

What Parents Should Know



An excerpt from:
Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)
Education Standards: What Parents Should Know
It's Okay to Play in VPK!

Designed to help families understand how they can
create developmentally appropriate learning
environments for their children.

Research shows that young children learn best through hands-on experiences. While this may look like “just play,” it is actually active learning. When young children explore things directly with their hands and practice new skills through play, they are learning in ways that are meaningful to them at the stage of development.

Regarding:

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical health and learning go hand-in-hand. Physical activity supports every aspect of development. With their increased coordination, balance, and strength, four-year-olds are great explorers of their environments. They are able to accept learning challenges that were out of their reach just a few short months ago. When children are physically active and healthy, their learning is enhanced. Encouraging their bodies to move, act, and react, children gain self-confidence. These experiences are related in ways that facilitate language learning. They are also developing skills that enable them to become responsible managers in managing their health, safety, and physical fitness.

Four-year-old children love to move, and their increasing coordination and motor skills open up new opportunities for active exploration of their environment. Research and experience confirm that free play alone is not sufficient for the development of planned movement activities are needed. Exposure to many different types of movements should be encouraged rather than high performance in particular skills.

Here are some examples of activities that support children's physical health:

At Home:

- Practice brushing and flossing teeth and practice together.
- Encourage children to wash their hands often. Talk about how germs are spread and the impact germs have on us.
- While grocery shopping or fixing a snack, talk about choosing healthy, nutritious foods over unhealthy ones.
- Provide daily unstructured times for physical activities (e.g., going on a bike ride, kicking a ball back and forth, taking a walk).
- Provide children with opportunities to use a variety of tools (e.g., writing tools, tongs, egg beaters, screwdriver).
- Display children's writing and artwork on the fridge or display board, or frame as gifts for relatives.
- Provide a variety of materials for children to practice zipping, snapping, buttoning, and tying.

PHYSICAL HEALTH-continued

During Outdoor Play

- Set up an obstacle course in the yard or on the playground for children to explore.
- Act out fire safety procedures (e.g., stop, drop, and roll).
- Create simple exercise routines with music.
- Increase outdoor time and decrease screen time (e.g., television, computer and video games).
- Allow children to practice riding a tricycle around the yard or driveway.
- Play games that involve kicking a ball with a two-step start.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

Social and emotional readiness is critical to a child's successful transition to kindergarten. Young children who are able to understand and express their own feelings, understand the viewpoint and feelings of others, cooperate with peers and adults, and resolve conflicts, are more likely to be successful in school. Positive relationships with teachers lead to positive relationships with peers.

Four-year-old children are developing important skills needed to join in conversations, ask questions, and listening to other people. They learn how to interact with a variety of people and in different situations.

Here are examples of activities that encourage social and emotional development:

At Home

- Support children when they make mistakes. Acknowledge their effort. Tell child, "I see you worked hard on that." or "You almost made it."
- Model respect for others and social skills like not interrupting others when they are speaking.
- Introduce children to other adults and children.
- Recognize and display children's artwork.
- Follow a consistent daily routine so children know what to expect.

During Outdoor Play

- Encourage friendly play on a playground, cooperates with other children.
- Encourage turn taking on playground equipment.
- Create activities that require children to work together in order to accomplish goals.
- Observe the children as they play to solve conflicts and provide modeling of appropriate resolution skills (e.g., "When you are frustrated/angry, tell your friend with words.")

LANGUAGE, COGNITION, AND EMERGENT LITERACY

When placed in environments that are rich in language, new experiences, and conversation, children develop skills in understanding what others say to them and in using spoken language to express their own ideas and experiences.

Learning to read and learning to write are among children's most important achievements. These skills open the door to a world of learning, discovery, and creativity. Children who have early experiences with books and other forms of print (e.g., recipes and road signs) are more likely to come to school excited about learning to read and write.

LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, AND EMERGENT LITERACY-continued

Here are examples of activities that encourage children’s language and communication development, and that support emergent literacy in children:

At Home

- Ask children questions (e.g., “What was your favorite part of the day?” “What did you do today?” “What did you play with?”).
- Read stories to children and ask who, what, where, when, and why questions about the story.
- Speak clearly, at a comfortable pace and an easily heard volume, inside and outdoors.
- Engage children in conversation. Follow their lead in the conversation.
- Create comfortable, inviting spaces for reading. Provide good lighting, and make the space cozy by adding pillows, bean bag chairs, and a book basket.
- Model appropriate book handling on a daily basis by holding the books upright and putting them back on the shelf or in the book basket.
- Play a clapping game with the children, clapping once while saying each syllable of children’s names.
- Provide books that are at the appropriate reading level.
- Include children in use of written materials (e.g., menus, signs, and labels) and show them how they might be used.

During Outdoor Play

- Play Simon Says and scavenger hunt games using prepositions, and descriptor words (e.g., behind the big red slide).
- Take children on field trips and to assemblies to create a shared topic to discuss.
- Take children on nature walks and ask questions about what they see to start a conversation going.
- Provide dramatic play props (e.g., food, red cloths, pretend tools) for children to use when re-enacting a story.
- Encourage children to practice writing letters on paper or dirt.

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND CURIOUSITY

Mathematical and Scientific Thinking involves the skills and strategies that children use to explore and learn about their world. Children begin to compare and manipulate sets of objects. Children also begin to identify and compare two- and three-dimensional shapes and notice more symmetry as they work with blocks and other concrete objects. The natural world and physical objects are fascinating to four-year-old children. When adults respond to children’s questions, inquisitiveness and scientific thinking are fostered.

Children demonstrate knowledge of social studies by identifying attributes of familiar people and places and relationships. They are developing new ways of examining and noticing places and the environment. Group activities are becoming easier to understand and follow, and four-year-old children have a beginning understanding of leadership.

The arts give children with opportunities to express ideas and feelings, use words, manipulate tools and media, and solve problems. Through the arts, children learn to express what they know, pursue their own interests and abilities, and appreciate the contributions of others. They begin to understand that others can be creative in different ways and show appreciation for these differences by asking questions and commenting.

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE / COGNITIVE-continued

Here are examples of activities that support children's mathematical and scientific thinking and understanding of social studies and the arts:

At Home

- Incorporate math into everyday activities (e.g., counting body parts, how many places to set at the dinner table, counting as high as possible before the traffic light changes from red to green).
- Provide supervised opportunities to examine how tools work (e.g., looking at and discussing what is taking apart broken appliances).
- With close supervision, involve children in the meaningful use of household tools (e.g., eggbeater, whisks on the refrigerator, funnels).
- Provide one-to-one matching activities (e.g., spoon and fork, nuts and bolts).
- Identify shapes around the house (e.g. door is rectangular).
- Introduce new scientific tools (e.g., thermometers and calculators) and discuss who might use them for the job.
- Allow children to use markers, chalk, finger paint, etc., to express themselves.
- Play different types of music in the CD player on the ride to and from school and on the way home in the car.
- Encourage children to participate in family chores (e.g., making beds, taking out the trash).
- Make family trees to show similarities and differences in family.
- Encourage children to ask questions about other families (e.g., how do they celebrate holidays, who goes to work).

During Outdoor Play

- Go on a nature walk to collect leaves, rocks, and other objects that draw children's attention to patterns and shapes in nature.
- Create obstacle courses that require moving in different directions and locations.
- Teach songs, games, dances, and skits that include positional words (up, down, over, and around).
- Discuss with children reasons for planting flowers while on the walk.
- Assist children as they follow a path to find a specific object on the ground.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Approaches to Learning is about specific knowledge content or skills. It is about how the child learns new skills. Some four-year-olds are comfortable experimenting with the unknown, exploring, and accepting new challenges, while others need more structure and encouragement to try new things. The role of teachers, parents, and other adults should be to provide opportunities for success. All children, regardless of learning style or special needs, can learn and be successful.

Here are examples of activities that encourage children to explore their environment and actively engage in learning:

- Encourage children to think, wonder, and ask more questions. Use open-ended questions that begin with who, what, when, where, why, or how, and that cannot be answered with just "yes" or "no."
- Include children in planning special events (e.g., birthday parties, family vacation, weekend activities).
- During dinner, in the car, or at bath time, provide opportunities for children to discuss and review what they did during the day.

During Outdoor Play

- Plan a project (e.g., woodworking or gardening) and ask children for input.
- Plan and build a fort in the yard or on the playground together.
- Introduce new equipment and materials and talk about the different ways they might be used.