



happy, healthy,

# REAdy

for school!

a magazine for  
parents and caregivers  
Spring 2004

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Healthy Preschool  
Years Will Give Your  
Child an Energetic  
School Start

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Ordinary Moments Present  
Golden Opportunities to  
Promote Sharing and  
Respect for Others

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Reading, Writing,  
and Beyond: Real-Life  
Exploration of  
Numbers, Shapes,  
Colors, and More



A service of PNC Grow Up Great  
In partnership with Sesame Workshop  
Helping children get ready for school

## Get ready to learn.



Encouraging kids to become strong learners before they set foot in the classroom is crucial to their future success. That's why PNC has invested \$100 million in PNC Grow Up Great, a program that provides parents with great tools to help their kids prepare for school and, ultimately, for life.

One of these tools, the *Happy, Healthy, Ready for School Kit*, was developed for PNC Grow Up Great by Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization behind Sesame Street. This helpful resource gives parents tips on how to get their preschoolers excited about learning every day. Whether at the dinner table or grocery store, during bedtime or bath time, these helpful lessons will assist parents in making the most of every moment with their children.

Make a real difference in a child's life today. Stop by your local branch, visit [www.pnc.com](http://www.pnc.com) or call 877-PNC-GROW.



A program to help prepare kids for school every day.

## Making the most of the preschool years

Children begin learning from the day they are born. As your child's first and best teacher, you provide her first "classroom," in your home, your car, your grocery store, and – most importantly – your lap.

There is a direct path from your front door to the school's doorstep. When your child eventually goes to kindergarten, she will have learned literally thousands of things from you. Over time, you will have helped her become ready for school in every way possible:

- 1 Physically**, you will have seen to it that she is strong, healthy, rested, energetic, and prepared to continue her learning experience.
- 2 Emotionally**, you will have given her the tools to handle her own feelings and understand those of others. She will have the social skills to share with others, to understand different perspectives, and to cope with whatever challenges each day brings.
- 3 Academically**, she will arrive at school understanding something about the world beyond her home and with a strong sense that reading and writing are adventures that are just beginning. She will have an idea of how numbers work and will be able to grasp concepts such as colors and shapes. She will express herself joyfully in scribbles that gradually yield to recognizable letters, numbers, and shapes. Her curiosity will have become even more boundless with your encouragement.

The process by which all this happens is not mysterious, nor does it require months set aside for endless school-like activities. It's woven into the threads of everyday life. Part instinct, part savvy, it's pure magic. This publication is a blueprint for how it all happens.

**Marie Hodge**  
EDITOR

Happy, Healthy, Ready for School was developed by Sesame Workshop and funded by PNC Grow Up Great, a ten-year program to prepare young children for school and life, so that an entire generation won't just grow up...but grow up great.



## Getting a healthy start

For your child to get the most out of school, he should have every opportunity available to give him optimum energy, vitality, and concentration. Healthy habits start with the things you already do, such as bringing your child to the doctor and dentist for regular checkups and immunizations.

Your child will continue building a firm foundation for learning through good nutrition, physical activity, and sound sleep habits. You'll also need to be on the lookout for hearing or vision problems that can make listening, seeing, and learning more difficult.



## See that your child eats right

Eating right provides your child with the energy to be enthusiastic and focused. Typically, preschoolers have three snack-size meals and two healthful snacks a day.

- You decide what your child eats and when, but it's up to the child to decide how much. If most of your child's meals are healthful, he will naturally eat the amount that is right for his growing body.
- If your child doesn't want to eat, don't force the issue. Forcing your child to eat when he is not hungry encourages overeating, which can lead to weight gain.
- Introduce one new food at a time. Be patient. Remember, it can take a while for your child to develop new tastes.
- Certain items such as candy and fried foods can be enjoyed as an occasional treat in limited amounts.
- Breakfast really *is* the most important meal of the day and gives your child the fuel to start his day.
- Sit down and eat with your child. He will mimic your good eating habits.

## mealtime tips

### HERE ARE WAYS TO MAKE MEALS FUN FOR BOTH OF YOU:

- Buttermilk pancakes can be made ahead of time and frozen individually. Then just warm them in the toaster oven. Make them more fun – and nutritious – by adding blueberries for eyes, a raisin for a nose, and sliced strawberries for a mouth.
- Planning makes snack time easier. Cut cheese into cubes. Keep celery, carrot sticks, and fruit-flavored yogurt on hand.
- Cut up fruit, drizzle a little juice on it, and leave it in the refrigerator for a quick snack.
- Present foods in a fun way. Cut sandwiches into shapes such as triangles or circles – or use your favorite cookie cutter. Bake mini-muffins. Or make bite-size meatballs instead of hamburgers.
- Pizza, especially with vegetable toppings, can be a healthful fast-food choice. Tacos can be fun, too, and reinforce eye-hand coordination when children put their own favorites into a tortilla shell or wrap.
- Children eat better with “friends.” A favorite doll or stuffed animal can be seated at the table to serve as a “friend.” Better yet, make mealtime a family affair. Turn off the TV and enjoy each other’s company.



## Get physical with skill building

Your preschooler is becoming more sure-footed every day. She is developing her body in new ways, learning to jump, climb, skip, and hop – skills that build on one another. This skill building is another form of learning.

Developing her large-muscle, or gross-motor, skills increases her strength and stamina. Here’s how to further encourage development of her gross-motor skills and coordination while having fun:

- Give her a tricycle or pedaling toy.
- Walk to the park, where she can climb and swing on the gym equipment.
- Play catch or kick a ball in the backyard.
- Get your child involved in group or individual activities such as soccer, jump rope, or swimming.
- Play a tape or CD of music, and dance to the beat with her.

Your child’s small-muscle, or fine-motor, skills are yet another part of his step-by-step development. Eye-hand coordination will enable him to draw, scribble, and write.

- Plan art projects that include drawing, cutting with safety scissors, and pasting.
- Do puzzles that have pieces of different sizes.
- Provide toys that allow for sorting or stacking.
- Offer trains or cars that need to be pushed along a track.
- Use clay to make things he can play with, using his imagination.
- Let your child dress himself as much as possible. Buttons, snaps, and Velcro™ closures help him develop those fine-motor skills.

## To hear, to see, to learn

Hearing and vision are crucial to language development and other learning skills. Yet problems with hearing or sight can be difficult to spot unless they are severe. Make sure your child's checkups include tests for vision and hearing. Don't hesitate to check with your pediatrician if you're concerned about your child's development in these areas.

- If your child gets frequent ear or upper respiratory-tract infections, a hearing test may be in order. Hearing, language development, and learning can all be affected by frequently blocked ears.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends your child get her first vision screening no later than age 3. At the office of your pediatrician or a pediatric ophthalmologist, take advantage of special vision tests for preschoolers that don't require knowledge of the alphabet.



## bedtime & bath time

→ Because sleep is so important to your child's ability to learn, it's a good idea to establish a nightly routine for your child. You can start with a calming bath and toothbrushing. Then read a bedtime story your child has selected from his library.



## Children need lots of sleep

Having a good night's rest helps children start their day with the ability to go-go-go. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 typically need about 10 hours of sleep at night, as well as a nap during the day. Your 3-year-old may need to nap for 60 to 90 minutes every day, whereas a 5-year-old may need only 30 to 60 minutes of quiet time.

Here are several ways to be sure your preschooler has a good night's rest:

- Don't expect your child to say, "I'm tired; I'm going to bed." You say when it is bedtime. Make it the same time every night to get your child used to falling asleep at a certain time.
- Preschoolers are notorious negotiators. Head off your child's stalling tactics by anticipating them. Make sure he goes to the bathroom *before* getting into bed. Kiss him and his teddy bear good night.
- Soft, gentle music can help your child relax and prepare for sleep. But turn the music off when it's lights out.
- When you leave the bedroom, make sure it's conducive to sleep. Turn off the lights, and shut the door. Keep down noise in the house. Make sure the room temperature is just right – neither too hot nor too cold.

# 2

## Social & emotional readiness

Preschoolers are mastering the art of interacting with people – and they are great learners. They learn from watching and listening to you and to others with whom they come into contact. They are also figuring out how to master their own feelings and behavior.

Your child will use her maturing social and emotional skills to follow directions, make friends, share, take turns, and develop an understanding of similarities and differences in others. These skills, too, are a kind of learning.





## Following the leader

Following directions develops the important learning skill of listening – of paying attention and retaining information and acting on it.

- Your child will learn to handle the multipart tasks school requires if you ask her to do things that have progressively more steps to them. A two-step instruction might be: “Would you please take the truck from the couch and put it into the toybox?” Once your child masters that, you can add another step.
- Emphasize the importance of following directions by talking as you open and assemble new things, such as a bicycle.
- It is good to ask your child what can happen when directions are not followed exactly. (“What would this taste like if we added a cup of salt instead of a teaspoon?”)
- Play direction-following games such as Simon Says and Giant Steps.

## Becoming emotionally aware

Being able to express his own feelings and understand the feelings of others opens up a whole world for your child. Children who understand their feelings have a way of coping with both positive and negative situations. They feel more empathy for others and are better able to cooperate and to learn from them. Giving your child a vocabulary for his feelings sets the stage for a very deep level of learning.

- Help your child relate to his own feelings by identifying with them: “When I can’t find where a puzzle piece goes, I feel frustrated. Is that how you feel now?”

*continued on page 12*







Every day is an opportunity  
to do more for our children.

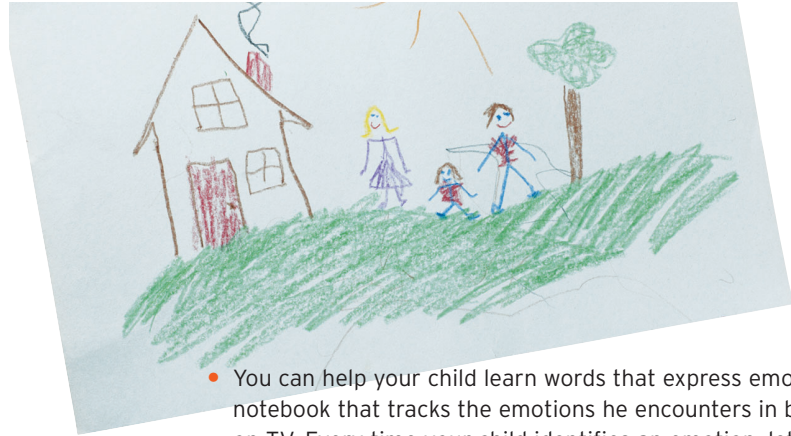
Introducing the PNC Grow Up Great Program, a \$100 million investment that brings together experts in preschool development to *help parents help their kids* become strong learners before they set foot in the classroom.

- PNC Grow Up Great gives parents the tools they need to get their preschoolers excited about learning at every opportunity - whether it's in the kitchen, the bathtub, supermarket or park. So they'll be better prepared for school and, ultimately, for life.
- PNC Grow Up Great was created so an entire generation won't just grow up, but grow up great.

Make a real difference in a child's life today. Stop by your local branch, visit [www.pnc.com](http://www.pnc.com) or call 877-PNC-GROW.



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- You can help your child learn words that express emotions using a notebook that tracks the emotions he encounters in books, life, even on TV. Every time your child identifies an emotion, let him draw something that relates to the feeling he has felt.
- Help your child distinguish subtler shades of feelings by teaching the difference between being angry and being frustrated or disappointed. Showing your child examples of these emotional states in everyday life will help him understand them in others.
- Help your child develop a sense of pride in himself by focusing on his achievements, such as learning to comb his hair or write his name. Keep a chart of the things he has accomplished.
- Listen to music with your child, and talk about the emotions it raises in him. Identify music that sounds happy and cheerful or sad and lonely. Then, with simple rhythm instruments such as blocks, bells, or whistles, create different kinds of music: happy, sad, soft, loud, fast, slow.

## Respect and understanding

The more your child is exposed to wider groups of people, the more she learns that things everywhere are not exactly as she perceives them to be in her own sphere. You can help her learn that everyone doesn't come from the same background; that there are differences among people but similarities, too – and both should be accepted. This allows her to interact with others, to cooperate, and to share more easily. It opens up her world.

## playtime sharing

- When your child shares of his own accord, praise him: "Did you give Dyson a turn with your favorite toy? I'm happy you did that!" If sharing bothers him, say, "When I give up something I like, I feel frustrated. Is that how you feel now?"



- It is easier for your preschooler to develop empathy for others' points of view when she is asked to look at situations from their perspective: "How would you feel if Jenny took the truck away from you?"
- Take notice when she helps another in need, and praise her for being considerate. Showing kindness should be reinforced as much as trying a new food or mastering a new skill.
- Help your child become aware of peers' cultures by teaching her about them – for instance, providing background on where a playmate's family comes from and some of their traditions. You can help her find information in the library, on the Internet, and by going to different food stores in different neighborhoods. Be as specific as possible: "When you go to Tina's house, her family might not eat the same things we do," or "Our next-door neighbors always walk barefoot in their home. It's just a different way of doing things."

## Share and share alike

The ability to take turns and share is important in learning the give-and-take, the negotiation involved in friendship and playing. Your child needs your help to become flexible and empathetic enough to share cheerfully.

- The best way for your child to understand about sharing and taking turns is by modeling those behaviors yourself. Always explain what you are doing and why.
- If there are sharing conflicts, intervene in a way that allows children to provide suggestions or resolve the problem: "I know you are both having trouble sharing your blocks, but can you think of a way you can use them together?"

# 3 The lure of language & learning

Preschoolers are naturally curious and ready to learn. Their world is full of opportunities to build language skills and expand general knowledge. You are already encouraging learning just by going about your everyday routines. There are lots of ways you can enrich ordinary moments to help your preschooler move out into the wider world, master language, prepare to read and write, and develop thinking skills.

It all starts with the natural curiosity that your child already has in abundance.



## Tell me why

Be responsive to and understanding of “why” questions. Your child is expressing her desire to learn about the world, and children need much more repetition than adults do before they master a concept.

- Sometimes it's good to turn the question back to your child and say, “Why do you think this is so?” or “I'm not sure. How can we find out more about this and figure it out?”
- Vocalize your own questions, such as “Which road do I take to get to Grandma's?” or “What kind of fruit should I buy?” Your child can learn how to answer questions or solve problems by listening to the way you do it.
- Promote curiosity and creativity by playing games to find different ways to use common objects. Ask your child, “What else could this straw be? Could it be a telescope?”

## A whole world for you to explore

Chatting casually with your child while you're at the zoo, in the store, visiting the library, riding in the car, or going on a picnic helps him understand how the world works.

- To broaden his vocabulary, use a variety of words to describe the same thing, such as “That truck is really big. It's huge. It's enormous.” Ask him to use similar words.
- The next time you take a walk through the park, name all the living things you pass (or all the things that are round or small or green), and then ask your child to describe them.
- Ask your child to name the items you put into your shopping cart at the grocery store, and add to his knowledge about each item.
- Help him learn the names and relationships of body parts by asking as he cleans himself during bath time, “What's this?” “Is that your toe? What is it connected to?” It's a fun way to ensure cleanliness.

## Colorful lessons

Colors are used as a way of labeling and categorizing things, in life and in school. This is another way for your child to use words and identify concepts.

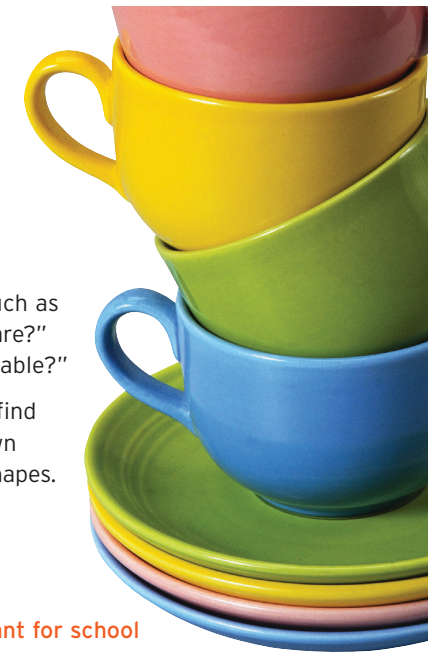
Let your child explore colors using crayons and colored markers, or by playing with toys that separate, stack, or organize by color. To help hone your child's mastery of color:

- When you sort laundry, ask her to find towels, shirts, or socks of one color.
- At the grocery store, ask her to help you find fruits and vegetables by color.
- While you're driving, point out traffic signs and signal colors. Explain their meaning: "That red sign means stop," "Yellow lights mean go slowly."
- Show her how the mall directory separates areas by color so you can find your way.

## Shapes

Shapes such as circles, squares, and triangles can be labeled and categorized; grouping objects helps children learn. You can foster your child's understanding of shapes by playing shape games, using coloring books to find shapes, and building with blocks. As children explore shapes, they develop a foundation for later math abilities.

- Send your child on a shape search in your home. Encourage him to look for a variety of interesting shapes including ovals, hexagons, and octagons.



- As you set the table together, ask questions such as "What do you see here that is shaped like a square?" "Do you see any circles?" "What shape is the table?"
- Give him old magazines and encourage him to find shapes in the pictures. He can then make his own book of cutout pictures that show a variety of shapes.

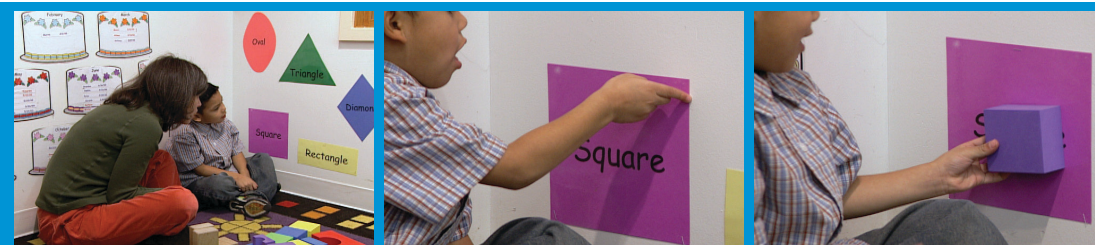
## One, two, three

Understanding what numbers mean is as important for school preparation as reading and writing. By playing counting games and exploring numbers with your child, you can help her remember numbers and understand how to use them.

- In the elevator, have her count along with the floor indicator. Count forward as you go up and backward as you go down.
- While you and your child are playing with blocks, make two piles. Ask your child to count how many blocks are in each pile. Now ask "How many are there all together?" "How many remain if you take two away?" Your child is adding and subtracting!
- When you are making dinner, ask your child to help you measure. Count four tablespoons of sugar or two cups of milk. She sees the amount as you add ingredients and hears the numbers at the same time.
- Fill two clear containers with objects and ask your child to guess which has more. Now, count the objects to compare and figure it out. Next, ask her to fill the containers and you guess!

## time to learn

- Talk about how squares look. They always have four equal sides and four angles. See how many different squares your child can find around his home.

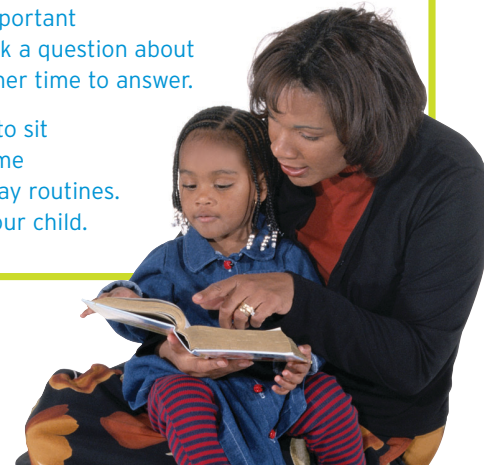


## reading tips

### GET YOUR CHILD READY FOR READING AND MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR STORYTIME WITH HER:

It's never too early to start reading to your child. Language development begins long before your child can talk. Cuddling your child on your lap helps cement a positive connection between reading and the pleasure of one-on-one time with a loved adult. You can help her get ready to read on her own, too.

- Sing together, play rhyming games, and read stories that rhyme. Rhymes help children recognize and remember the sounds that build words.
- Sing songs with lots of verses that let your child add new words.
- Point out signs at the zoo, the parking garage, and the shoe store that illustrate ways to give information. Use mall directories to show how signs help you locate things.
- Supply synonyms as you read words she may not know. If "corridor" is unfamiliar to her, say "That's a hallway."
- Help her understand the sequence of stories or events by asking questions: "What happened before that?" "What is happening now?" "What do you think will happen next?"
- Encourage her to make up different endings to favorite stories.
- Listening to your child is as important as reading to her. When you ask a question about the story you're reading, give her time to answer.
- There may not always be time to sit and read, but there's always time to talk as you go about everyday routines. Share your own stories with your child.





## The mightiness of the pen (or crayon)

To children, scribbles are an empowering first step toward self-expression. As your child begins to make marks on paper, he is simultaneously learning that writing is used for many different purposes. There are a variety of ways you can encourage this process.

- Provide materials such as large sheets of paper and crayons or markers, and let him have plenty of unstructured time to exercise his imagination, play with writing implements, and practice what he learns.
- Encourage him to make lists. When you're making a shopping list, ask him to write down what he wants from the store.
- Give him paper and crayons, and let him write about going to the dentist or other new experiences.
- Help him make memories by having him dictate a story about his adventures at the playground or zoo or with a new friend as you write it down or type it into an e-mail to Grandpa or Grandma.
- Show him how to write his name and let him sign letters and holiday or special-occasion cards. His name can start as a scribble, but eventually he will begin to write letters. Next, show him how to write the name of a sibling, parent, or friend.



## How much should you push?

We all want our children to do well in school, but remember: Helping to build their school readiness should remain fun. Most lessons will be learned through everyday moments, but when you're focusing on teaching a particular skill, don't push. Instead, take your cues directly from your preschooler. Nobody knows your child better than you do.

- Start with five-minute sessions each day and increase the time as your child's attention span grows. Children ages 3 to 5 typically can handle reading sessions that last between 5 and 20 minutes.
- Watch for signs of overstimulation and frustration. You may be presenting too much at once or setting the level too high. Try simplifying or taking a break.
- As long as she stays interested, keep going.
- Check your own feelings. If you're having a good time, your child is probably having a good time too. So enjoy!

### We want your opinion!

Please respond to a survey about Happy, Healthy, Ready for School and receive a FREE Sesame Street screensaver for your computer. Complete the survey online at:

[www.sesameworkshop.org/readyforschool](http://www.sesameworkshop.org/readyforschool)



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PNC's commitment to school readiness will yield stronger, smarter, healthier children, families, and communities. School readiness encompasses the preparedness of the whole child, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. For more information on PNC's Grow Up Great visit: [www.pnc.com](http://www.pnc.com)

Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit educational organization behind *Sesame Street*; *Dragon Tales*; and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat*. Through these programs, and through groundbreaking productions around the world, Sesame Workshop is making a meaningful difference in the lives of children worldwide. Find out more at [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org)

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