Kindergarten Readiness

By Stephanie Copa, Preschool mom and Church mom

With any new venture, one may ask, “Am I ready for this?”… regardless of what “this” may be. For many of our preschool families and preschool families around the county, this is the time of year that this wondering about their preschool child runs through parents’ minds like a ticker tape, as they attend elementary school tours and see Kindergarten Round-ups on the horizon. So, what does *it* take to be *ready* for Kindergarten?

Clare Carter, First Presbyterian Preschool Director, was recently asked this question. Her answer might surprise you! One might think that reciting all your ABC’s, being able to count to 20, knowing how to write your name legibly, or recognizing printed letters or their spoken sounds would be at the forefront of the readiness list; however the foundational skills that all Kindergarteners need lean more toward independence and friendship skills, and soft skills such as patience, having a positive attitude, cognitive flexibility, listening and following directions to name a few.

These are skills that your preschooler has been hard at work on since they began in a classroom, and are likely a part of their day at home, as well. So the great news is, you have been preparing them for this day their whole lives!

If there are readiness skills that you feel your preschool might need some support or extra practice with, your child’s preschool teacher is an excellent resource. Play is the language of children; working on and reviewing skills through play is a fun and engaging way to spend quality time with your child while reinforcing needed skill sets. Here are some ideas:

Play dates and trips to a park are excellent opportunities to praise pro-social behaviors and friendship skills as they occur in the play date or naturally occur at the park. Some praiseworthy friendship skills are approaching a potential friend and inviting them to play, introducing themselves, asking a question to find a common interest, sharing, and turn-taking. Some children seem to have acquired these skills by watching older siblings, or parents, interact with peers. Other children may need these skills modeled for them and practiced, at their readiness, in steps.

Independence skills are an important part of Kindergarten readiness. Mastery of independence skills boosts your child’s confidence, and they also help your child meet their own needs with things like tying their shoe, buttoning their shorts, toileting, opening lunchbox items, etc.- things that are difficult for a teacher to do for each student at the same time at lunch, recess or on a bathroom break.

Teaching patience takes a lot of patience. Gradually delaying gratification and heavily praising your child's efforts at remaining patient go a long way.

If your child sees things pessimistically at times, reframing the situation for your child with other possible ways to interpret circumstances helps your child expand their understanding of social situations and experiences. For example, if your child is beginning to lose their cool with a friend or sibling using the blue crayon, and begins to complain that they aren't getting their turn, you could set the expectation for the experience," Sarah is using the blue crayon, and she will let you know when she is finished and it is your turn. It looks like she is coloring the butterfly very carefully. I know you have a plan for the blue crayon. I can't wait to see your creative ideas, too, when it's your turn." Praise the patience your child is demonstrating. Waiting is hard; progressively our stamina for waiting is built by having our effort at being patient noticed. If at a red light someone honks the horn and your child has an opinion about the beeping driver, you could reframe the experience… "Could it also be true that he is running behind for an important meeting? Maybe he has an emergency? Maybe he needs the potty?!" Wait for their chuckles about the possibility of the other driver needing a potty.

Flexible thinking about our routines does not always come naturally for kids. Consider making a picture chart of their week with daily high points to help them know what major high points will occur. Having a child's daily routine in pictures can help them transition through the day as they can see what is coming next, also other cues like using a song every day for transitioning to activity to activity: house to the car, cleaning up toys, or transitioning to bed. These are tools that their current classroom teachers use to help the class navigate transitions. It is very likely that similar tools will be implemented next year, too. You might even find it helps your time at home flow more smoothly!

Playing "Simon Says", "Red Light Green Light" and "Mother May I" are all great, simple games that teach listening and following directions.

Remember, preschoolers are not the only ones getting ready for Kindergarten- so are their parents and caregivers. It can be a time of reflection… "How did you get SO big?" As Mrs. Carter has been known to say, "The days can feel long, and the years are short." Take time to process all the growth your child has experienced. Share this with your child, too. It's interesting for them to have these milestones of their growth pointed out and celebrated. From cradle to kindergarten is a long journey, that happened in a flash. Employ solid self-care activities: walks, reading a good book, coffee with a friend, whatever healthy activity that relaxes and energizes you, find a few minutes each day to do. Advancing from preschool to Kindergarten is a big step and a transition for everyone. Be kind to yourself. When your emotional cup is full, you have more emotional availability to offer your transitioning child when they will need it.