

**Prepared for:**

**United Independent School District  
Laredo, Texas**



# **37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School**

**One of a series of Parent Guides from**



## **Parent Guide**

### **37 Experiences**

Every Child Should Have  
Before Starting School

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## Introduction

Whether your child is in preschool, day care or at home with you in the years before starting kindergarten, there are some simple but important experiences every child should have during those years to enhance and enrich her\* learning in both kindergarten and later school years.

Young children are developing physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively at lightning speed in the early years from birth to age five. How a child's development occurs in one of these areas affects her development in other areas. For example, an experience that seems to be only physical—like hopping, skipping or bouncing a ball—can aid social development because these are skills that can be used in games with other children.



Likewise, experiences that help with cognitive, or thinking, skills can also help a child mature emotionally. For example, practice using words to help her express what she feels, thinks or wants can provide a way to deal with frustration instead of just reacting with tears.

This Parent Guide will get you started with 37 experiences your child should have before starting kindergarten. This is by no means a definitive list: you're sure to think of many other activities that can contribute to all areas of your child's development. You will note that many of these experiences are activities that a child should have over and over again, not just one time.

It's also important to note all the experiences listed assume that the child is receiving the "basics" every child needs to thrive—nutritious food, enough sleep every night, immunizations and regular health checkups—along with plenty of hugs, kisses and "I love you's" every day.

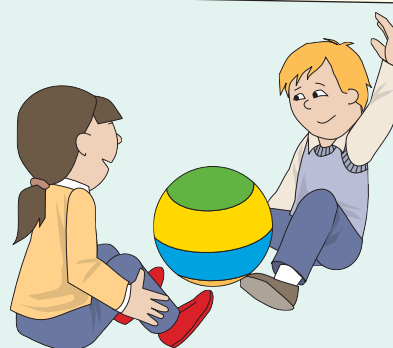
*\*Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*

## Social and Emotional Development Experiences

Children are social creatures by nature, but that does not mean that they understand how to manage social situations and the confusing nuances involved. The more times they are put in situations where they have to interact with other children and adults, the more comfortable they will become in social settings. You can guide your child in the rules of play—sharing, taking turns, initiating play and communicating his feelings effectively, to name a few. You can teach him to ask for a toy and not to grab it. You can also teach him to say, “Please don’t push me,” instead of biting a playmate who pushes. Each time he successfully interacts with other children, he is building confidence in his ability to be with others. He is also adding new choices to his repertoire, so the next time he faces a similar situation, he will know what to do.

Following are some things you can do to provide your child with experiences that will help him develop socially and emotionally:

1. **Participate in a playgroup.** It can provide regular entertainment and friendship for both you and your child. Your child will have the opportunity to share his toys, take turns with other children, and develop friendships. It is also a free, low-stress activity where you can seek advice and share experiences with other parents.
2. **Nurture good manners.** Teaching your child to say “please” and “thank you” gives him the tools to gain approval and acceptance. Social graces engender likeability to family, teachers and potential friends. Expect your child to use them at home, and they will become automatic wherever he goes.
3. **Provide alternate caregivers.** Your child needs practice separating from you on a regular basis to prepare him for attending school five days a week. A daycare center, a religious organization, babysitter, or preschool program can provide opportunities for your child to navigate without you. He will learn to take turns, make compromises, approach unfamiliar children, and obey authority figures.



4. **Encourage sharing.** Your preschooler’s seemingly selfish behavior is really a display of his sense of self and protecting things that he sees as “his.” Sharing is a learned activity that children need lots of time to practice. Talk about the feelings that relate to sharing. For instance, “Sophie is so happy that you let her borrow your train. Thank you, Sam.”
5. **Help your child make friends and be a friend.** Research shows that one of the top reasons youth drop out of school is that they don’t get along with teachers and/or other students. Teach your child to communicate friendliness by wearing a smile on his face and making eye contact with people. Teach him to use humor, make positive comments to his friends, and encourage him to think of other people’s points of view.

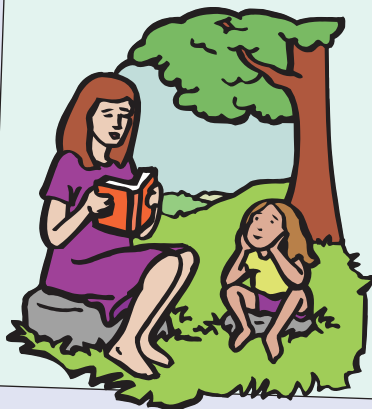
## More Social and Emotional Development Experiences

6. **Teach conflict resolution.** Instructing her about a systematic way to approach and solve a problem will take the fear out of most conflicts. Discuss with her how to compromise, take turns, wait for others to finish and be fair. Role-play each of these situations when they arise so she can practice the dialogue she could use.
7. **Insist upon tolerance.** During her lifetime, your child will encounter people who are different in their race, religion, culture and even appearance. Teach your child to appreciate the differences in people and the richness of other cultures. Attend programs and events of different cultures. Also be sure to be a role model of tolerance yourself.
8. **Nurture a caring outlook.** Doing things to help others will help your child care about others and feel good about herself. Model helpfulness yourself, and your child will see it as not only a worthwhile pursuit but as a necessary part of adulthood. Encourage your child to look for ways she can be caring and helpful. Teach her to think about how others are feeling and be a comforting friend when problems arise.

9. **Assign household chores.** Having simple chores to do and a schedule for doing them builds responsibility and independence. Help your child establish the habit of cleaning up when she is very young and she wants to help. Start this habit early and it will become part of the playing process.

10. **Offer opportunities for good decision-making.** Making decisions and choices helps your child see herself as a worthy and competent person and aids cognitive development through building reasoning skills. Give your child practice making decisions often, such as selecting a vegetable for dinner, deciding whether to wear her red or blue shirt today or which book to read with you after lunch. When she decides to pick up her toys before bedtime, praise her for being responsible. And ask your child's advice regularly about everyday matters—"Do you think we should stop at the library first or the grocery store?" "What would make a good birthday present for grandma?" "Should we read a book or play a game after dinner?" When she has lots of practice thinking things through, she'll develop good decision-making skills.

11. **Organize one-on-one time with your child.** The time you spend with her shows him that you think she is important. You are showing her that you like her as a person and will be boosting her self-esteem. Set a regular day and time that you will spend alone with your child pursuing an activity together. You could go for a walk, drive to the park for a picnic, or learn a new skill together.



## More Social and Emotional Development Experiences

**12. Inquire about his conscience.** A sense of ethics will serve as a base from which your child can respond to challenging situations. Teach him to consider how his actions will make others feel before he does them. Ask him how he feels about sharing a toy with a friend. Let him respond honestly, and inform him that it is okay to be jealous or impatient. The more words he can acquire to express his emotions, the better equipped he will be to cope with them.

**13. Show your child that he is a unique person.**

Individuality is not only acceptable, it is expected and should be encouraged. Balance this with teaching him how to manage himself within expected norms of a classroom. Empower him to take advantage of his unique traits in a positive way. Instead of calling him a chatterbox, encourage him to express his ideas in different ways. He could draw in a journal or simply paint pictures.



**14. Encourage him to express his emotions through play.** Play gives children opportunities to understand the world, interact with others in social ways, and express and control emotions. Provide dress-up clothes for your child to wear when he is acting out stories. Offer him puppets so he can project his feelings onto an inanimate object while exercising his voice.



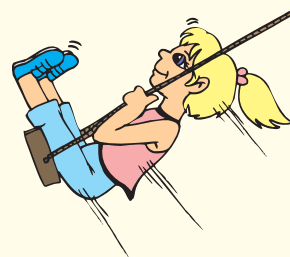
**15. Motivate your child at his "growing edge."** Research demonstrates that children need to be able to successfully negotiate learning tasks most of the time if they are to maintain motivation and persistence. Praise your child when he succeeds at a new activity, and then add one additional task. For instance, when building towers out of blocks, say, "Your tower is so tall with five blocks! Can you build one with six?"

## Physical Development Experiences

Children need to use their muscles. When they haven't been engaged in some kind of motor activity, you'll know it. They get frustrated at a toy they usually enjoy, and they can't settle into one activity. The cat's tail suddenly looks very inviting and before you know it, the cat and your child are both screeching. Physical capability is social currency in the kid arena. Whether she can swing across the monkey bars or draw the best dogs in class, the muscles that enable her to complete these activities will earn her rewards in the classroom. Find out what muscles your child enjoys flexing, and then encourage their development by giving her many opportunities for them to strengthen and grow.

Following are some things you can do to provide your child with experiences that will help her develop physically:

**16. Encourage gross motor skills.** Play allows children to try out and practice new skills. Your child needs opportunities to develop upper body strength by rolling balls and throwing bean bags, and later by pulling herself up, by hanging and by swinging. She needs opportunities to strengthen her lower body by running, jumping and balancing. To learn to control large muscles, your child can throw balls, climb and dance to music.



**17. Develop fine motor skills.** Neat handwriting and coloring in the lines are important gauges of ability in kindergarten. Improve your child's fine motor skills and help her to express visual ideas by encouraging her to draw. Other activities to improve her fine motor skills include using crayons, stringing beads and working puzzles. You can also provide opportunities for her to cut, pick up objects with tongs, build with pieces that snap together, button, zip and lace.



## Language Development Experiences

As you speak to your child everyday, he is learning that language is the way to meet his needs. He is also developing his ability to listen, to understand what is said, and to speak to others. This will later translate into an ability to recognize and understand written language and will ultimately assist him as he learns to read. The better he can express his ideas, the easier it will be for him to develop them as his vocabulary grows along with his self-esteem. Show your child the benefits of reading and writing. You'll be enriching his mind and building the foundation for future success.

Following are some things you can do to provide your child with experiences to build his language skills:

**18. Teach reading skills.** Growing up in a household with reading materials and people who read them greatly increases a child's language skills. Children form their attitudes about reading at an early age, so show your child that reading is fun and important. Read to your child daily. Talk to him about what he is reading and seek material that he expresses interest in. Let him see you reading. Make reading time a regular routine by setting aside a special time every day to read aloud together. Make regular visits to the library. Encourage him to start his own personal library at home by setting aside a bookshelf for his books.

**19. Develop verbal language.** Recent research has revealed a dramatic link between the development of spoken and written language among children, and the importance of language acquisition to basic reading skills. Encouraging your child to communicate and responding when he does speak, gives him social competence that will engender success in the school arena.

## More Language Development Experiences



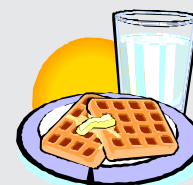
- 20. Enjoy your local library.** Checking out books at the library shows your child that reading is important without you having to say it. Participation in a story time program on a regular basis gives him yet another social opportunity. He will also learn to sit still, answer questions, follow directions, and interact with unfamiliar people.
- 21. Initiate story telling.** Storytelling helps toddlers develop listening and cognitive skills in ways that television and movies cannot. The spoken word stimulates different centers in the brain which are associated with a child's developing cognitive abilities, including his imagination. Help your child develop an idea in his mind and tell it in story form to others. As a family, participate in a serial story where each person repeats what has been said and then adds his own segment.
- 22. Listen when he talks.** Listening is a very large part of school learning and is primarily how we interact with other people on a personal basis. Most of the time, your child will have to listen to learn new information. Teach him that a good listener is interested and attentive, watches body language, and asks questions.
- 23. Play with words.** The more fun your child has with language, the more interested he will be in exploring the academic pursuits that language is involved in. Teach him about onomatopoeia—words that sound like what they describe—such as rustle, crunch, bang, boom and zip. Read lots of rhymes to him and make up your own songs about him.
- 24. Teach the sound-symbol relationship.** The earlier your child recognizes that the symbols in a book make sounds that ultimately create a story, the earlier he will be receptive to learning to read. Begin with an alphabet book where each page focuses on one letter. Point to the letter and say, "This is the letter F. It says, 'fff' as in fun. Learning your letters is fun!"
- 25. Build vocabulary.** Teaching synonyms, for example, is a wonderful way to build vocabulary because of the shades of meaning they add. Sprinkle your own language with synonyms and let your child ask, "What is the difference between funny and hilarious?"

## Cognitive Development Experiences

One of the delights of being around young children is their love for learning—exploring new things, figuring out how things work, marveling at how blue and yellow watercolors make green, wondering why the sky is blue and how birds can fly. They don't even know they are doing it, but it's thinking and learning that children love more than almost anything when they are young. And that's also the best time to help children develop their thinking, or cognitive, skills. So watch to see what makes her eyes light up. That spark might ignite a passion that could lead her onto a successful path in the future.

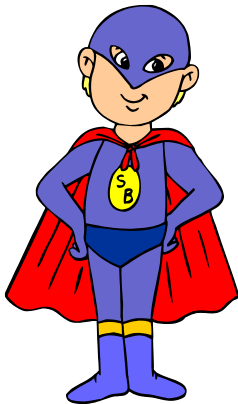
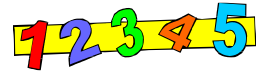
Following are some things you can do to provide your child with experiences to help her develop important cognitive skills:

- 26. Classify your world.** Classification skills are building blocks for learning important math concepts. Encourage your child to classify objects, ideas, sounds, smells or flavors into groups according to traits they have in common. Describe breakfast according to what shapes are involved—your waffle is a square, your glass is a cylinder, your grapes are ovals.
- 27. Help her understand order or "seriation."** Many things about learning are very orderly and children need to know how to arrange things in order—first to last in a series, short to tall, small to large. Give your child the opportunity to practice these skills with activities at home. Line up beads on the counter in a certain pattern—red, blue, green, red, blue, green, red—and then ask your child to predict what color will come next. Arrange objects on the floor from smallest to largest. Get a shoe, a brick and a book. Then by lifting each one in turn, place them in order from lightest to heaviest.



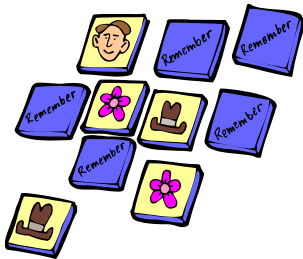
## More Cognitive Development Experiences

- 28. Incorporate numbers and counting into your day.** A child entering school should be able to count from one to 20. He might not be able to recognize each of those numbers, but he should know some of them. Make it a routine activity to count objects throughout the day. You could assign him to clean up five toys in the playroom and count with him as he does it. You could encourage him to look for numbers on mailboxes as you play “I spy” when you go on a walk.
- 29. Give children experience listening and following directions.** One of kindergarten teachers’ common concerns is that children entering school don’t know stop, pay attention, listen carefully and then do what they are told. But the skills are easily taught at home—and it can be lots of fun. Play a variation of Simon Says with your child regularly. Say, “Simon says: Put your hands over your head,” and “Simon says: Dangle your fingers behind your back.” You can also play the “directions” game—with a reward at the end if the directions are followed carefully. For example, you can say, “I got you a new book we can read together as soon as you can find it. Here are the clues: Go to your bed, look for something orange and bring it to me. Then I’ll give you the next clue.” Keep the clues simple at first then make them more and more complicated. Regular experience with “focusing in” and paying attention, listening and following directions will produce useful skills when it’s time to start school.
- 30. Talk about time.** A child will often ask when he is going to start an activity without a true understanding of time. Answer his question by describing the length of time in terms of an activity that has a regular duration. For instance, if he asks when you are leaving for the pool, you could answer him by saying, “It will take as long as one grocery store visit takes.” It could also be as long as naptime or as long as “Sesame Street.”
- 31. Offer choices for self-expression.** Children need opportunities to represent their experiences and concepts in a variety of ways. Let your child draw, paint and play with play dough. Encourage dramatic play by having a dress-up closet with scarves, hats, belts, ties, beads, costume jewelry, shoes and other props available. Play with him to show him how to express his feelings and act out his own story.
- 32. Encourage her to pretend.** Symbolic play is when children begin to substitute one object for another. For a three- or four-year-old toddler, a pillowcase becomes a superhero cape and the cardboard core of a roll of paper towels is used as a trumpet. By age four or five, a child’s ideas and experiences with family and the social world provide material for games like “house” or “driving the car.” Encourage symbolic play by providing blocks for building, friends to pretend with and the opportunity to perform.
- 33. Form and test your child’s hypotheses.** From birth, children are actively engaged in constructing their own understanding from their experiences. Children need to form their own hypotheses and keep trying them out through social interaction, physical manipulation, and their own thought processes. Plant a sunflower seed with your child. As she helps your care for the plant, ask her to predict what will happen next. As you read with your child, ask her to predict what comes next in the story.



## More Cognitive Development Experiences

**34. Expand children's ways of learning.** Experts now believe that all children have specific learning "styles," sometimes called learning tendencies or preferences. Some children seem to naturally learn best by listening (auditory learning), others need to watch how something is done (visual learning), while still others have to touch it, feel it and try it

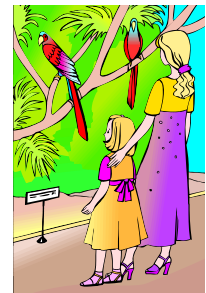


for themselves (kinesthetic learning). And there are many other learning preferences including writing, talking, reading, looking for patterns, working with other people, working alone, making pictures or diagrams and even using music. While your child is young is the best time to look for her learning preferences and help her develop those strengths. It's also important to help her develop new ways to learn. If you think your child learns best by listening, for example, try stretching her capabilities by playing a game of concentration that requires her to watch for and match patterns. The more learning skills a child can develop now, the better she will be prepared to succeed when she starts school.

**35. Make rote learning fun.** Much of what is taught in school must be memorized. A phonics rule such as, "When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking," is one example. Help her enjoy this type of learning by teaching her some nursery rhymes, the alphabet, numbers up to twenty, her address, and her phone number.

**36. Help her understand her community.** A child relaxes and is open to learning when she understands and can predict what will happen in her "world." Parents' comments and explanations deepen her understanding of the world around him. Ask her, "What are the fruits you will see at the grocery store?" and, "What goes on at the dry cleaners?" Once you are inside these places, check out her predictions and talk about your findings.

**37. Introduce your child to the broader world.** Your child needs to know that there is life outside of her own experience. Increase her curiosity about the world by exposing her to many different experiences. Take her to a working farm, a zoo, concerts, puppet shows, museums, national parks and festivals. Make it your goal to do one of these activities at least once a month.



## Conclusion

You are mixing the mortar and laying the first bricks in your child's educational path when you give your child the experiences described in this Parent Guide. You can widen this path by honing in on your child's strengths and weaknesses. He will be better prepared to succeed in school if you give him plenty of opportunities to be successful-and opportunities to fail while he has you around to help him get back up and start again. Simple things you do now will ease the transition for your child as he moves from preschool to kindergarten.

## For More Information

### ***Building Your Baby's Brain: A Parent's Guide to the First Five Years***

by Diane Trister Dodge and Cate Heroman  
Teaching Strategies, Inc.  
1-800-637-3652  
www.teachingstrategies.com

### ***Educating Young Children***

by Mary Hohmann and David P. Weikart  
High/Scope Educational Research Foundation  
1-800-407-7377  
www.highscope.org

### ***"Getting Your Child Ready for School...And the School Ready for Your Child"***

American Association of School Administrators

### ***Love and Logic Magic For Early Childhood: Practical Parenting from Birth to Six Years***

by Jim Fay and Charles Fay, PhD.  
Love & Logic Institute, Inc.  
1-800-588-5644  
www.loveandlogic.com

### ***MegaSkills***

by Dorothy Rich  
Houghton Mifflin  
1-800-462-6595

### ***"Missed Manner: A Parent's Plight—Teaching Kids to be Polite"***

by Camilla Cornelle  
Today's Parent  
www.todaysparent.com

### ***"Parental Roles in Preparing Children for School and Learning"***

National Center for Education Statistics  
<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/93410/4.asp>

### ***The Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn: Creative Ideas from 35 Respected Experts***

by Betty Farber, MEd  
Preschool Publications, Inc.

### ***Raising Children: A Parent's Guide***

by Javad Kashani, MD, Donna Mehregany,  
Wesley Allan, MA, and Kate Kelly  
Random House  
1-800-733-3000

### ***"Teacher's Ratings of Important Qualities for Kindergarten Readiness"***

National Center for Educational Statistics  
<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publication/93410/3.asp>

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*Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them*  
*37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School*  
*Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten*

### **School Success—Set 1**

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*Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them*  
*31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child*

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