TV, ask your child to guess what a character is feeling, why the character is feeling that, and what he or she might need.



Beach ball means that activity is a Kid Builder activity.

Emotional Maturity

What is it? Emotional maturity is the ability to recognize and to express both positive and negative emotions in ways that are healthy, respectful, and appropriate to the situation. Emotional maturity is also compassion and the willingness to help and comfort others.

Why is it important? Children who are emotionally healthy and able to understand and get along well with others are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

Encourage your child to reflect before acting

- Talk about “Highs and Lows”: find time each day to talk to your child about their day, ask them to share the good parts and the hard parts. Share the highs and lows of your day as well. 🌈
- Encourage your child to use words, like in “Express Yourself” when problems arise (for example, “I’m mad”). During a disagreement, allow your child to express his or her emotions—both positive and negative—and encourage your child to listen when others express their emotions. 🌈

Manage fearfulness and impulsiveness in your child

- When your child does something inappropriate, give him or her a consequence that matches the behavior. For example, if your child is coloring on the table instead of the paper, gently take the crayon away until she or he is ready to color on the paper. Remember to give your child another chance and praise him or her immediately for the appropriate behavior.

- Provide choices every day, such as selecting snacks, clothes, or toys. This will help your child become confident in the decisions he or she makes.
- Don’t push your child to do things that make him or her afraid. Instead, give your child time to take small steps toward the activity.

Encourage your child to have compassion for other people


- Respond to your child with compassion when he or she is hurt, sick, or upset. For example, when your child falls down and gets hurt, respond to his or her cries in a caring and consoling manner. Your child will learn to respond to others in the same way.

Help your child deal with feelings at an age-appropriate level

- Label your child’s feelings when he or she is upset, then show him or her different ways to cope. For example. “You seem mad. Would you like a hug? Would you like to look at a book in a quiet place?”
- Show your child how to deal with strong negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, or frustration. Your child is always watching and learning from you so remember to model appropriate ways to deal with emotions.



Start teaching emotional health and showing attachment from the very first moments of life

- Respond sensitively to your infant's needs by letting them know "I am Right Here." When you hear your baby cry or see they are upset, respond as quickly as you can and let them know you hear them. 
- Play different types of music with a variety of "moods." Take your baby in your arms and dance.

Give your child opportunities to be caring and thoughtful to others

- Give your child some cuddly toys to care for (for example, wash, feed, hug). Talk about what your child is doing, and how helpful and caring she or he is being.
- Make a "Teddy Bear Hospital" for all your child's cuddly toys and act out imaginary situations as you and your child help the toys "get better."
- Play "Guess the Feeling": You act out an emotion and your child will guess what you are feeling. Include your child's toys or stuffed animals. This adds other personalities and situations to the game.

Show your child the importance of helping and getting along with others

- Plan a time for your child to play with other children their age. As they are learning to play with others, try playing side by side and letting each child do their own play and encouraging sharing and taking turns.
- Every week give your child a few jobs around the home (for example, sorting laundry, putting away silverware, watering plants, picking up toys). Doing chores helps your child gain confidence in his or her abilities and gives him a feeling of importance that he is a helpful part of your family. Remember to praise their effort!



Beach ball means that activity is a Kid Builder activity.

Language and Cognitive Development

What is it? Language includes word recognition, reading, and writing. Cognitive development includes remembering, problem solving, and decision making. Examples of cognitive development are counting and recognizing shapes and numbers.

Why is it important? Children who enjoy stories and being read to, and whose cognitive development is appropriate to their age, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

Read to your child

- Making books, stories, and storytelling part of your child's daily routine will encourage his or her love of literacy and build communication skills.
- Story time isn't just for bedtime. There are many chances to encourage reading throughout the day. From reading cereal boxes at the kitchen table to making a grocery list together, all help encourage a love of reading.

Talk about what's happening

- When we talk, we describe what's going on around us and help put names to the things we see and experience.
- Make conversation with your child an important part of every day. Remember that your child learns about language by watching and imitating you.

Play, play, play!


- Rhymes and songs are fun for you and your child, and they also build your child's understanding of and appreciation for language—how it works and how it's used. Children learn lots of new words through songs, rhymes, riddles, and chants.
- Play is children's work—it is how they build their brains and learn about the world we live in.
- Every time your child is playing with you, he or she is exploring the world with his or her senses and learning how things work.

Limit screen time


- Young children learn through doing. That is why active play helps them learn more than passive experiences like playing on a smart phone or watching TV.
- Limit television and screen time and look for ways to engage the whole family in activities like board games, creative play, and going to the library.



Use daily routines as opportunities to learn

- Cooking provides opportunities to measure and count.
- A trip to the grocery store creates opportunities to develop language, communication, and decision-making skills.
- Making your child an important part of your everyday activities makes learning fun!
- Play “Number of the Day”: Choose a number for the day; for example, two. Throughout the day, search for things that come in twos. See how many things you child can find or create in twos. At mealtimes, help your child group his or her food in sets of twos, and count as your child eats them. Help your child learn what the number looks like by showing him or her the number on a piece of paper or in a book. 

From your child’s first day, open up his or her world to a love of learning

- Walk around your home with your child, pausing to look at things. Name the items you see. This supports vocabulary development.
- Play “Categories!”: Think of a group of things, like “names of people you know” or “animals.” Give your child an example and then help them think of things that fit that category. 
- Make artwork using stickers and whatever items you can find around the house or outside. Together with your child, sort and count the items (for example, beads, leaves, shells) while working on your project.



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Physical Health and Well-Being

What is it? Physical health and well-being includes physical readiness for school (for example, not arriving at school hungry), physical independence (for example, well-coordinated movements), as well as gross motor skills (for example, able to catch and throw a ball) and fine motor skills (for example, able to handle crayons and pencils).

Why is it important? Children who are healthy and happy are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

Children who get enough sleep, eat right, and keep active will:

Do better at school

- Active living helps children have better concentration, memory, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Have a healthy body weight

- Daily exercise builds a healthy heart, encourages muscle growth, and helps develop strong bones.

Develop healthy self-esteem

- Active living helps children feel good about themselves, reduces anxiety and depression, and makes children better able to deal with stress.

Play with others

- Active living provides opportunities for children to socialize, make friendships, and practice self-discipline.

From your child's first days, encourage him or her to be healthy

- Give your child items to hold and bang together. Talk and sing while he or she has fun making noise and practicing hand-eye coordination.

- Play "Let's Move": Make family movement a part of every day! Take your baby out in a carrier or stroller and, as they grow, your baby will want to move too. Daily movement doesn't need to be hard, just has to include your baby! 🌈



Singing and playing games are fun ways to promote health

- Play “It is Fun to Move.” Plan some fun activities you and your child can do to get your bodies moving, like going for a walk, dancing to music, or playing tag. Try to do one activity together every day! 🌍
- Sing, sing, sing!—especially music and movement songs, such as the “Hokey Pokey.”

Health and well-being also includes eating well, dressing for the weather, and proper hand-washing and hygiene

- Make a weekly meal calendar and let your child pick a meal that he or she will help prepare. Breakfast is an especially easy one to make, and is said to be the most important meal of the day.
- At the grocery store, play “I Spy.” Let your child put the items in your shopping cart that he or she spies. Provide hints by sounding out the first letter of the item. 🌍
- Provide a wash cloth and a little soapy water in a bowl and let your child wash plastic toys.

Healthy activities can be simple

- Take short walks together around the neighborhood. This is a great time to play “I Spy” and “I Hear.”
- At your local park, you can play tag, hide-and-seek, or make up your own game.
- Make an indoor obstacle course using pillows, chairs, pots, pans, measuring cups, and water—anything and everything! Activities could include walking along a chalk line, jumping over a box, and crawling through a tunnel.



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Social Competence

What is it? Social competence is cooperation and the ability to get along with others and make friends. Social competence is also taking responsibility and showing respect, as well as the ability to solve problems and adjust to routines. Socially competent children have positive work habits and are eager to explore new things, such as books, toys, and games.

Why is it important? Children who get along well with others, and who can adjust to new situations, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

Teach your child acceptable behavior in public places

- Visit a variety of places with your child (for example, grocery store, doctor's office). Before you visit these places, give your child very clear and specific expectations (for example, no running, indoor voice only, and remember to say please and thank you).
- Plan ahead of time for long outings. For example, bring small toys or coloring activities to restaurants, the doctor's office, or any place your child must wait a long time.
- Speak respectfully to your child and others. Children imitate what they hear.

Encourage your child to control his or her behavior

- When a problem arises between your child and a playmate, try not to give a solution right away. Give children an opportunity to come up with their own ideas on how to solve the problem, but stay nearby and coach when it is needed.
- Be consistent—create a schedule and household rules that are enforced the same way every time.

Help your child learn appropriate respect for adult authority

- Build a strong relationship, based on trust and respect, with your child. Follow through on your promises and your child will feel that she or he can rely on you.
- Talk to your child about being respectful to family members and other people, and then show her or him how it's done by modeling respect to those around you.

Teach your child how to cooperate and follow rules

- Talk to your child about sharing and taking turns, then set up an activity where you and your child can take turns.
- Help your child learn to share. Start with a snack you can eat. Give some to your child and have some for yourself. Ask your child if they'll give you one of their snacks. Keep asking until they offer you one and then thank them for sharing!
- Set up play dates for your child with one of his or her friends. Plan for games and activities that are short, simple, and cooperative (not competitive).



Right from the beginning, encourage your baby to develop good social skills

- Lie down on the floor next to your baby and talk, read a book, or sing.
- Give your baby a chance to be with other babies. For example, participate in a baby play group in your community to engage young minds and encourage parent-child involvement.
- Play “Hide, Find, and Hug”: It’s just like hide-and-seek within a very small area, but with a hug as the reward for finding the “hider.”

Imagination is a great tool for teaching social skills

- Play “Let’s Pretend.” When you read a book with your child, think of way to pretend about something in the book. Laugh together at this silly action! 🌈
- Play “A New Ending”: Choose a story your child knows well. Partway through the story, stop reading. Ask your child to tell you how it ends. Then ask if they can think of a different ending to the story. 🌈

Encourage your child to play and work with other children

- Provide lots of opportunity for your child and his or her friends to play and work together.
- Give the children a common goal to work on. For example, they can bake cookies together, first by taking turns pouring and measuring the ingredients, then by stirring the batter.



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The Importance of the Early Years

During the first five years of life, your child's brain develops dramatically. Research has shown that during those years, your child is developing socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. A good start in life—days full of caring, sharing, kindness, and creativity—will set the foundation for future success and happiness in school and throughout life.

The tips in this booklet are built upon two important facts.

1 Your child is constantly watching and learning from you. This makes you your child's first and best teacher.

2 Children learn by playing, so have fun and be confident your child is learning from your actions.

By remembering these two facts and practicing some of this booklet's tips every day, you are helping to ensure that your child is ready for school.





This toolkit is adapted from the “Understanding the Early Years Toolkit” developed by the Understanding the Early Years Malton Service Providers Network and the Peel District School Board. First 5 Orange County, in partnership with the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities (under license from McMaster University), is implementing the Early Development Index (EDI) throughout Orange County.

For more activities to do with your child, Kid Builders are available by age including baby, one, two, three, and four & five on the First 5 OC website: first5oc.org/kid-builders.





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