



United Way Community Matters

By Mary Lou Goeke

Preparing for Your Child's School Success

3.19.09

Research shows that preparing children to succeed in school begins at birth. As parents, if you haven't already thought about preparing your child for school, you can start now. As your child's first teacher, make learning fun for both you and your child this summer. To help get you started, First 5 Santa Cruz County offers parents and caregivers 10 tips for making sure your entering kindergartener is well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

1. **Play, Talk and Read:** Make verbal interaction with your child a priority. Playing, talking and reading with your child helps stimulate their minds and develops verbal skills.

2. **Get a Library Card:** Research shows children who spend time reading together with their parents enter kindergarten more prepared for reading and learning. Visit your local library for a free way to strengthen your child's reading skills early on.

3. **Monitor Development:** Every child is different, but if you are concerned about delays in the development of your child, seek out local resources that help with special needs assessments.

4. **Enroll in Health Insurance:** A child's overall health makes a difference in how he or she will do in school. A child who is sick may miss class, struggle to keep up and have difficulty learning. Free or low-cost health insurance for children is available locally by calling 454.2515.

5. **Get Required Immunizations:** Children cannot enter kindergarten without up-to-date immunizations. Receiving required immunizations are an important step in preventing unnecessary disease and helping your child grow up healthy and ready to learn.

6. **Go to the Dentist:** By the time children enter kindergarten, more than 50 percent already have dental decay especially in communities that do not have fluoridated water,

like Watsonville. To help keep children's smiles bright, the state now mandates that all California children have dental check-ups prior to the completion of their first year of public school.

7. **Register for Kindergarten:** Identify a school nearby and make an appointment to register your child. Don't forget to bring your child's immunization records, birth certificate and proof of residence.

8. **Choose a Program:** Talk with your school about the best kindergarten program for your child. Whether it's a morning or afternoon session, bilingual program or one with built-in transportation arrangements, your school can help you find one that meets your child's needs.

9. **Visit Classroom and Meet Teacher:** Walk your child around the school so they are familiar on their first day. This is also a great opportunity to make introductions and ask questions. When there's good communication between parents or caregivers and the school, everyone benefits.

10. **Be Familiar with Local Resources:** To help you implement these tips and make the transition into kindergarten a smooth one, First 5 Santa Cruz County can connect you with local resources, such as quality health care and kindergarten enrollment assistance.

For more information on getting your child ready for this next chapter in their life, call First 5 Santa Cruz County at 465-2217 or visit www.first5scc.org.

For the past 16 years Mary Lou Goeke has been the Executive Director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County. She has 32 years of experience providing social services to elders, children and families. The mission of United Way is to improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz County by convening the community to seek solutions to their needs and by efficiently raising funds for the human care programs the United Way supports. Their website is www.unitedwaysc.org.