

Readiness to Learn at School

Language and Cognitive Development

What is it?

Language and cognitive development includes word and number recognition, counting and memory, as well as an interest in reading and writing.

Why is it important?

Children who enjoy stories and being read to, and who can count and recognize some shapes and colours, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed—at school and throughout life



Hold your baby so that he or she is looking outwards (instead of at you) and walk around your house, pausing to look at things. Name the items you see.

Sing little songs or play simple games with repeating sounds and rhyming words (e.g., “Baa Baa Black Sheep” and “Five Little Monkeys”).



What can I do to build my child's language and cognitive skills?

Your child is constantly watching and learning from you. This makes you your child's first and best teacher. But you don't need to teach “a lesson”—just look for teachable moments. Start by watching your child. See what he or she is doing, then join in. Children learn by playing, so be sure and have fun while exploring books and magazines with your child, as well as singing counting songs and playing games that enhance memory and creativity. For ideas on strengthening your child's language and cognitive skills, try some of the activities on this tip sheet. Although these activities are grouped into three ages (see footprints below) they may be suitable for children of different ages.



INFANT



TODDLER



PRESCHOOLER

Play “Five Little Piggies Finger Grab”: Recite the nursery rhyme while touching each of your baby's fingers in turn. Then let your baby grab your fingers as you say the rhyme again.

Have fun playing “What Sound does the Animal Make?”: Cut out pictures of various well known animals, or use a book with pictures. Ask the question, “What sound does a make?” and then answer by making the sound.

Go to the library and borrow alphabet books, rhyming books, and books about things that are the same and things that are opposites. Read them together. Stay and attend parent-child programs.

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Cuddle together to read a book that has simple sentences or rhymes and big pictures.

Play card games like “UNO,” as well as other games involving numbers and letters.

Work with your child to make a scrapbook of all her or his favourite things and people, then talk about it with your child. You can label some of the people and things.

Count the stairs as you walk up or down. “One step, two step, three step...” In fact, count everything you see (e.g., cars, shoes, pets).

Look for specific things as you go for a walk (e.g., “Let’s look for big trucks”). If there is a bunch of one thing together, you can count them with your child. Tell your child what various signs say as you are walking. Ask your child to read the signs as he or she becomes familiar with them.

Make a collage using stickers and whatever craft supplies you have on hand. Together with your child, sort the various craft items (e.g., pipe cleaners) by size, colour and type while working on your project.



Sing counting songs, such as “Five Little Monkeys” or “The Elephant Song,” and have fun acting out the lyrics.

Together with your child, cook something he or she enjoys eating. Use this time to explore such things as measurements, numbers, colours, words and textures.

Gather a selection of objects that go together (e.g., brush and comb, shoe and sock, fork and spoon, and so on), then let your child have fun matching them.

Gather together a bunch of old magazines or colour flyers, then let your child cut or tear out pictures of things she or he likes. Together, make a collage and give the masterpiece a title.

Play “I Forget”: Say a sentence but “forget” an important word. Ask your child to help you figure out the missing word (e.g., “I had the best ice cream today. It was soooo... Hmm, what’s the word? Can you help me figure it out?”).

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