

Parents = the Difference

a monthly parenting newsletter

With amazing fortitude and persistence, we march through our 13th month of pandemic life! This year will forever be part of your child's educational blueprint. Parents continue to fret over kindergarten readiness, especially now that placements have been announced. The fact of the matter is no one knows exactly what kindergarten will look like next year, however there is every reason to believe school will be in-person. Children will walk into the classroom with a variety of readiness experiences, and teachers are prepared to do what they always do—differentiate and meet every child where they are. The second page of this newsletter focuses on preliteracy and math readiness. The cover article is about the emotional changes kindergarten may bring and how best to support your child through this transition. *Barbara Biermann, Division of Early Childhood Social Worker (bbierma@schools.nyc.gov)*

Coping With Kindergarten Talk

It's been a mixed up, unpredictable year! Children in hybrid learning have been in and out of the classroom and forced into 100% remote learning when Covid cases surged. It's been a bit like whack-a-mole. Here we are in May. For many of you, it is the first time your child has attended five-day-a-week in-person instruction. Teachers report that for the most part children are transitioning well.

What has been predictable about the year is the arrival of spring! As welcoming as the warmer weather has been, spring can bring unsettling changes. We know children itch to get outside and move. Talk of kindergarten has begun. Children just getting used to being in school five days a week are now faced with the prospect of changing grades, teachers, and in some cases schools.

While it seems our children have become change experts, the anticipation and uncertainty of turning five-years-old and moving into a grade where expectations different is stressful. As adults, we have developed ways of coping with stress. Young children haven't lived long enough to develop reliable coping skills. They don't always have the ability to express their feelings verbally. They don't always understand what they feel. Young children rid themselves of stress and scary feelings by ACTING!

- **Regression:** Stepping backward developmentally when stressed out. When a change looms, old behaviors like thumb sucking, bathroom accidents, or baby talk returns.
- **Denial:** A refusal to accept reality or fact. Children may say, "I'm not going to kindergarten." When challenged, a heated debate ensues.
- **Acting Out:** Big feelings are expressed with big behaviors.

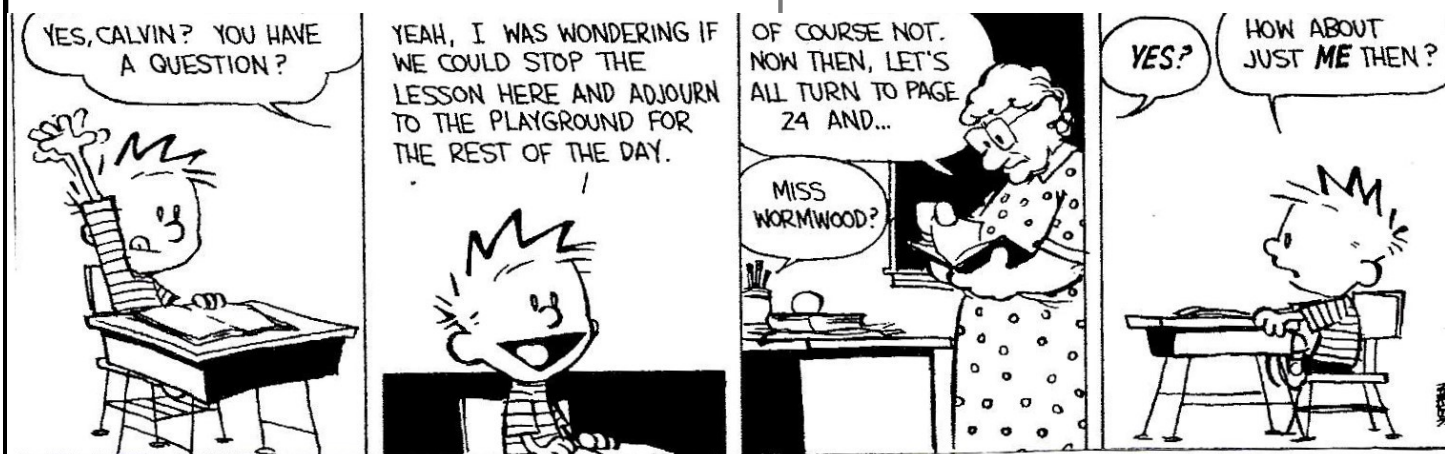
Throwing a book or having a temper tantrum releases pressure helping your child feel calmer.

- **Zoning Out:** A brief mental vacation from the real world. Mentally escaping to a different world where thoughts and feelings aren't overwhelming.
- **You Take it. I Don't Want It:** Giving unwanted or confusing feelings, thoughts, or impulses to someone else. *I am worried I might not do well in kindergarten because I don't write my name as nice as Aisha, so I tell her she's a terrible writer.*
- **Believing the Opposite:** Turning unwanted confusing thoughts, feelings or impulses around. *I am upset that we won't be in the same school next year, so I tell you, "You're not my friend!"*

Helping your child deal with the stress of change

- Talk about change (but not too much).
- Acknowledge your child's worries and fears.
- Help your child mark the change with excitement.
- Maintain family routines.
- Be sure your child eats well and gets plenty of sleep and exercise.
- Approach change positively.

You have weathered the 2020-2021 school year and all it's ups and downs. You got this transition to kindergarten!



Get the Most Out of Reading

Adapted from *Childhood Education* by Ernie Dettore

20 minutes a day is the gold standard when reading with children. For young children that means having an adult or older child read to them.

Picture books are written specifically for children who are developing preliterate skills. They blend stories with art. The illustrations are as important as the text and both work together to tell a story.

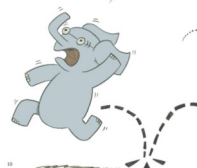
Hook Kids with Illustrations

"Don't judge a book by its cover." Well, children do it all the time. A child's first impression of a book comes from the pictures. Conduct "picture walks" through books by leafing through the pages to look at the images and discussing what you see. Illustrations have the power to draw in even the most reluctant listener. Illustrations can hook children into a lifelong love for reading.

Bring Books to Life

Illustrators usually tell stories with pictures. Authors use illustrations to depict specific scenes of high emotion or action. Sometimes the text is accompanied with action sounds. Read with passion and excitement, and give the characters voices!

Aaaaaaaa



See the World

Don't overlook non fiction books. Children love to learn about the world outside of their neighborhood. There are many fun fact books about animals, castles, trains, and the world. Reading books with informational text exposes them to the bigger world and sometimes confirms what they already know. Check out books like the *Magic School Bus* and *How Things Work* series.

Build Reading Skills

Pictures help increase vocabulary, an important building block for reading. When a word is supported by a picture it becomes easier for your child to remember. If they have a visual image that has been implanted by a picture, half the work is done. The combination of the sound of the word + the picture + the written text = the ability to read!



The Caldecott Medal

Named in honor of 19th century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott, it is awarded annually to the ARTIST of the most distinguished American picture book for children. This year's winner:

We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom

*If you want your children to be intelligent,
read them fairy tales.*

*If your them to be more intelligent,
read them more fairy tales.*

- Albert Einstein



Instill a Love of Math



Parents are bombarded with messages to read with their children, but it's not as common to hear about the importance of doing math with them.

Early Math Matters. Early exposure to math lays the foundation for the rest of their thinking lives. It is important to help children love math while they are young. Parents can build on preschool lessons by counting with their children, looking for patterns and shapes, and then moving on to what numbers represent.

The goal is to make math "real" and meaningful by pointing it out in the world around you. Check and compare prices at the grocery store and read recipes. When we get back to eating out regularly again, take a measuring tape with you. While you wait for the food, measure everything on the table!

So What If It's Hard? What if you hated math as a child? Set aside your distaste and encourage your child as much as possible. Young children are eager to learn. It's hard to learn to talk and walk, but they didn't care and pushed themselves over their limits. Just think of the possibilities if your children could approach math with that same attitude.

Avoid talking negatively about math. A lot of people joke that they cannot do math or announce publicly, "*I'm not a math person.*" When a parent does that in front of a child, it suggests that math's not important. Attitude has everything to do with learning.

Play Games. Math is something that requires work. That doesn't mean that it can't be fun. Many games rely on math. The classics require manipulating cards and game pieces, calculating along the way, and may have the same appeal for your kids as they did for you. A study by Carnegie Mellon and the University of Maryland found that preschoolers who played Chutes and Ladders improved their math skills significantly compared with those who played non-math games.

Flexing Math Muscles. Riding a bike, swimming in the deep end of the pool, and playing a musical instrument are examples of childhood activities that require practice to master. So does math. Think of math as a muscle that must exercised to grow. If school is the only place your child does math, it will become something they only do at school.

Look around. Math is everywhere and we use it everyday (even if you aren't a "*math person*"). So if you have negative feelings about math, brush them off so you can instill enthusiasm in your budding mathematician.

Adapted from PBS.org by Laura Lewis Brown