

Section 4 School Readiness Through Play

Importance of Play

Spontaneous play is natural and healthy for children. Children learn best through play. Through play all areas of a child's development can be enhanced. Play positively supports children's social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language, and literacy skills, is essential to a child's overall healthy development (Ginsburg, 2007; Packer Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002) and enhances self-regulation. Daily physical and active play for children is recommended by the Canadian Paediatric Society (Grenier & Leduc, 2008), to foster optimal development. The right to play is also recognized for all children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009) states that "play offers a key way to support the learning of whole children in developmentally appropriate play" (p23). Play, therefore, is an important vehicle that promotes children's school readiness.



Stages of Play

Since the 1800s, the play of children has been the focus of considerable study. One aspect of play, the various stages of play through which children progress, has been observed and recorded extensively. Mildred Parten (1932; 1933) categorized the stages of play in pre-school children.

Mildred Parten (1932; 1933)

In her famous study, Parten (1932) developed six categories of social participation among preschool children. Her play categories are still actively used by educators today. They include:

1. Unoccupied behaviour - not engaged in any activity
2. Solitary independent play - child playing alone, no other children within 1 meter (3 feet)
3. Onlooker behaviour - child observing others play but not joining in
4. Parallel play - child playing next to others without verbal interaction
5. Associative play - verbal interaction, but few attempts to organize the play situation
6. Co-operative or organized supplementary play - each child taking an active role to plan and structure the play situation while collaborating with each other.

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Parten found that with increasing age, the children tended to participate in more social forms of play. Younger children tended to engage in more unoccupied behaviour, onlooker behaviour, and solitary play, while older preschoolers engaged in more cooperative play.

Sara Smilansky (1968)

Sara Smilansky is known for her four stages of play. These play stages are considered to reflect a child's cognitive development. Smilansky's four stages consisted of:

1. Functional play (also called practice play)
2. Constructive play - children create or assemble a structure or object
3. Dramatic or symbolic play
4. Games with rules

- ◆ Play can also be classified into play behaviour that corresponds to some developmental domains, although there is always considerable overlap:
 - Locomotor play - physical
 - Social play - social/emotional
 - Pretend play - social/emotional
 - Object play - cognitive
 - Language play - language and literacy
(Smith & Pellegrini, 2008)
- ◆ It has been found that children engage in increasingly more complex stages of play as they get older. Rubin, Watson, and Jambor (1978) found:
 - Infants engage in solitary-functional play
 - Toddlers engage in parallel-functional play
 - Preschoolers engage in associative play, constructive play and dramatic play
 - Four and five year olds engage in cooperative-constructive play, socio-dramatic play and begin to play games with rules.
 - Kindergarten and school age children elaborate cooperative-constructive play, socio-dramatic play and games with rules.
- ◆ There are times when individual children choose solitary play. A master lego builder, for example, may want the concentration allowed in solitary play. When day after day is spent in solitary play and play seems "stuck" adults should extend their observations to determine if:
 - The child is being isolated by peers
 - The child has some emerging interest and social skills
 - The child chooses to play alone
 - The child needs some assistance to move beyond the present form and level of play.

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Functional play includes the investigation of the properties and functions of objects through sensory motor exploration. When we are introduced to a new medium like clay for the first time we all may pinch, poke and pull apart the clay in functional play. When children are “stuck” using functional play and do not move with time and experience from poking, pinching and pulling clay to rolling it and forming shapes and eventually creating objects then it may be time to intervene.

Benefits of Play in Children’s Development

As an essential part of childhood, studies have shown that play has a positive impact on children’s overall development. The positive benefits of play on a child’s social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language and literacy development have been well documented (Ginsburg, 2007; Pronin Fromberg, 2002; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004).

- ◆ What are some of the benefits of play for young children?
 - Play enhances children’s creativity and problem-solving (Smith & Simon, 1984).
 - Play contributes to the development of self-regulation and social skills such as turn-taking, collaboration and following rules, empathy, and motivation (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Krafft & Berk, 1998).
 - Children, who engage in social and dramatic play, are better able to take others’ perspectives, and are viewed as more intellectually and socially competent by their teachers (Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Sawyer, 2001).
 - Outdoor play helps to promote children’s physical well-being, attention, conflict resolution, coordination, muscle development, and healthy weights (Clements & Jarrett, 2000; Council on Physical Education for Children, 2001; Fjortoft, 2001; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2002).
 - Adding literacy-related materials to dramatic play centres, increases reading and writing activities and use of more varied language (Bagley & Klass, 1997; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Stone & Christie, 1996).
 - Children, who play out events in a story, have improved story comprehension and develop a stronger theory of mind, the understanding that others have different feelings, thoughts, views and beliefs (Pellegrini & Galda, 1980).
 - Positive links between children’s dramatic play and early reading achievement have been found (Pellegrini, 1980).

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What is School Readiness?

In recent years, areas such as school readiness and school transition have received considerable attention. Even the terminology is not consistently defined. Generally in Ontario professionals use the following to indicate what is meant by 'school readiness'

- ◆ **'Transition to school'** is the terminology used for programs that prepare children to a more formal setting. It usually includes 3 - 5 year olds and includes three different types of programs.
- ◆ Pre-school is a play-based setting that supports learning for 2 - 5 year olds. Pre-school programs can be formal or informal and are offered through a variety of public and private organizations. Pre-schools are not mandatory and may have fees associated with them.
- ◆ Junior Kindergarten (JK) is usually, but not always, offered in a school-based setting to support the beginnings of curriculum-based learning. Children are usually 3 or 4 years old at entry to JK and 4 or 5 years old by completion of a JK program. JK is publicly funded; but attendance is voluntary.
- ◆ Senior Kindergarten (SK) is offered in a school-based setting in all schools across Ontario as a publically funded 'transition to school' program for 4 and 5 year olds (at start of school-year). JK and SK are offered on a half-day or alternate full day basis.
- ◆ Some schools offer Full Day Kindergarten. The province of Ontario is set to expand the Full Day Kindergarten Program to all schools in Ontario.
- ◆ **'School readiness'** is the terminology used to indicate that a child is ready to enter grade one. Children entering grade one are usually 5 or 6 years old in Ontario.



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- ◆ In the report: *With our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, Charles Pascal (2009a p5) sets the goals for every child in Ontario to enter the primary grades:
 - “Healthy and secure
 - Emotionally and socially competent
 - Eager, confident and successful learners and
 - Respectful of the diversity of their peers”.

A child’s ability to learn depends on how well she has mastered the art of self-regulation. Posner and Rothbart (2006) show that there is a sensitive period, when self-regulation can be enhanced, between the ages of three to five. During this time, the area of the brain that supports the development of self-regulation, experiences a major growth spurt. While self-regulation continues to develop into adulthood, having acquired age appropriate self-regulation by the time a child enters formal schooling, will benefit his learning trajectory. Following directions, staying on task, and managing emotions and social situations are the skills that will allow the child to focus on his academic activities. Self-regulation develops well in an environment that provides;

- ◆ Opportunities for playful learning by stimulating the child’s imagination and curiosity.
- ◆ Caregivers that respond to the child’s cues warmly, sensitively and consistently.

Children, experiencing circumstances that do not encourage healthy development and developmentally appropriate play, will greatly benefit from early interventions, before brain processes have become entrenched (Tierney & Nelson, 2009). The fundamental neural pathways for the development of self-regulation are more difficult to acquire after the age of six. The foundation, therefore, must be laid in the early years (Shonkoff & Philips, 2009).

Factors Affecting School Readiness

- ◆ School readiness consists of three areas:
 - The child’s readiness for school
 - The school’s readiness for children
 - The family and community’s ability to support healthy child development (High, 2008).
 - Professionals can play a role in enhancing the readiness within all three areas.

Two primary factors have been noted to promote the individual child’s school readiness

- ◆ **Participation in quality early childhood education and care programs** is an important factor that promotes school readiness (Boethel, 2004; Zigler &

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Styfco, 2003) and has been linked to the following improvements:

- Language development, early literacy, and numeracy skills (Barnett, Lamy, & Jung, 2005; Berlinski, Galiani, & Gertler, 2006; Magnuson et al., 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)
 - Self-esteem, behaviour skills and attention skills (Barnett, 1995, 2004; Berlinski, Galiani, & Gertler, 2006; McCall, Larsen, & Ingram, 2003)
 - High quality early childhood programming has also proven to be particularly effective for children from high-risk, low-income families (Barnett, 2008; Magnuson et al., 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). High quality programs encourage age-appropriate, play-based learning.
- ◆ The **direct involvement of caregivers in their child's early learning** and development also enhances school readiness. Research has demonstrated that active involvement of caregivers in the child's preschool program improves her success in school (Jordan & Rodriguez 2004). Children from low-income families, not surprisingly, benefit significantly from programs with caregiver engagement (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Unfortunately, not all children arrive at school with the same types of positive early experiences. There are a number of issues which contribute to a child's lack of school readiness and may need to be addressed. They include:

- ◆ Issues related to preschool programs - insufficient number, cost, wait lists
- ◆ Income-related factors including poverty, overcrowding in the home, lack of parental education, or inability to provide school transition resources
- ◆ Parenting factors including coping strategies, mental health issues, or lack of understanding of the importance of school transition programs
- ◆ Child factors including lack of social skills, physical activity or the impact of media overuse (e.g., television, internet)
- ◆ Insufficient access to safe spaces where children can play or insufficient play structures or equipment
- ◆ Lack of awareness or resources to support children's play
- ◆ Lack of consensus of the school readiness definition across disciplines (e.g., health, education, social services)
- ◆ Lack of support services, such as literacy programs for newcomers
- ◆ (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2009; National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, 2008).

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All areas of a child's development need to be nurtured through learning-based play, in order to enhance school readiness. Considering that school readiness indicators are all interconnected, support in one area can positively influence other domains. For some additional ideas of ways to enhance healthy child outcomes, click on the Ways to Support School Readiness through Play link in this section, and the section Supporting All Children. Health and physical development, social and emotional development, language development, cognition and approaches to learning should be considered when promoting a child's school readiness (High, 2009).

- ◆ When a child is engaged in play with caregivers and other adults in a warm and responsive relationship, she will develop qualities that will help her succeed in school:
 - Strong oral communications skills
 - Confidence
 - The ability to make friends
 - Persistent, creative problem-solving
 - Task completion
 - Curiosity
 - Eagerness to learn.
- ◆ In homes and early learning programs, where security forms the foundation for exploration and learning, each child learns a number of things that increases her readiness to learn:
 - Increased awareness of and modification of emotions
 - Ability to focus and shift attention
 - Ability to control impulses, tolerate frustration, delay gratification
 - Ability to relate to others.

All children are unique with strengths that provide a foundation for facing the challenges that emerge as they grow and develop. The skills and experiences listed here will vary because of individual differences, diverse early learning experiences and the context in which the skills emerge. The lists below can be seen as a background for school entry but not an inventory that fits all children the same way.

To assess each child's unique development when preparing to enter JK or SK, view section 3 Preschoolers (2½-6 Years).

Health and Physical Development

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As one aspect of school readiness, the area of health and physical development covers a wide range of important indicators. First and foremost, a child's basic needs must be met, including the provision of healthy food and adequate sleep. Children are unable to maximize the learning experiences within an educational setting if they are constantly hungry or tired. A child's fine and gross motor skill development also affect school readiness. For example, if a child is unable to hold a pencil properly, later writing skills are impacted.

Health and physical domain	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
Healthy and adequate nutrition	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Eat according to Eating Healthy with Canada's Food Guide. ♦ Have breakfast before school.
Adequate sleep	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Have a regular bed time and getting up routine. ♦ Have a nap or quiet time with books or quiet toys during the day.
Physical activity and active play	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Be physically active for at least 60 minutes throughout the day. ♦ Engage in active play both indoor and outdoors. ♦ Watch less than 2 hours of TV or computer screens per day. For ideas and strategies see: www.haveaballtogether.ca
Hearing	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Have passed hearing screening shortly after birth. ♦ Have a hearing check if there have been any concerns, such as frequent ear infections, prematurity, antibiotic use or language difficulties. ♦ Enjoy and use music, rhymes and repetition.
Vision	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Complete a vision screen by the age of one or as soon as concerns are noted. ♦ Visual deficits that are not corrected early can compromise a child's learning and may not be noted easily. ♦ Enjoy exploring a variety of art forms, colours and other visual experiences.
Dental health	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Brush and floss teeth daily under the supervision of an adult. ♦ Visit a dentist regularly.

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Health and physical domain	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
Physical health	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Have all her pre school immunizations. ♦ Have a complete physical examination by the child's primary health care provider prior to starting school.
Mental health	Section 2 Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Spend time in a nurturing environment without undue stress. ♦ Have developed secure attachments with adult caregivers. ♦ Have access to factors that promote resilience.
Motor skills	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Have reached the age-appropriate gross and fine motor skills. ♦ Have the opportunity to use both gross and fine motor skills in a variety of play situations.

Self-Care Skills are also important for school readiness as the child takes a large step towards future independence.

Self-care and safety skills	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
Dressing	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Dress and undress self without help depending on age. ♦ Be able to do most buttons and zippers. ♦ Put on shoes, may not be able to tie laces. ♦ Have the opportunity to practice dressing with a variety of dress up clothes.
Feeding	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Be able to open lunch and snack containers. ♦ Feed himself, finish most meals.
Toileting	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Be able to tell an adult when she needs to go to the washroom. ♦ Go to the washroom independently. ♦ Wash and rinse hands safely and independently.
Help-seeking	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Ask for help. ♦ Tell an adult if she is upset or sick.
Safety	Section 3 Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Know her first and last name. ♦ Know her address and telephone number (more likely for 5-year olds).

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Self-care and safety skills	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
General safety	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Know how to follow instructions and routines. ♦ Pay attention to instructions.
Safe play	Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Use appropriate safety precautions during play (e.g., wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, use rounded scissors when cutting).
Getting to and from school safely - by bus	Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Know the safety rules of riding a school bus. ♦ Complete a practice ride if possible.
Getting to and from school safely - walking	Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Walk with an adult or older sibling. ♦ Know not to talk to strangers, not to get into a stranger's car and where to go for help if someone approaches her. ♦ Complete a practice walk.
Getting to and from school safely - by car	Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Walk from car to school or school to car observing safety rules and precautions. ♦ Cross the road with an adult or older sibling.

- ◆ Click here to view the resource, *Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings* (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006).
- ◆ Click here to view *The Kindergarten Program - Revised* (Ministry of Education, 2006).

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Social/Emotional Development

When children are socially competent and emotionally healthy, they function well within the social parameters of a classroom setting. They interact easily with others, share materials, express their feelings, work well in group settings, and develop positive relationships with peers and adults. A positive sense of well-being will contribute greatly to a child's school readiness (National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005). Social and emotional development is fostered in reciprocal and cooperative play (e.g., turn taking, sharing, dramatic play, games with rules).

Social Domain	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
Playing with other children	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Take turns and share. ♦ Play along side and cooperatively with other children.
Conflict resolution and problem solving	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Express feelings, wants and needs. ♦ Use self-regulation strategies to deal with highly emotional situations. ♦ Begin to identify consequences.
Helping skills	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Follow a routine (e.g., set out placemats for snack time, put on gym shoes and line up for gym) ♦ Use some pro-social behaviour.
Empathy	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Begin to see things from another's point of view. ♦ Be able to describe what another person might be feeling.
Interacting with adults	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Be able to pay attention. ♦ Make eye contact while talking.

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Emotional Domain	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
Emotional skills can be enhanced through social play, reading and discussion of stories. Active play and physical activity also increase self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept.		
Self-concept	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have responsibilities for some personal, family and group routines (e.g., feeding a pet, setting the table). Use some positive social comparisons and personality traits to define himself (e.g., "I am strong; I can climb better than my sister").
Self-awareness	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to understand that she is separate from others and that others live and think differently.
Self-esteem	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that she has some areas of strength. Complete tasks and show pride in her accomplishments.
Self-expression	Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have an expanding vocabulary to express her emotions. Begin to understand that she can feel mixed emotions at times.
Self-regulation	Section 1 Section 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use self-talk and other strategies to regulate her emotions. Respond to inductive justice (making a child aware of the feelings or harm she has caused by her misbehaviour) by displaying pro-social behaviour.
Positive attitude towards learning	Section 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Click here for: Approaches to Learning

- ◆ [Click here to view the resource, Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings \(Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006\).](#)
- ◆ [Click here to view The Kindergarten Program - Revised \(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006\).](#)

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Language and Early Literacy

The development of language and literacy skills begins at birth, and is influenced by a wide range of factors, including the vocabulary used at home, early reading and opportunities to play.

Oral language is the foundation for later literacy skills. A rich vocabulary and well-developed expressive language skills are essential for literacy development. Any delays in the development of a child's language skills need to be addressed quickly by caregivers and professionals.

The age at which children learn to read varies greatly. Some children begin to read at age four, while others don't develop reading skills until age six or later. Children pass through several stages of reading, writing and spelling development, as they move along the continuum of literacy development. For more information on these stages see:

- ◆ The Hanen Centre at www.hanen.org for information and programs to support oral language delays
- ◆ Speech and language milestones, as well as talking tips are provided at www.speechdelay.com

Language and early literacy consist of four areas: attention, receptive language, pre-speech and expressive language and pre-literacy skills. These are closely interrelated with hearing, social, emotional and physical development. For more information on all language and early literacy milestones click on Supporting Preschooler's Development by Age.

Reading/Writing Continuum

In May 1998, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) came out with a joint position statement on reading and writing expectations for young children. The continuum spans from preschool to the third grade. The first two phases are listed here (NAEYC, 1998, p. 15):

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Phase 1: Awareness and exploration (goals for preschool)	Phase 2: Experimental reading and writing (goals for kindergarten)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By entry into Junior Kindergarten children should have achieved the following skills. <p>Children explore their environment and build the foundations for learning to read and write.</p> <p>Preschoolers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enjoy listening to and discussing storybooks understand that print carries a message engage in reading and writing attempts identify labels and signs in their environment participate in rhyming games identify some letters and make some letter-sound matches use known letters or approximations of letters to represent written language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By entry into Grade One children should have achieved the following skills. <p>Children develop basic concepts of print and begin to engage in and experiment with reading and writing.</p> <p>Kindergartners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enjoy being read to and themselves retell simple narrative stories or informational texts use descriptive language to explain and explore recognize letters and letter-sound matches show familiarity with rhyming and beginning sounds understand left-to-right and top-to-bottom orientation and familiar concepts of print match some spoken words with written ones begin to write letters of the alphabet and some high-frequency words

- ◆ Click here to view the Language/Early Literacy Development domain in section 3
- ◆ Click here to view the resource, Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006).
- ◆ Click here to view The Kindergarten Program - Revised (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).
- ◆ Click on the following link to download Foundations for Literacy: An Evidence-based Toolkit for the Effective Reading and Writing Teacher: http://foundationsforliteracy.ca/index.php/Main_Page

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Cognition and General Knowledge

As children are exposed to new experiences and learning opportunities, their understanding of their world expands. A rich and stimulating environment will enhance a child's learning and interest in further inquiry. Cognitive development encompasses many aspects, such as "language and literacy, mathematical knowledge, scientific thinking, the arts, music and other vehicles for knowledge acquisition, creative expression, reasoning and problem solving" (National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005, p. 68).

Cognitive Domain	Where to find more information	Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child's readiness to learn
Cognitive skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ general 	Section 3	<p>Have reached the age-appropriate, cognitive developmental milestones.</p> <p>Emerging skills should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Questioning ♦ Critical thinking ♦ Problem solving ♦ Spatial abilities ♦ Observation ♦ Categorization ♦ Communicating findings
Numeracy skills	Section 3	Have acquired the age-appropriate numeracy skills.
Attention	Section 3	<p>Be able to focus on a task or situation for more than a few minutes.</p> <p>Be able to shift attention to a new situation.</p> <p>Return attention to task or situation easily following a brief distraction.</p>
Memory and recall skills	Section 3	<p>Increasingly use descriptive words to tell about past events or experiences.</p> <p>Use memory of past experiences to construct or plan for new and future experiences.</p>
Working memory	Section 1	<p>Increasingly use working memory to keep in mind information while adapting to changes in play or real life situations.</p> <p>Use working memory to solve some problems and simple science experiments.</p>

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Approaches to Learning

- ◆ Caregivers can help the child develop approaches to learning and skills that will help her be successful at school. Children need:
 - Routines
 - A quiet place for reading and homework,
 - Books and literacy aids such as paper, crayons, pencils to encourage preliteracy
 - Space and props to stimulate play
 - Reciprocal play with nurturing adults.
- ◆ The following skills should be encouraged when observed in play as they will be transferred to academic tasks later:
 - Curiosity
 - Engagement
 - Enthusiasm
 - Attention
 - Persistence
 - Problem solving
 - Task completion
 - Reliability
 - Organization and planning
 - Time management
 - Risk-taking while using safety precautions (e.g., practicing swimming without floating device while adult is at arm's length)
 - Self-direction and initiative
 - Ability to work independently
 - Collaboration with others.
 - (National Education Goals Panel, 1998)
- ◆ [Click here to view the Cognitive Development domain in section 3](#)
- ◆ [Click here to view the resource, Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings \(Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006\).](#)
- ◆ [Click here to view The Kindergarten Program - Revised \(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006\).](#)

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Ways to Support School Readiness through Play

School readiness is comprised of many different and interconnected factors. We can support children's school readiness by encouraging children to explore the world around them through play. We can also support the development of public policies that ensure schools are ready for children, and communities support healthy child development. The goals of healthy public policies should be:

- ◆ All children have access to high quality early learning and care environments with highly qualified professionals
- ◆ All families have access to a wide range of social supports within their community, such as dental and medical care, child and family programs, and more. The need is especially acute for families who live in poverty or families who are unfamiliar with the resources that may be available to them
- ◆ Professionals working with children from zero to six continue to seek out free or subsidized programs, resources or services to support children and families in need
- ◆ Schools are part of the community hub that supports healthy child development and each child's transition to school
- ◆ Schools are ready for all children and continue to support healthy child development of the whole child.

Here are some strategies how professionals can support and promote school readiness:

- ◆ Build a strong rapport with caregivers
- ◆ Encourage positive adult-child interactions and relationships
- ◆ Promote the creation of a nurturing, rich, and stimulating early learning environment for children and families
- ◆ Plan activities to involve caregivers regularly in their child's learning and development
- ◆ Lend toys, books, and videos to families; work to establish toy-lending libraries in your community
- ◆ Continue to provide outreach to families in your community, especially to those who may be harder to reach; support and refer to family home visiting programs such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children
- ◆ Encourage caregivers to read to their children on a daily basis; encourage caregivers to listen to children read to them on a daily basis (even if it is "pretend" reading)

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- ◆ Encourage caregivers to set up a centre in their home with materials that promote school readiness through various types of play
- ◆ Encourage participation in and provide information about:
 - high quality early learning and care programs
 - parenting programs
 - public library programs
 - parent support networks and programs
 - family literacy programs
 - prenatal care programs
 - informal and formal networks and playgroups
- ◆ Continue to support adult and family literacy, as well as English-language learning for newcomers to Canada (e.g., LINC programs - Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada)
- ◆ Sign up for the Welcome to Kindergarten program (www.thelearningpartnership.ca under the Programs tab), which provides a literacy resources bag and workshop for caregivers to help support readiness for school
- ◆ Create partnerships with schools, early years and early learning centres, community and health care agencies and neighbourhood centres to help provide supports for and resources about:
 - prenatal care
 - mental health care
 - nutrition and food banks
 - vision, dental, and medical care
 - health and immunizations
 - emotional/behavioural concerns
 - shelters
 - subsidized housing
 - early intervention
 - employment or job retraining
- ◆ Plan or participate in family resource fairs
- ◆ Promote programs that provide universal screening such as hearing and vision screening programs
- ◆ Ensure that resources provided to families are culturally sensitive and when possible, translate the resources or provide translation services for families
- ◆ Help families to make referrals for additional services, if help is needed with the process

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- ◆ Promote the availability of workshops and training programs in your community for caregivers and service providers
- ◆ Ensure a constant flow of communication with caregivers through the use of discussions, newsletters, brochures, email, or other ways to keep them informed
- ◆ In the absence of funds, seek out donations or sponsorship to help fund some of your community initiatives (e.g., breakfast programs)
- ◆ Encourage play at home and in early learning and care settings in your community
- ◆ Ensure your community provides safe spaces and opportunities for play (Florida Head Start State Collaboration Office, 2002; Maryland State Department of Education, 2002; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2002).

Professionals can encourage families to promote healthy child development that supports readiness to learn in all children from birth on by using not the three “Rs” of “reading writing and ‘rythmetic” but the five “Rs” of early playful learning.

- ◆ Reading together
- ◆ Rhyming, playing, singing and physical closeness
- ◆ Routines and regular times for eating, playing and sleeping
- ◆ Rewarding children with praise for any success
- ◆ Reciprocal, nurturing relationships.
- ◆ (High, 2008).