What is readiness?

Educators often talk about readiness, but what is meant by this term? Typically, the term has been used to refer to developmental skills that a child should acquire before starting school. In today’s society, however, children are starting school at earlier and earlier ages, so the term “readiness” most often refers to the skills a child must master before he can learn to read and write – which usually happens in first grade or later.

People are developmental in nature, and the readiness of a child begins at birth. We must crawl before we walk, make early vocalizations before we talk, and scribble before we write. The primary way that caregivers prepare children for later educational development is by interacting with them. Beginning at birth, it is important that adults talk, read, sing, and play with children. During the first few years of life, young brains are in their fastest growth period, and vital synapses are developing between neurons in the brain. Each time adults interact with children, they promote this important “brain wiring.”

As you read to children on a daily basis, you are providing them with important exposure to language. Children love being read to and may ask you to read the same book over and over again. Many children acquire early reading skills by memorizing books to which they have had repeated exposure. Children will also greatly benefit from a literacy-rich environment. Surround children with language as often as possible and in as many forms as possible – from labels to signs, from notepads to index cards. The child should be offered a large variety of books and supplies to encourage early attempts at reading and writing.

Young children are normally exposed to other skills considered basic for readiness during preschool and kindergarten. Such skills include concepts of color, shape, size, position and direction, matching and sorting, and recognition of alphabet letters and numerals. It is ideal if parents can also support these basic concepts and skills at home through positive interaction with their children.

It is important to remember that children’s development takes place step by step and that there are vast individual differences. Although we recognize developmental milestones, there can be significant (and normal) differences among children, so developmental age should be emphasized rather than chronological age.
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The Environments Professional Group is a team of educators and designers who come together to make the connection between the needs of early childhood programs and the developmentally appropriate products that meet these needs.

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