

Create a kindergarten environment at home

As your older children board the bus to go to school, it can be difficult for the younger ones. They're not only losing a play companion, but may feel they're missing out on an exciting new world. But never fear, there are plenty of ways you can bring the wonderment of the classroom into your house so your younger children won't feel left behind.

Create the right atmosphere

By having a desk, craft items and maybe even a backpack of his own, your child can easily imagine he's in a classroom setting. Plus, as younger children age, you can reuse the space by transforming the school-play area into a homework and study zone.

Find toys that offer teachable moments

There are many toys you can purchase that help develop math skills, creativity and body coordination as part of the fun. For example, take the TRIO building set of bricks, sticks and panels from Fisher-Price. Building sets improve hand-eye coordination, help children develop spatial relationships, determine shapes and classifications, and encourage creativity.

“You will often see toddlers enjoying the process of stacking things up; as they get a little older, they move outward, building bridges and walling things in. As children get close to five years, they use more complex patterns with greater symmetry, creating more representational structures like a building, tree or animal,” says Cynthia Lynn-Garbe, a senior child researcher at Fisher-Price. “The bricks, sticks and panels of the TRIO building system let children experiment with how things fit together, then advance to creating more complex structures.”

And would you guess that building sets not only encourage creativity and fine motor skill development but also encourage language skills? Lynn-Garbe suggests having your child build something without telling you what it is. You can then ask about the creation, what it's used for and who lives there, making guesses as you continue to encourage your child to use her imagination as she tells a story about what she built. “Building can offer family fun as well as touch on some really important skill development that may just spark that engineer or architect of the future,” Lynn-Garbe says.

Turn household chores into a learning opportunity

Having children help with household chores not only teaches them responsibility, but it also gives you an excellent chance to be a teacher. For example, if you're doing laundry, have your child help you sort the clothes by colour. Sure, it will take longer, but your child will soon be able to recognize different colours and understand the concepts of sorting and organizing. Or if you're cooking, let your child help measure so they can grasp simple fractions – without even knowing it.

Play with music

There are lots of creative ways you can introduce your child to the world of music. For example, play music on the TV or stereo and let children keep the rhythm while dancing around, playing a toy drum or clapping their hands. You can even help your child make colorful streamer ribbons to dance with, adding more fun to the activity. As they get older, introduce your child to reading music and playing a small keyboard or other easy instruments.

By having their own school at home, your younger children will not only have fun, but be better prepared when it's their turn to get on the bus in the morning. (ARA)

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