

# School Readiness: THE BIGGER PICTURE

Frances Adlam explains why nurturing and emotional control are key to your preschooler's future success and happiness at school.

There's been much written about getting ready for school, usually focusing on the immediate key skills that we, as adults, think of as being fundamental skills for the nearly five-year-old child to learn. These skills include: > **Being toilet trained** > **Being able to dress themselves** > **Being able to listen to instructions** > **Being able to sit still on the mat for a period of time** > **Being able to play with other children** > **Being able to take turns**. And so the list goes on. And this list does not even begin to speak to the academic skills a nearly five-year-old will need to know in this age of National Standards.

However, what is often overlooked are the necessary experiences that a preschool child needs to be immersed in to make their subsequent school years fulfilling. These experiences are based on the underlying theme of "nurture." In the context of a preschool child, nurturing is both the process and the culmination of caring moments that enable a child to feel safe and grow emotionally and cognitively.

## #1 Reading to and with children

Reading books to children is when the adult reads and the child listens. The words, pictures, and simply being

close to an adult who cares about them creates a magical, warm, fuzzy feeling for the child. It is this warm, fuzzy feeling that the child will internalise and associate with books, reading, and words, and will bring their older self back to books and reading again and again. You could sit your child down for inappropriately aged "lessons" on the alphabet and writing – but the warm, fuzzy feeling will win hands-down. This is because young children (and many adults) learn with their hearts first and then their heads.

Making the most of reading books with a child is when the process of reading is more interactive than simply the adult reading and the child listening. The child may be "reading" the pictures, lifting flaps, squeezing fingers through peepo holes in the book, turning the pages, and making comments about what's happening in the pictures.

## #2 Real conversations with children

You may ask: "What is a real conversation?" Let's think about a real conversation as opposed to instructions. A real conversation is when two people take turns truly listening to each other and engaging in what the other person is saying. At the end of a conversation, both parties will often understand the subject they were talking about in a new way.

Conversations with preschool children take time and patience. They require tuning into the child's world. To do this, we often have to tune out of our busy adult world – and sometimes this is tricky to do. Conversations require us to be present in the moment. Instructions, on the other hand, are generally commands: > **"Get your socks."** > **"Dinner's ready."** > **"Bedtime is in 10 minutes."**

These are not conversations. Of course, parents will always need to give instructions to keep the day running smoothly. But it is real conversations which will enhance a child's interest, curiosity, concentration and brain power.

## #3 Emotional control

This is one of the key skills we need to succeed in life. Emotional control enables us to cope with the ever-present ups and downs of life. Once your child is at school, they will be one child in a large classroom group. They will not have you there to guide and comfort them through tricky situations. So coaching your preschool child in some emotional control is extremely useful for the child's happiness and success at school.

When your child is disappointed that something was planned but did not happen (such as a playdate and then the friend got sick), do not try to fix the problem. Instead, coach your child to be resilient to disappointments.

> **Acknowledge the disappointment. Be there for your child to let out their emotions.**

> **Once the emotions have been poured out, ask an "I wonder" statement: "I wonder what we can do now that your friend isn't coming over."**

> **Brainstorm ideas with your child.**

> **After the event (maybe even the next day), remind your child of their resilience: "It was disappointing that your friend couldn't come over, but it was great how you made that tent in your bedroom."**

The last point is extremely important, as it is this kind of reflection that brings forth the memory that your child survived disappointment – and therefore will be able to do so again in future.

These are just three ways you can help your child have a more fulfilling time at school. Critically, these three points underlie and link together many of the more obvious "ready for school" criteria. The best thing is, they are all free for you to do with your child. And you can utilise them on a daily basis. Have a go!

Frances runs *The Bridge* ([thebridge.org.nz](http://thebridge.org.nz)), a business that helps all children learn and develop using original resources and teaching clinics.

LOOK AT A SNIPPET OF THIS CONVERSATION RECORDED BETWEEN A MOTHER AND FOUR-YEAR-OLD IN SOME RESEARCH I WORKED ON IN THE UK. MOTHER IS DOING THE LAUNDRY AND ROLLING SOCKS INTO PAIRS.

CHILD: "Each ball has 2 socks."

MOTHER: "Yes, we can call that a pair of socks."

CHILD: "Marion (ECE teacher) tells us to put our shoes in pairs."

MOTHER: "When you get to preschool?"

CHILD: "We have to leave them under the big shelf, because it's raining too much."

MOTHER: "Do you mean that now the rain has come you can't leave them on the outside porch?"

CHILD: "They might get wet."

MOTHER: "Yes they might. So in winter, you take your shoes off inside and put them under the shelf?"

CHILD: "I like putting them under the shelf."

THE CONVERSATION WENT ON FOR 20 MINUTES! IT COULD BE ANALYSED FOR A LONG TIME ON THE LEARNING THAT IS HAPPENING FOR THE YOUNG CHILD, BUT IN A NUTSHELL, THE CHILD IS: MAKING THINKING CONNECTIONS, EXTENDING THEIR LANGUAGE, CONCENTRATING, BONDING WITH THEIR MOTHER, AND MORE. A CHILD WHO HAS CONVERSATIONS LIKE THIS WITH A SIGNIFICANT ADULT WILL HAVE AN INCREASED VOCABULARY, WHICH IS ONE OF THE KEY INDICATORS OF FUTURE SUCCESS IN SCHOOL.



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**WONDER-FULLY PREPARED FOR SCHOOL** In a world where creative solutions and new ideas are urgently needed, could "wonder" be an essential skill to foster in our children?