

## Helping your Child with School Readiness-Physical Health and Well-being

When your children enters school for the first time, be it preschool or kindergarten, that is often when a parent notices other children's skills and abilities and can't help but observe how their own child fits in.

You may notice that some children have very large vocabularies, while others seem less developed in their speech. Some children will be printing their names and drawing and colouring detailed pictures, while others cannot hold a pencil and do not attempt to draw or print.

Some children will seem physically talented, and be able to throw and catch a ball, balance well and climb on playground equipment with ease.

All parents want their children to succeed in school; to enjoy learning and playing with others, to explore new opportunities, and to be able to take advantage of the many learning experiences offered.

School readiness is the term often used to describe a child's ability to meet the tasks of the school setting. Often, people assume this means knowing ABCs and having other academic skills, but that is not truly school readiness. Many other areas of development have an impact on how a child will do at school. Readiness for school means that a child is able to take advantage of the learning environment and experiences provided in school.

In many communities across Canada, school readiness is measured through a teacher-completed checklist called the Early Development Instrument (EDI). Developed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, the EDI looks at 5 main areas of school readiness. These areas or domains are Physical Health and Well-being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

A child who is ready in these five areas is more likely to be able to meet the challenges of the school environment and will be able to take advantage of the many opportunities provided at school.

Children who start school ready to learn are more likely to continue to thrive. Many studies have shown that children who do well in kindergarten, continue to succeed in the early grades and are more likely to complete high school. They also have better long term outcomes in the areas of health and career success.

In this column, let's look at the developmental domain or area of "Physical Health and Well-being", and how a parent can encourage readiness in this area.

This area of readiness includes: **Being appropriately dressed, and coming to school well-rested, well fed and on time.** A parent can set routines around bed time and rest times, ensuring that their 5 year olds gets appropriate sleep. (10-12 hours is recommended by the Canadian Paediatric Society). Parents can make sure that clothing is appropriate for the weather, and for active learning and play. Children should not be afraid to participate for fear of dirtying or damaging fancy clothing. Following Canada's food Guide recommendations for preschoolers to ensure adequate amounts of nutritious food will

improve learning. Provide a nutritious snack for your young child. Making sure a child is on time for school and attends regularly, only missing when ill, makes a big difference in school success.

**Being independent in looking after their own needs such as using the washroom independently most of the time.** Parents can help their child learn to care for themselves in the washroom, including how to wash hands properly. They should teach their children personal hygiene, including dental care, washing of face, how to blow their nose, how to brush their hair. Parents can help their children learn to put on and do up boots and shoes, zipper coats, put on a hat and mitts. To help children to be successfully independent with this, parents can buy children's clothes that don't have complicated zippers, snaps, and buckles.

**Being coordinated when running or walking, able to climb stairs:** Children need opportunity to for physical movement and play. They need opportunities to develop endurance, strength and flexibility. Walking and running, outings to a playground for climbing and jumping, participation in organized recreations and sports will all contribute to coordination.

**Having enough energy to participate throughout the school day:** This is addressed by proper nutrition and sufficient sleep. Children have differing energy levels and needs for rest and sleep. Parents can build in quiet, restful times for their children and develop a calming, night time routine, to help with restful sleep. Avoid late nights on school nights. Young children need to eat more frequently than adults to maintain energy levels.

**Able to hold a pencil crayons or paint brush, and able to use and manipulate small objects:** The fine motor skills needed in painting are the ones needed for printing. Other activities that encourage fine motor development are cutting with scissors, drawing with chalk and markers, tearing paper, and throwing and catching small balls and beanbags. Doing puzzles, playing with small toys and blocks, stacking and sorting items will all help with fine motor skills. Playdough is another fun activity that encourages fine motor skills. Parents can easily provide these activities at home in the early years.

There are many other suggestions and sources of information to help a child develop in the area of Physical Health and Well-being.

The following websites are a reliable source of information:

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca) [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

By Laurie Lafortune, Understanding the Early Years Coordinator. For more information on child development, parenting and parent and child play groups, call 403-343-6400 or go to [www.fsca.ca](http://www.fsca.ca)