

Why Social Skills Are Key to Learning

Instill in your kids the social skills they need to acquire before they can learn academics.

You may be hoping your child will learn how to read and write in the first few months of preschool or kindergarten. But there are many other skills that she needs to master before an academic focus is appropriate. Studies show that the most important skills to learn in the beginning of the year are social: cooperation, self-control, confidence, independence, curiosity, empathy, and communication.

The First Basic Skills: The Four Cs

Here are a few examples of teachers' goals for the beginning of the school year. Ask your child's teacher to tell you about her objectives and her suggestions on how you can support these skills at home.

- **Confidence:** One of the first skills teachers focus on is the development of your child's sense of confidence or self-esteem. This means helping her feel good about who she is, both individually and in relationship to others. This is a lifelong skill that will help her feel competent now and as she continues in her schooling.
- **Cooperation:** Games, stories, and songs help your child learn how to work with others — no small task at this age! This teaches him how to empathize and to get along with others.
- **Curiosity:** Perhaps one of the most important skills she needs to develop at this stage is a true thirst for learning. Her teacher will use a wide variety of interesting materials and ideas to engage your child's natural curiosity.
- **Communication:** Expressing himself and representing his ideas, feelings, and knowledge about the world is a key skill for your child. It is at the core of all reading, writing, math, and science skills.

What You Can Do

Help your child develop essential social and emotional skills by making connections with school friends at home. Ask her whom she would like to invite for a playdate. It is often easier for children to make friends in their own space, one on one, than in school. Many teachers have found that a child who is having difficulties making friends or sharing in a large group often can make a close connection to a new friend on her "home turf." This relationship can then carry over to the classroom setting. Once there is a connection to one child in the classroom, more are soon to follow!

The Importance of Play

For your young child, play is important work. He grows, learns, and investigates the world through play. This happens through complex play activities that invite him to think, problem-solve, and participate in fantasy. When your child engages in play, he has to [plan](#), create a focus, and strive for a goal — all essential life and work skills. Your child's teacher should provide play situations throughout your child's day. She may first introduce letters and numbers through meaningful dramatic play, block-building, and literature/music experiences. So don't fret if your child comes home saying he played all day! You can be sure that with his teacher's guidance and his own innate curiosity, he was applying very important problem-solving, reading, math, and science skills right in the midst of his play.

The experiences your child receives in the beginning of the year provide the foundation that will enable her to become an enthusiastic lifelong learner — enthusiastic because she has discovered that learning is fun as well as meaningful.