



## Can kids get kicked out of daycare?



When my children started Kindergarten, it was exciting but also somewhat stressful. I wondered what they were expected to know and if they would have the skills needed to participate at age level. Had I done enough to prepare them as they started school? As a parent, we want our children to be able to go into any environment having the confidence and skills to not only participate but to be successful. We want our kids to interact with others, be able to sit and attend to the activities presented, follow a routine as they go through their day. We want them to play and have fun with their friends. Preparing our children for these situations is much easier when you know what is expected. The last thing a parent wants to hear is their child is being kicked out of daycare and it happens! The child may be too aggressive, bites excessively, is disruptive to the point of not being able to participate with others. How can we be a positive component in preparing our children for what is to come?

By knowing what your baby can learn during each stage of development makes it easier to direct their play to ensure they are meeting their developmental milestones. When they are in a new environment, they will be able to follow a routine, participate in activities and interact appropriately.

Hands-on play working with books, blocks, puzzles, shape sorters, coloring activities and other learning activities all provide foundational skills. This type of play builds attention, problem solving skills, hand strength, endurance, and coordination for higher more complex skills of writing, making things using their hands and using scissors. It takes time to build skills allowing a child to attend, understand concepts, follow simple instructions, and have muscle strength and coordination for higher level learning.

Our kids are starting kindergarten and cannot hold a pencil correctly. They are struggling to keep up with the amount of writing and hands-on activities that is completed during the year. During Kindergarten they learn to read and can read several books by the end of the year. There are many writing activities, crafts, and projects that require a child to sit and attend and use more complex fine motor skills to complete the task. Without foundational skills, children will struggle to keep up, and will have problems participating in the activities. This sets the stage for future learning and can affect their attitude about school. After struggling through the year, their confidence is affected and feelings toward school most likely will be negative.

Children can receive occupation therapy to address these issues and it can take up to 6 months to make progress in these areas. The therapist works with the child to learn the basic foundational skills (which occur all throughout the years prior to Kindergarten) but also works to ensure the child is learning the new skills taught in Kindergarten. Talk about stress on your little one! Confidence is built when we can

participate and learn along with others but constantly being behind and not being able to do what your peers are doing has a detrimental effect on learning and will result in a negative attitude about school.

Skill building starts early as grasp and dexterity begin during tummy time as an infant. Children need tummy time for trunk control, neck and back extensors, upper body strength, shoulder stability and strengthening of hand muscles for an appropriate grasp to develop. As a child gets into the 18-24 month range you can set up some structured play for hands-on activities to include turning pages in a book, pointing at pictures, working with puzzles, building with blocks, and coloring. "Let them be babies" some people say. Yes, they are babies, but their brain is developing at a very rapid pace and many foundations skills develop during this early period. And the thing is, children learn through play. Playing is their occupation (occupations are functional activities during their day). They are happiest when they are engaged in meaningful play activities. Why not set up their play where they can learn new things? They are going to move anyway whether you direct it or not. Without direction your toddler will have unsurmountable energy and you will follow them around saying "no" throughout the day. They run around the house, climb, jump on the couch and anything else they can do to provide their bodies and brains needed stimulation. If we direct their play into functional activities, you will have a much happier, better behaved child. You will also be preparing your child for Kindergarten where they need to have many of these foundational skills to participate at age level. If we can direct that energy into meaningful play you might get some rest!

## How can we provide the best opportunity for learning and developing?

### 1. Start early! Allow tummy time.

Babies need to be on their tummies. Get in the floor, talk, and play with your baby. Your baby is learning to press up on extended arms, roll over and move to hands and knees in a very short amount of time.

### 2. Limit time in carriers and bouncy seats

Kids do not move as much when they are in carriers or bouncy seats. When they are in bouncy seats, they are using a select group of leg muscles to press up into standing and then they relax their legs for their body to return. They do this over and over to bounce. When they start to crawl, they have no reciprocal arm/leg movement, their legs muscles are strong, and their arm muscles are weak. They move their legs like a frog because that is the movement they have been practicing every time they are in a bouncy seat. Floor time is best to develop all the muscles and to give opportunity for your baby to figure out movements for transitions (how to roll, pivot, move into sitting)

### 3. Provide hands-on activities in structured and unstructured play starting at 18 months

Ten to fifteen minutes 1-2 times each day with structured activities provides time to complete hand over hand assistance if needed to learn new skills. Work with single piece puzzles, build with blocks, assist your child with coloring (part of the goal is to color on the paper and not put the crayon in the mouth) but remember you are teaching these things. Help your child point out pictures in a book. By helping

your child participate and learn how to do these types of activities (which are age appropriate) you are allowing opportunity to learn many skills. Do not refrain from giving your child a puzzle or book because he is not interested, or you do not think he is ready. Show him the puzzle, identify the pictures on the pieces, let him play with the pieces. If they get thrown, then assist him to put the pieces to the board. Throwing objects is appropriate at 9-12 months not two to three years. You may have to help turn the pieces to get the pieces in the board but that is ok. That is part of the learning process and what you are teaching. You can use these activities to address language as you name the items in the pictures and they can place the pieces to the board. You can also address turn taking. Put learning time into your daily routine and your child will begin to participate and amaze you with learning new things! Make learning time fun! Attention is learned and by providing a routine of learning time, you will address cognition (thinking skills), language development, social interactions, gross and fine motor skills.

#### 4. Limit screen time:

Studies are showing an increased amount of screen time is a leading cause to weak hand muscles and delays in development in fine motor skills as children have limited hands-on play time. Increased screen time leads to language delays, problems with attention and behavior. Screen time should not be allowed under 18 months other than video chat. Passive screen time for children under five years old, should be limited to one hour per day. It is addicting and behaviors can be horrible when it is taken away from a child that has been allowed to have a phone or tablet for extensive time during the day. I have witnessed major breakdowns (screaming for over 30 minutes) when a phone was taken away. In one case, the mom gave the phone back to her daughter who was still screaming and said that was the only thing that would calm her down. That is a number one reason to believe there is a problem and reason NOT to give it to her. The more they have screen time the more they want it.

#### 5. Sleep (what is that? You may ask )

Make sure your child is getting enough sleep and ensure it is quality sleep.

0-3 months	14-17 hours/24 hours including naps
4-12 months	12-16 hours/24 hours including naps
1-2 years	11-14 hours per 24 hours including naps
3-5 years	10-13 hours per 24 hours including naps
6-12 years	12 hours
13-18 years	8-10 hours

The National Sleep Foundation reports that screen time (blue light emission) affect the levels of production of melatonin which affects our sleep pattern (circadian rhythm) and level of alertness. It will also affect the quality of sleep. Screen time tends to affect REM sleep (when dreams occurs) so even though a child may be sleeping, it is not restful, quality sleep. The CDC recommends not having TVs in children's room and to stop any screen time a few hours before bedtime.

So bottom line, get up, get moving, and PLAY! Your children will be more active, more engaged and you will be amazed at what they can learn before they ever start school!

If you are not sure what your child should be learning, please check out our OT Boxes that will provide you information along with toys, items and activities to use to address development in each area (cognitive, language, gross motor, fine motor, self-help and social skills) each month. By subscribing, your child will receive a monthly OT Box with developmentally appropriate learning activities and you will have access to a pediatric occupational therapist who can answer your questions about your child's development, recommend appropriate toys, help you with setup and strategies to help you get your child to engage in learning.

Play time is learning time! Don't miss out!

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