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For more resources, please visit **BeyondtheBackpack.com**.



# nickelodeon COULTS WORLD BEYOND THE BACKPACK

GET READY FOR KINDERGARTEN!

Nickelodeon invites you to be part of a great adventure: Beyond the Backpack, a nationwide initiative to promote early kindergarten readiness for preschoolers. Getting ready for school requires more than having a backpack and the right school supplies. It also means getting your child ready to learn in five key areas: Family Engagement, Health and Wellness, Literacy, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math)/STEM and Life skills. This Toolkit has been developed to support and strengthen all of these early learning areas so every child has the tools they need to enter kindergarten ready to learn!

To develop this guide, Nickelodeon has teamed up with early childhood experts at Boston Children's Museum, incorporating their extensive knowledge of families, early childhood and the latest in school readiness research. Boston Children's Museum educators bring learning and expertise from their own "Countdown to Kindergarten" classroom — a life-sized model classroom where caregivers and children can experience going to school together! Families can participate in a circle time complete with stories and songs, counting and calendar games. They can try out activities at typical kindergarten-style learning centers, and even pretend to drive a school bus!

Beyond the Backpack complements Nickelodeon's curriculum-based preschool programming by providing parents with tips, activities, and resources that focus on the five areas. It also offers lots of helpful tips to get your little ones ready for kindergarten. Check out **BeyondtheBackpack.com** for additional resources. All families want the best for their children and starting kindergarten is a true milestone on the path to lifelong success. We hope you find this Toolkit a useful and fun way to start this exciting journey with your children!

# WHY IS SCHOOL READINESS SO IMPORTANT?

School readiness sets the stage for a lifetime of learning, and that learning begins long before the first day of kindergarten. In fact, 80% of all brain growth happens in the first three years of life! So, it's super important to pay attention to what children are learning and experiencing in those early years as they begin to develop the skills and tools they will need to ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten, and the beginning of their kindergarten through high school adventure and beyond!

To begin, we'll focus on *five learning areas:* 

- **\* FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**
- **\* HEALTH & WELLNESS**
- **\* LITERACY**
- \* STEAM/STEM
- **\* LIFE SKILLS**



# BEYOND THE BACKPACK WHAT TO LOOK FOR!

In this toolkit, you'll find ideas, activities, and resources that will help you prepare your child for school. Here's a quick overview to get you started.

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### **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

Follow these suggestions and make learning a priority.

- **Embrace** conversation, singing, and using words! Talking to each other increases vocabulary and will help your child learn to read.
- \* Visit public libraries, children's museums and other places in your community with resources and activities for families to learn and play together

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### **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

Check out these suggestions and make well-being a priority in your family.

- **Eat** together whenever possible, and make breakfast part of your child's daily routine. Encourage eating different types of foods, especially fruits and vegetables. Say "Yes" to active physical play.
- **Develop** routines for good hygiene! Encourage your child to wash their hands and brush their teeth regularly.
- \* Talk to your pediatrician and other professionals (like therapists, teachers, and school nutritionists) about your child's overall physical, emotional, and developmental needs. These discussions can include sleep, nutrition, vaccinations, and behavior. Don't be afraid to share stories and ask questions, because that can help you find people you trust and feel comfortable with!



### LITERACY SKILLS

Help get your child's reading and writing skills on the right track.

- \* Read with or to your child every day.
- \* Talk about what you're doing and identify objects with your child while doing daily activities. This can help build vocabulary.



### **STEAM/STEM SKILLS**

Expand your child's science, technology, engineering, arts and math learning by encouraging their natural curiosity.

- \* Ask lots of questions as you go about your day or evening. Ask your child, "What do you notice?" or "What do you wonder about?"

  Questions like this show that there is no right or wrong answer and that you are interested in your child's opinion.
- \* **Model** curiosity about everyday occurrences: "I wonder what will happen when I put water in the flour to make pancakes?"



### **LIFE SKILLS**

Put these tips into practice to help prepare your child for school socially and emotionally.

- \* Visit local libraries, museums, or playgrounds where there are other children. Attending a program like circle time, or even playing together, encourages important social skills, such as raising hands, waiting, or taking turns.
- \* Model empathy by asking questions and commenting on social cues, such as "I wonder how that person feels? I think he might be happy because he is smiling!" Encourage your child to describe their own feelings: sad, mad, happy, excited, scared, etc.



# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

"Family Engagement" is rooted in the many ways you support your child's learning and development. As your child's first teacher, you have lots of great opportunities to practice family engagement. As little as 20 minutes a day can have a big impact on your child's school readiness.



### **TIPS**

While you are waiting in line at the supermarket, walking to the bus, or simply sitting together over a meal you can help your child develop important skills. You may want to try some of the following activities:

- **Talking back and forth** having conversations together gives children practice listening and responding, and gives them confidence that their ideas matter.
- **Creating and following daily routines** this helps children feel secure about what is coming up and will help them adapt to the many routines they will learn in school.
- Safely exposing them to new experiences this will help children learn how to manage and get the most out of all the new things they will see and hear in school.
- Connect with your child's preschool teacher or child care provider, or with the children's librarian at your local library you will gain confidence and skills as you take advantage of these resources for your family.

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Communication, understanding and developing routines, managing new experiences, building family trust and support, creating awareness of outside supports.



# ACTIVITIES

- **Visit** the school and play on the playground. If an orientation isn't already scheduled, call to set up a visit and meet the kindergarten teacher or principal. If your child has any special medical needs, you could also make an appointment to meet the school nurse or other specialists who might support your child. Find out where your child will be having breakfast, lunch or snacks and try to have that included on your tour as well.
- \* Borrow lots of books about starting kindergarten from your local library to help your child understand that everyone goes to school and it's an important and exciting time for your child and the whole family. (See Sample Kindergarten Day in pull-out section.)
- **Set aside** time every day for a quiet cuddle or face-to-face conversation with your child. Ask them leading questions and tune in to their answers to help them learn to listen and respond a skill that they will need in school.
- **Find out what your school registration process is and when it begins.**Check your district's website or contact the main office of your local school to find this information and to get support in filling out the paperwork.

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## **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

Physical and social and emotional well-being is a key factor in every child's learning and long-term success. For children and families, this means developing healthy physical and mental habits.

### **TIPS**

- \* Kindergarten is all about structure and routine. Help your child become comfortable with following routines by creating your own structures around wake-up time, lunch time, and bedtime. Routines can be as simple as reading a bedtime story or singing a wake up song!
- Support your child in learning to recognize and name their emotions and starting to identify strategies for when they feel upset, angry, annoyed, or stressed. Breathing deeply or sitting quietly may be a way they can help themselves calm down.
- **Be sure to check with your pediatrician** to address any questions you may have about your child's vaccinations and keeping them up to date.



### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Self-care, learning to make healthy life-style choices, understanding and adapting to routines.

# ACTIVITIES

- \*\* Use the Healthy Habits Chart on page 27 to help your child develop healthy habits and routines. Note the healthy habits listed as examples and add some of your own! Place a smiley face, check mark or sticker in the box each time your child engages in one of these habits, and point out why it's important. (Also, see Sample Before and After School Routines in pull-out section.)
- **Point out** when your child is making good choices. Praise them often, even for small accomplishments like playing nicely with siblings, helping to pick up toys, waiting for their turn, or being a good sport.
- \* Make time for a routine that includes regular family meals when family members and children can sit and talk about their day together. Play the "high-low" game, taking turns sharing the best and not-so-good parts of the day.
- **Set limits** for your child around safety, screen time, regard for others, household rules and routines that are important to you. If you have difficulty setting limits, ask your pediatrician for tips.



### LITERACY SKILLS

Believe it or not, early literacy — learning to read and write — begins in the first three years of life. It is closely linked to a child's earliest experiences hearing and using language. Reading books and telling stories are great ways to engage your child. Young children's interactions with early literacy materials offered by caring adults have been shown to be a powerful predictor of long term literacy and school success.



Read to your preschooler. Stop once in a while in the middle of a story to talk about what is happening. Ask questions that go beyond the text to help your child develop an enjoyment of language, books and writing, such as "Where do you think the bunny is going? Why?" and "How do you think the little girl feels? How do you know? Do you ever feel that way?"

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Foundational skills (building vocabulary, understanding what letters are and what print means, and making marks on paper starting with scribbling), finding connections in stories, making predictions, using imagination, and enjoying interactive reading with an adult.





### **ACTIVITIES**

- \* Embrace conversation! Talking to each other increases vocabulary and will help your child learn to read. Chat with your child while doing family activities. In the grocery store you can ask, "What fruits and vegetables shall we buy?" "What color are those apples?" and "How many bananas do we need?"
- \* Ask questions as you read books together and help your child identify words during play, as you walk through your neighborhood, or at the grocery store. Help your child describe things and events, and play with sounds and letters in words.
- \* Read with or to your child every day. You can build this into a regular bedtime routine or keep a small book in your bag and just read together whenever you can while riding the bus, in line at the store or waiting for water to boil.
- \* Set out recycled paper and a box of crayons for your child to use anytime they are ready to scribble, draw or write. Scribbling is the first step to writing as it teaches a child how to hold and control a crayon to create marks on paper. It takes practice, so give children lots of opportunity and encouragement so they'll keep at it.

# STEAM/STEM SKILLS

STEAM - Science, technology, engineering, art and math all provide building blocks for how children learn and build on what children already do naturally: explore and experiment, work with all kinds of tools (which can include items as varied as toothbrushes, paintbrushes, and even fingers), problem solve, compare things and create. As children's first teachers, parents can expand this learning by supporting their natural curiosity and drive to explore.

### **TIPS**

- Ask lots of "what" questions. These focus on what is happening, what you notice and what you're doing. Other great STEAM questions include: comparing: "Is it longer or shorter?", attention focusing: "Did you notice ...?", measuring and counting: "How many? How long?", and problem solving: "Can you find a way to ...?"
- **Technology involves using tools.** Make a game out of walking around your home with your child looking for all different kinds of tools (hint: a toothbrush is a tool for cleaning your teeth!)
- **Engineering involves designing and building.** Something as simple as building a block tower counts as an early engineering project!
- This skill set is also known as STEM. The addition of art acknowledges the importance of creativity in the problem solving process, since a lot of STEM exploration and practice involves generating and applying creative ideas, and communicating using symbols, designs, and pictures.

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Observing, describing, categorizing, experimenting, predicting, solving problems, using tools, communicating, working together, and developing new vocabulary.

## **ACTIVITIES**

- \* Exploring Air: Air can move things. Have your child practice blowing air on their hands and then have them try blowing cotton balls across a flat surface. Next, have your child use a straw (a tool) to blow the cotton balls. Talk with your child about their observations "Which method blew the cotton balls further?" Experiment with blowing on other objects and talk about what happens and why.
- \*\* Scooping: Using scoops from the kitchen or sandbox, have your child practice moving dry materials like sand, dirt or flour from one container to another. You can ask questions such as "Which material feels heavier in the scoop?", and "Which spills more easily?" Experiment by substituting the scoops with other household materials such as paper cups or serving spoons.
- **Recycle Build-It:** Collect clean household recyclables and let your child build and engineer three-dimensional structures with them. (Hint: egg cartons, toilet and paper towel tubes, and Styrofoam packing material make super building materials). Use tape, glue, string, paper clips or rubber bands to keep things in place.
- \* Make a Mark: Have your child choose a crayon and piece of paper. Let them mark the paper, encouraging them to try making different types of marks (squiggles, zigzags, "pecking" dots), and using different grips (full fist or holding like a pencil). Have your child try marking on other types of materials such as a piece of wood, stone or tile, and talk about how it felt to make those marks and how they look similar or different.
- Likes Go Together: Assemble a set of toys and have children sort them into groups; e.g. cars with cars, blocks with blocks. Sorting is an early math skill and can encourage creative thinking! Repeat using different rules they can match colors, shapes or sizes. Expand this activity by having your child collect any types of items (e.g. rocks, dishes, shoes) and then come up with new ways to sort them.

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## **LIFE SKILLS**

How young children feel, interact with others, and think about themselves is a critical part of their ability to learn and succeed in all other developmental areas. Although children feel angry, sad, frustrated, nervous, happy, or embarrassed, they often do not have the words to talk about it. This becomes important as children become more independent and want to express their needs to others outside of the house. The ability to share their needs increases their resiliency and confidence in taking care of tasks on their own.



### **TIPS**

- Be a role model for your child by talking with them about your own feelings. Let them see how you manage conflicts with others and how you deal with daily stress in a healthy way.
- Provide a safe, loving environment where your child feels comfortable to talk about their fears and worries, and also the things they are happy about or proud of.
- Allow them to take on household responsibilities like picking their outfit and preparing dinner with your support.

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Recognize, name and express emotions; engage in a positive way to build relationships with others; learn to reflect on actions and make thoughtful decisions.





### **ACTIVITIES**

- \* Talk about your feelings and encourage your child to do the same. "Today I was frustrated because I spilled the milk, but I was proud of myself for getting a sponge from the sink and cleaning up my mess!" Have them give you an example of something they did during the day and how they felt about it.
- **Reflect** each night at bedtime about the day, then have your child use the Feelings Chart on page 30, to describe what kind of day they had.
- \* Practice waiting. Set your kitchen or cell phone timer as your child waits their turn to play with something or waits for a snack or a meal. Practicing waiting helps children learn to manage frustration and distress. When the timer goes off and your child has been waiting patiently, you can say, "Wow, great job waiting your turn!"
- **#** *Help* your child approach others in a positive manner. They might ask another child, "Can we play together?" Join a social group at your local library or your family's faith community, or attend a play group to help make connections with other children.

# PARTNER RESOURCES FOR PARENTS



The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is a professional development society that champions children's museums worldwide. As a community of more than 400 children's museums, individuals, and supporting organizations, our members share a vision of a world that honors all children and respects the diverse ways in which they learn and develop. To find a children's museum near you, visit **www.FindaChildrensMuseum.org**.



Founded in 1913, Boston Children's Museum carries on a 100-year legacy with exhibits like "Countdown to Kindergarten," where children and their parents are invited to experience a typical kindergarten setting and ask questions about how to get ready to start school. BCM is delighted to contribute kindergarten readiness content to Beyond the Backpack. To learn more and plan your visit to BCM, go to www.bostonchildrensmuseum.org.

# **MIZZEN**EDUCATION

Mizzen Education is a free digital platform and capacity-building organization that empowers K-12 afterschool and summer programs to deliver high-quality, engaging content and learning experiences. For more information, visit www.mizzen.org.

NOTES

## KINDERGARTEN READINESS TIP LIST

Children are ready to go to kindergarten when they have most of the developmentally appropriate skills that will enable them to be successful in a school setting. Strong family engagement in this process is key to helping a child get set with these critical skills.

# BY THE TIME YOUR CHILD ENTERS KINDERGARTEN, IT IS HELPFUL IF THEY CAN:

#### **Health and Wellness**

- Do most of these jump, run, hop on one foot, throw or kick a ball.
- Hold and use a pencil properly, cut with safety scissors, and put together simple (4-9 piece) puzzles.
- Popen and close zippers and lids of various containers (such as food containers).
- Do the following independently: go to the bathroom, get dressed, brush teeth and wash hands. Follow safety rules: recognize warning symbols (stop sign, poison symbol, etc.) and recite their full name, parent's names, and address and phone number.

### **Literacy Skills**

- **★** Write their initials or full name, using upper and lower case letters correctly.
- Hold and "read" books both by themselves and with an adult.
- Correctly grip a pencil or crayon and "write" letters, words, or stories by drawing or scribbling to express ideas.
- Speak in complete sentences and make up or retell stories.

### STEAM/STEM Skills (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math)

- As Observe and explore objects and materials both indoors and outdoors; ask and answer questions about what they see.
- Recognize basic shapes e.g. circle, square and triangle, and sort objects by shape, size or color.
- Use a wide variety of school tools, such as paint brush, safety scissors, pencil and crayon. Count out loud from 1 to 10 in order, recognize a few 1-digit numbers by sight and use sorting and making patterns to support early math skills.

#### Life Skills

- \* Talk about basic feelings (anger, sadness, happiness, etc.).
- \* Cooperate with others, share, and take turns.
- Listen well and concentrate, follow directions that have 2 to 3 steps, and focus on a task independently for 15 minutes.

For more resources, please visit **BeyondtheBackpack.com**.

Please note: this list is intended merely as a guide, highlighting skills and benchmarks that will help preschoolers prepare for kindergarten. Kids develop at their own pace, so some preschoolers will master many of these skills before kindergarten, while others will learn them in school. Parents should contact their child's school for specifics on school entry requirements.



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: SAMPLE KINDERGARTEN DAY

This is an example of a typical kindergarten day adapted from two different states' samples.

#### KINDERGARTEN DAY

#### SAMPLE SCHEDULE

SAMPLE SCHE	DULE
8:30-9:20	<b>MORNING ROUTINES:</b> sing a song, go over the calendar and weather, review the schedule for the day, beginning of the day announcements and morning messages
9:20 - 9:45	<b>READING TECHNIQUES INSTRUCTION:</b> phonics, vocabulary, word work
9:45 - 10:15	<b>ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA):</b> integrate Science, Social Studies or Health and Wellness; shared reading and read-aloud, guided reading lesson, writer's workshop
10:15 - 11:00	<b>LITERACY CENTERS:</b> games with letter names, sight word puzzles, small group work and instruction
11:00 - 11:30	LUNCH
11:30 - 12:00	RECESS
12:00 - 12:40	<b>SPECIALS:</b> music, theater, computers, physical education, organized active play
12:45 - 1:00	<b>QUIET TIME:</b> resting, drawing, writing
1:00 - 1:30	MATH (USING MANIPULATIVES)
1:30 - 2:00	<b>ELA</b>
2:00 - 3:00	CHOICE TIME: Reading, art, dramatic play, free play
3:00 - 3:15	GET READY FOR DISMISSAL: clean-up, check backpacks to

go home, end of day announcements or songs

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OR HEALTH AND WELLNESS SAMPLE BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL ROUTINES

Consistent routines are key to school success. Even on the weekend, it is a good idea to continue the same schedule for morning and bed times, so children don't have to adjust when the school week begins.

### **BEFORE SCHOOL**

**ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT MORNING ROUTINE.** Children do best when they know what to expect. Whatever your morning routine is – getting up at the same time every day, washing up, brushing teeth, dressing, eating or having a food plan in place, packing the backpack for the school day – try to stick to it on a regular basis.

HAVE A PLAN IN PLACE FOR BREAKFAST AND LUNCH. If your child isn't eating breakfast at home, most schools have a cafeteria or breakfast option. There is usually a school-subsidized plan as well, for breakfast and lunch. Note: Access to food that your child is familiar with is key for ensuring they'll feel comfortable eating their lunch in the school setting. It's also great to have your child practice opening their food containers so they'll be able to manage their own lunches at school without help.

**CHECK THE BACKPACK.** You can do this in the morning or evening; see backpack notes in the After School section.



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### **AFTER SCHOOL**

**MOST SCHOOL SYSTEMS HAVE AN AFTER CARE OPTION** for children to remain at school up until 5:00 or even 6:00 pm. Contact the school in the spring or early summer to find out how to register, and if they have transportation options available if needed.

**GO THROUGH YOUR CHILD'S BACKPACK.** Teachers use the backpack to send home important notices for you to read or paperwork to sign, and/or homework for your child to do at night. If you need notices translated into your home language, let the school know; most schools will have a translation service available for you. Other important backpack items to look for can include: wet clothes from accidents or outside play, and uneaten food or dirty containers from the day.

**ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT BEDTIME ROUTINE.** Children do best when they know what to expect. Whatever your night time routine is (brushing teeth, quiet story or cuddle time, a song or talking about the day) try to stick to it on a regular basis. Note: any type of screen time before bed can make it harder for a child to fall asleep. Try to limit screen time to an hour or two before lights out so they can get the solid rest that they need.



### **HEALTHY HABITS CHART**

Use smiley face drawings, check marks or stickers to fill out this chart to help your child develop healthy habits.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
BRUSH TEETH							
GET DRESSED							
PICK UP TOYS							
EAT A HEALTHY SNACK							

Healthy Habit ideas: set the table, play outside with a ball, tucked in to bed.

# EARLY LITERACY DRAMATIC PLAY- ANIMAL TALES

This early literacy activity gets children excited about using words to tell stories while playing with toy animals.

### **MATERIALS**

- \* Stuffed or plastic toy animals
- Props for the story; these can include empty boxes, plastic dishes or cups, yarn or large buttons.

### **ACTIVITY**

- 1. Have your child pick an animal and give it a name. That's the beginning of the story!
- 2. You can ask many questions that are "story starters", helping your child reach into their own imagination to create more ideas. For example, "Your cat looks hungry, what can it eat?" Your child can put yarn into a cup, stir it with a fork and feed their animal "spaghetti". Have them tell you all about what they're doing to encourage their story telling skills.
- 3. Your child can look around the room for all kinds of objects for their animal-story play. Blankets can be bunched up into mountains, shoe boxes can be beds, and bowls can be bathtubs. Ask them about the adventures their animal is having!
- 4. Throughout the play time, ask your child questions that let them continue to make up stories about what their animal is doing, and what they might do next. This is a great way for your child to use lots of words and put them into sentences. You can help them by suggesting new words, such as is your cat sleepy or wide-awake? Excited or bored? Does your bunny like to walk or hop; can it fly?

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Communication, building family trust and support, building vocabulary, finding connections in stories, using imagination.

# STEAM/STEM SKILLS COLOR AND SHAPE DETECTIVE

This STEAM activity gives children lots of practice using crayons and scissors while they learn about shapes and colors!

### **MATERIALS**

- Colored paper with shapes drawn for children to cut out (e.g. circle, square, triangle)
- **Scissors**
- **\*** Crayons or markers
- **Popsicle sticks or straws**
- **本** Tape

### **ACTIVITY**

- 1. Talk with your child about the different shapes and paper colors. If they don't know the names, this is a great opportunity to have them learn and practice.
- 2. Have your child pick a shape to cut out. Depending on their level of scissors skills, you can help them with the cutting. Note: If they aren't able to cut on a line yet, let them practice by making little "feathering" snips at the edges of the paper.
- 3. Once they have a shape cut out, help them tape it onto a popsicle stick or straw. This is their shape finder detective tool!
- 4. Next, have them explore the room to locate the same shape and color that they have on their shape stick. Talk with them about differences and similarities between what they find and their own shape. Is the plate (circle) bigger or smaller than their circle? Is the book longer or shorter than their rectangle?
- 5. You can extend this activity to include counting by having your child count how many objects they can find that match the color or shape of their shape finder. Challenge yourself to do this along with them to model having fun while learning!

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Observing, describing, categorizing, using tools, building vocabulary, communicating and working together.

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# **FEELINGS CHART**

Encourage your child to share their feelings every day. Look at the feelings chart and have them talk about their day or a part of their day, pointing to the face that shows how they felt.



**HAPPY** 



MAD



**SURPRISED** 



**DISAPPOINTED** 



**FRUSTRATED** 



**EXCITED** 

### **DEVELOPING SKILLS:**

Communication; recognize, name and express emotions; engage in a positive way to build relationships with others; building vocabulary.



**EMBARRASSED** 



**SCARED** 



SAD



**PROUD** 



WORRIED



**BORED** 

