

Questions & Sample Answers / ECHO-TV Show #501 & 502 & 503 “Getting Ready for Kindergarten”

(Recording Show: Tuesday, November 18, 2008 / 2-6 pm @ TPT)

2ND half-hour

Host: Lillian McDonald. Executive Director, ECHO

Guests: Huda Farah, Ann Hoxie, Sandy Benson, Angele Passe, Jesse Kao Lee

Host introduces self and welcomes viewers.

Explains that the next half hour will be a roundtable discussion to discuss in greater detail some common questions parents have about kindergarten.

Host introduces guests.

Huda Farah is the executive director of HEAL which stands for Health, Education, Access, and Leadership and is a former ECHO TV host.

Ann Hoxie is the assistant director for Student Health and Wellness for St. Paul schools.

Sandy Benson is a kindergarten teacher at the St. Francis school district and consultant for the Minnesota Department of Education.

Angèle Passe is a consultant and writer in early education. She's written, “*My Kindergarten Book*,” which helps children and parents prepare for kindergarten, in English and Spanish, and is at work on a new book on the transition to kindergarten.

Jesse Kao Lao is the Hmong Project Manager for Ready 4K-- a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving school readiness in Minnesota.

1 What's a typical day of kindergarten like? What can parents and children expect?

Sample Answer:

- Some kindergarten classrooms are full day; others are half day.
- The schedule will vary depending on the length.
- Children will participate in group activities with the teacher and other children (learning facts, hearing a story, etc.). Groups may be with a few other children or the entire class.
- Children will be expected to work individually during the day.
- They may practice writing, reading, counting or other learning activities.

2. How important is reading to children as a way of helping them get ready for kindergarten?

Sample Answer:

- Reading, singing or telling stories with children is the most important learning activity a parent can do.
- They help children develop thinking skills, and increase their vocabulary.
- Children that are read to before they start kindergarten do better in school than children who are not read to.

(Host introduces 1st video PSA)

As we're hearing from our guests-reading to children is a key in preparing them for kindergarten. Right now we'd like to show you a short video on that subject....

(Play tape-Spotlight from Talaris Research Institute-Dad's Club: Read Together, It Helps Kids Learn Length: 1:00)

3. How much of a role does health play in a child's ability to learn at kindergarten?

Sample Answer:

- Children who are healthy learn better in kindergarten.

- When children are three years old, parents should call their school district about the free Early Childhood Screening program. This is a check of how your child is developing and learning, and makes sure that your child's shots are up-to-date.
- We talked earlier about the important of getting enough sleep and healthy foods.
- Children also need a violence-free home to do well at school.
- Parents should let their school know if a child has a health condition or allergies. School nurses will work with parents to help children while they are at school.

4. What are some other issues parents should consider with regard to their child's health?

Sample Answer:

- Limit TV time to a maximum of one hour a day and watch the programs with your child.
- Encourage daily physical activity.
- Help your child learn to go to the bathroom and wash their hands by themselves.
- Take your child to a doctor or health care provider, and dentist when they are not ill for a "well-child" checkup. This examine identifies possible problems before they become serious.

(Host introduces 2nd video PSA)

We mentioned earlier that stories can be a really important part of learning. Here's a video that shows parents how easy it can be to create stories.

(Play tape-Spotlight from Talaris Research Institute-Story Time-- Length: 1:00)

5. Does it benefit children if they can speak English when they enter kindergarten?

- It is helpful if children have some basic knowledge of English.
- More important is that they have been read to and talked to in their home language.
- Knowledge of the written word, books and a rich vocabulary help structure the brain for learning, whatever language is spoken.

6. What if a child or parent does not speak English? Are interpreters available at school to help?

Sample Answer:

- Parents should talk to their school as early as possible about their language needs if the child does not speak English.
- Many schools have interpreters available and if not, they can work with families on this issue.
- A local community may also be able to provide support .
- Early childhood programs also help children get ready for kindergarten. Call your school district to find out more.

7. Parents want their children to do well in school, but many also worry about children losing their cultural identity and language. How can parents strike a balance between these issues?

Sample Answer:

- Several school districts offer bilingual, immersion or international programs that may be language or culturally specific.
- Many school districts have cultural celebrations throughout the year.
- Parents may want to explore community events and programs that celebrate culture and language.
- Parents should talk with their child's teacher about any issues that concern them, and perhaps offer to share information about their child's language and culture with the class.

(Host introduces 3rd PSA)

One of the messages I'm hearing from this group is that we can help our children get ready for school in small ways everyday. Here's another video on that point. (Play tape-Spotlight from Talaris Research Institute-Gone Fishing: Read Signs Together, It Helps Kids Learn-- Length: 1:00)

9. Will children become more confident learners if we make learning part of everyday life—as shown in that video?

Sample Answer:

- Yes. By using children's curiosity and natural drive to learn, parents can teach children so much in simple ways everyday.
- Encourage children to explore with their senses-to see, touch, hear, smell and taste.
- Teach children that making mistakes is part of learning.
- Encourage children to stay with a task when faced with a challenge.
- Tell children to seek and/or accept help when needed.
- Knowledge of how the world works is an important piece of learning.

10. An important part of school is also the ability to get along with others. How can parents help prepare their children to make new friends and solve problems with classmates?

Sample Answer:

- Show children ways to make new friends.
- Teach children words and phrases such as, "Can I play with you?" or "Please stop. I don't like that."
- Help children understand how they can be friends with children who are different from them.
- Teach children to know when it's their turn to speak and when they need to listen.

11. What if a parent feels their child isn't ready for kindergarten? What are the advantages and disadvantages of holding a child back a year?

Sample Answer:

- School districts know that children start kindergarten in different stages of development and preparation for school.
- Parents should not assume a child with a late birth date should be held out of school.
- Many studies are now showing that children who wait to start kindergarten do not have the long-term benefits that were once thought.
- Teachers prefer to work with children to prepare them for first grade, rather than have a much older child enroll in their kindergarten class.
- Early Childhood Screening can identify any areas of concern in a child's development and may offer solutions.

(Host introduces 4th PSA)

Surprisingly, some of the simplest things appear to have a big impact on children's readiness to learn—like talking with them. Here's a video on that thought. (Play tape-Spotlight from Talaris --Keep Talking--Length: 1:00)

12. One of the really big moments for parents and children is when the child gets on a school bus for the very first time. But many parents wonder, are the buses safe?

Sample Answer:

- School districts require bus drivers to have been tested by the state and hold special driving licenses in order to drive a school bus.
- Drivers are trained to manage children in specific situations.

- The school district also counts on families to instruct their children to follow the safety guidelines on the bus.

13. Where can parents go to find out about the many choices in the educational system, such as charter schools, magnet schools and open enrollment?

Sample Answer:

- Attend your local school's events about kindergarten and school choice/open enrollment.
- Contact the local Parent Teacher Organization.
- The Minnesota Department of Education has information about School choices. This is at www.education.state.mn.us select "School Choice."
- Parents can also call the free number at 1-877.766.5485 with their school choice questions during regular business hours. Interpreters are available.
- The State of Minnesota Web site—www.mnparentsknow.info-- has many parent resources. These resources are videos, podcasts, and brochures that are in English, Hmong, Spanish, Somali and other languages.

14. What's the best way for parents to ensure good communication between themselves and their child's teacher and the administrators at their school?

Sample Answer:

- Attend community events at your local school before your child starts school.
- Visit with the teacher. Attend all parent/teacher events.
- Take advantage of the communication methods the school has established. Send notes to the school or call the teacher.
- Consider a school district early childhood program for your child. This will connect your family to the school.

15. What's the "take home" message you'd like parents to remember about our conversation today?

Sample Answer:

- Parents can do a lot to prepare their child for learning and for school.
- Being healthy is the foundation of being able to learn.
- A home rich in conversation, reading and positive attention are the best experiences children can have to get ready for school.

16. Is there anything else you'd like to add?