**The Next Step…. Looking ahead**

Whilst in our care we are mindful of what is expected of the children when they leave us to continue at the next school, this gives an insight and to a lesser degree what we expect the children to be capable of when they arrive and what we build upon to prepare them…..

Changes for adults can be challenging, daunting and perhaps even a little frightening, so you can imagine how a child feels when presented with a major change in their life. So what to do to help children cope with these transitions in their lives and help you has a parent assist them.

One of the major factors will be knowing what is expected and preparing the child accordingly and of course support and love from the parents.

So the big day approaches, preschool days will draw to a close and it’s time for the next “giant step” A survey by a teaching web site conducted a survey of five eminent teachers in the field and came up with the following skills expected.

 Some of these may surprise you, but let’s not lose sight of the fact; these are young children, not teenagers preparing for university.

The teachers are happy if the children know some letters, some numbers and the like, but of paramount importance is the child’s attitude and being eager to learn. We in Daisy Chain work towards this goal through play and the curriculum we draw up to open the child’s mind to the wonderful world we live in and the joy of learning and play.

**So what are the skills?**

1. An enthusiastic attitude towards learning
2. Solid language skills
3. Being able to listen
4. A sense of independence
5. Being able to play well with others
6. Strong motor skills
7. Basic Letter and number recognition
8. Toilet Trained
9. Polite and well mannered

So what to do?

**An enthusiastic attitude towards learning**

We all know that children are fascinated by the world in which they live and of course see you as a font of all knowledge who can answer each and every question. It is impossible to be able to answer every question raised, but rather than ignore the question or change the subject we can engender within the child the idea of finding out how to find answers and how fulfilling it is to discover things. By doing this, their approach to learning will be enthusiastic, they will like exploring and discovering, will ask questions and learn to use initiative and be persistent. By setting aside a little time to engage with the child in different ways, and during walks etc. point out the different flowers, birds, cars and animals you open up new horizons, the child notices more, become curious and have more questions……

**Solid language skills**

We all know how frustrating it can be wrestling with a foreign language to sometimes even get the most basic message across, imagine then the world of the child, so many new things, an insatiable curiosity and the desire to learn and talk….

Teachers need to talk to the children in order to engage with them and fire their imaginations, it is vital that parents help build the child’s vocabulary and therefore their ability to talk by taking them to new places and building upon what they see, so this is a greengrocers shop, this is a shoe shop, that is a van whilst the bigger vehicle is a lorry, this is a stream, if bigger it would be a river, that is an oak tree, the other tree is an elm……

Some research shows that one of the best predictors of better reading later on is for the child to have a well-developed vocabulary. Play group age children can learn words at the rate of five to six a day on average, it is amazing how they retain words you use if repeated several times.

**Being able to listen**

**We all know the joy of curling up with a good book, or reading an interesting article in a magazine or simply taking the time to go through the newspaper and read an interesting piece. You will recall that before you learnt to read yourself how you enjoyed being read a bed time story, or have the teacher read to you, how the words came alive. But in order to enjoy the richness that we all have access to in children’s books it is important that the child knows how to listen. Some children alas do not have parents who read to them (this is a skill in itself) but spend their time in front of a TV and later on a computer, these too are useful aids to the child’s development, but like everything else, moderation is the key. Listening to a story being read not only develops vocabulary but also comprehension, ask questions as you read the story, what would you do? What will happen next? And of course if you can be a little theatrical, change your voice for different characters etc.so much the better. Listening helps develop the child’s concentration and tune into sounds.** Singing also helps in this, hence the reason we have the children sing.

**A sense of independence**

We all like to do things for our children and we all know that eventually the child wants to do things by his/her self. They will struggle learning how to put on their coats and button it up properly, how to tie their shoelaces, eat their food by themselves and this should be encouraged, it helps the child grow, gain confidence and makes them understand the importance of looking after things and themselves. Believe it or not some children are not encouraged to do things and in some cases this leads to the child expecting to be waited on etc., not a good trait in one so young! Of course a little patience is needed; they won’t be expected to do everything at once but should be able to:

1. Get coats on and off and hang them up
2. Follow simple two-step instructions such as "take off your boots and put on your sneakers"
3. Go to the bathroom and wash their hands
4. Blow their nose and cover their mouth when they cough
5. Fasten and unfasten simple buttons and snaps
6. Eat neatly and pour into a cup
7. Open up a juice box and get the straw in.

 Remember the teachers have to look after all the children, a little self-help is good

**Being able to play well with others**

We all know of the importance of cooperation within the workplace, in sports, at home. These are skills that we have learnt as we go through life. Children to begin with, in most cases are self-centred and need help in developing vital social skills such as sharing, taking turns problem solving and compromise. It takes time to learn these skills, but children quickly learn what is acceptable and what is not, that something’s can’t be used by two people at the same time that at times you have to wait. By rewarding good social behaviour (praise is enough) and by introducing the concepts when you play with the child, they will quickly pick up on accepted standards. Help them to resolve conflicts, help them see the effects of bad behaviour and by doing so you will help nurture compassion and empathy.

**Strong fine motor skills**

You will recall from your first days at school, or learning a new skill how difficult the simplest things can be, until you have practised, muscle memory is developed, techniques learnt and of course hand/eye coordination is harmonised.

Think back to the first time you used a crayon, fine lines were so thick, and then recall your first attempts at writing, not so much legible as more akin to modern art….. ☺

In order to keep up with what is being taught and not fall behind, children need to be able to hold a pencil correctly, it can be a strain to begin with and will make them frustrated, but persevere, give them simple tasks to do to exercise the fingers and hand muscles and find out through trial and error which size pencil best suits them. We do not want to lose a budding William Shakespeare, Salvador Dali or Beethoven.

**Basic Letter and number recognition**

Of course children go to school at whatever level to learn, this is why we have teachers of course, but it does help if the children have at least a rudimentary understanding of the basics. What can be counterproductive is subjecting the child to a barrage of workbooks, flashcards and the like, remember they are children and treat them accordingly. By being creative and imaginative and making the learning fun, a lot more will be achieved. Think of games where the by product is what you want them to learn, tell your daughter to give 3 biscuits to each of the guests at the dolls tea party, have your son sort out the different coloured pencils, show them what letters spell their name etc…. above all, enjoy.

**Toilet Trained**

This of course speaks for itself, the children want to be independent, use this to teach them and incorporate basic hygiene into the process.

**Polite and well mannered**

No one likes rude people, nor rude children or children who are unaware of how to behave amongst others. Of course this will be taught but you would be amazed at how many children do not know how to say please or thank you, how to clean up after themselves or expect to be waited on. We have a saying in English, “the child is father of the man” wise words and something to remember when teaching your children…….