

HELP PREPARE CHILDREN WITH COLOR, WORD GAMES

BY MEGAN GORDON - JUL. 4, 2010 12:00 AM • THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC



(Deirdre Hamill/The Arizona Republic) Rowan Thomas, 5, works on geometric manipulative activities during "interest centers" time at Goddard School in Goodyear.

When you prepare children properly for kindergarten, you are paving the way for future success in school, educators agree.

Parents can get their kids ready for kindergarten in several ways, said Rebekkah Stover, educational director for The Goddard School®, an early-childhood-development center in Goodyear.

Parents can make routine tasks a game. Stover suggests parents have children sort laundry into colors or play "I spy" to find different colors or shapes while grocery shopping.

"It doesn't really take extra equipment or resources to play those games," she said. "Whether you are at home or out shopping, make those everyday tasks educational and fun."

Other skills that help children succeed in kindergarten include recognizing letters and spelling their name. Stover said labeling objects at home, such as a radio, door or

window, will help children understand word meanings. Also help your child memorize his or her home address.

To help develop fine-motor skills - the first step to learning how to hold a pencil - she suggests children use puzzles and Play-Doh.

Children also need to learn manners and to take direction from adults besides their parents, said Joy Weiss, a Balsz Elementary School District first-grade teacher.

Weiss, the Arizona Educational Foundation's Teacher of the Year, sees a lot of first-graders coming into school having skipped kindergarten because attending kindergarten is not a requirement in the state. That concerns her.

Weiss said early-childhood education and kindergarten are important steps to prepare students for the rigors of school and recommends them for all children.

"Kindergarten has really changed from a social time to a lot of curriculum," she said. "(Attending kindergarten) would help their children really move quicker through the school . . . and be successful."

The last thing Weiss suggests: putting children to bed early and making sure it's the same time every night.

“Developmentally, the way our bodies grow and the stress of school is very exhausting. Kids need sleep,” she said. “Routines are important. Kids should have a certain bedtime when they’re in school. Doing that throughout the entire year will help the learning continue.”

Is your child starting kindergarten?

Valley parents share these tips on getting kids ready for kindergarten.

1. Learn to separate from your child well before kindergarten starts. Use baby-sitters babysitters on occasion so your child gets used to being away from //his or her his/her// parents, and gets used to accepting direction and supervision from someone other than Mom or Dad.

--Kathy Devenport has two children and lives in Tempe.

2. To In order to help parents prepare their children for kindergarten, I always recommend attendance at a high-quality preschool with small class sizes. In addition to a good preschool experience, when my three oldest went to kindergarten, we read books about it as a way of preparation.

--Kristina B. has five children and lives in Anthem.

3. Bring a camera! I was self-conscious about bringing one - I didn't want to be “that” dad, running around trying to snap photos of my son's every move. But then I got there and realized that practically every parent was “that” dad or mom. Have fun with it, and snap lots of photos.

--Michael B. has two children and lives in Phoenix.

4. Starting kindergarten is a big life event for both child and parents. Kindergarten teachers are very skilled and excel at making children feel comfortable. If you show your child you trust the teacher, they will feel safe and do the same. Overall, if your child is comfortable, you are, too.

--Stacia O. has two children and lives in Phoenix.

5. My best advice is to get involved. Know your kids' teachers, know the staff and know your child. Teach your kids that with any experience, you only get out of it what you put into it.

--Maggie S. has two children and lives in Phoenix.

Tips submitted by The Arizona Republic's parent panel, a group of parent volunteers from throughout the state who share their insights, opinions and advice on various educational issues.