

Is Your Child Ready for School?

Your child's future success depends on how well you prepare him or her before formal education begins.

By Joan C. Bogdanchik

“You know, Honey, Bobby will be starting to school next week,” said the young mother to her husband. “Shouldn’t we be getting him ready? Is there anything that he should know?”

“No, we’ll only confuse him. Better let his teacher do it,” her husband shrugged.

Jenny’s parents had a completely different approach. Teaching their daughter to read was all important to them. Even before she was age 2 Jenny began to read. Now she was reading near a fourth-grade level. “She’ll have no trouble at school,” boasted her parents.

The first day of school arrived. Cowering behind his parents came Bobby, on his face a look of terror and anxiety that brought sorrow to his teacher’s heart. Nothing was going to pull him free of Daddy’s trouser leg!

Jenny came in smiling and quietly found a seat next to the bookcase. Don’t those books look easy! she thought. But when the

children went outside to play at recess, Jenny sat on the sidelines. She hadn’t taken part in any activities or games like those the other children were involved in. She had rarely played with other children. Jenny sadly discovered that school wasn’t what she had expected.

I have personally known such children. Others like them will be

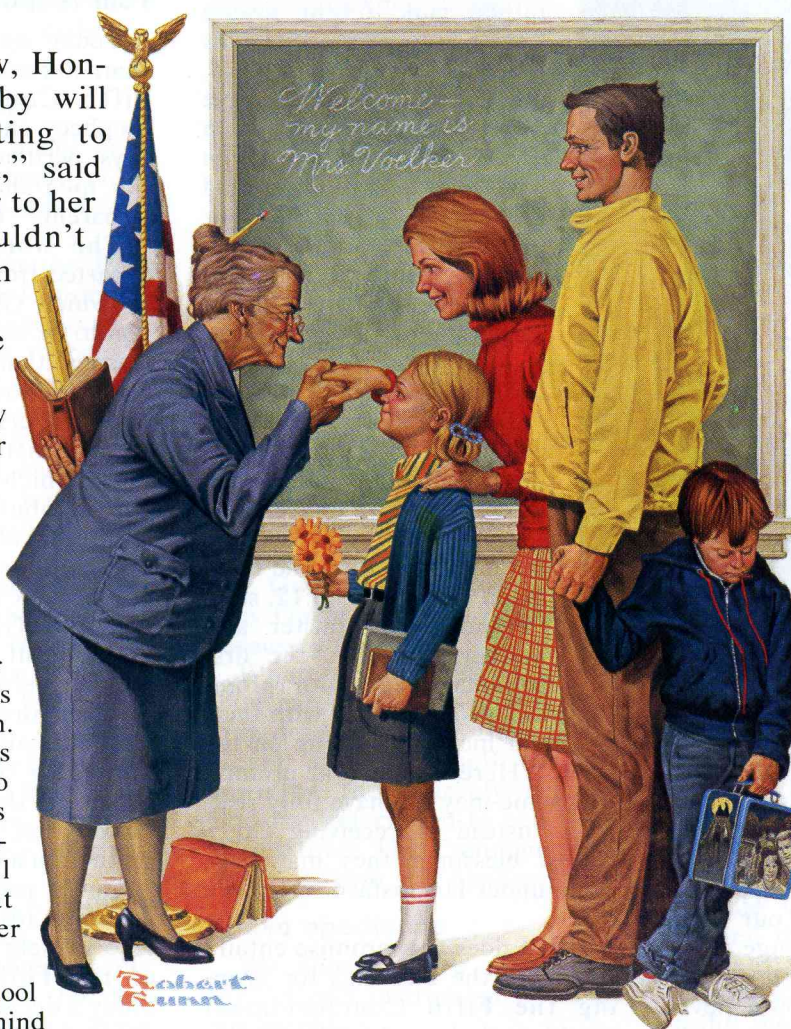
entering school next fall. Will your child be one of them? How much — and what — should a child know before he starts school?

Parents need to know, because what they do during a child’s vital early years will determine, in a large way, whether the child succeeds or fails during his school years and, indeed, throughout his life.

Begin preparations early

Certain specific areas should be covered before your child enters school to ensure that he will adjust smoothly to the new environment in which he will find himself. Trying to accomplish this preparation in the last weeks before school begins is too late. Initial preparation for school — and life — begins at the very beginning.

Proper child development begins at conception (and even before that, by extension, in the health and education of the parents before their union) and continues throughout life. The mother must have a proper diet and



right frame of mind during pregnancy.

But once the child is born, the real job of education begins. This instruction begins in the cradle — on the first day of life. This early education is vital — by the time a child is 1 year old he will either display or be lacking the qualities found in outstanding students.

From that wonderful moment when you first hold your baby in your arms, he is becoming aware that someone is there — and he will get to know that someone thoroughly, by smell, taste, touch, hearing and sight. You as his parents will have a tremendous influence on him. You will mold and shape him.

Talk to your child

One means that will be crucial in his development is your speech, which you should use unsparingly. Talk to your baby — while caressing him, dressing him, changing him, bathing him. The importance of talking to your baby cannot be overstated — the habit of talking cannot be established too early in a child.

Sad to say, some parents think that talking to a baby is a waste of breath. The child can't answer, they reason, and there are more important things to think about. But parents need to realize that the talking they do, beginning right after the birth of their child, is foundational. Hearing the sound of your voice and hearing the language you speak are necessary to your child's development.

Changing the position of the baby's crib from time to time is a good idea, too, as he will begin learning to distinguish different colors and shapes. He begins to learn that there are differences in seeing, as well as hearing.

By the time your child is 8 or 9 months old you will notice that he has more of an understanding of what you are saying. When you see this spark of enlightenment, fuel it!

Use carefully selected words and phrases, but speak normally. Baby talk shouldn't be used — the child will only have to unlearn

it later. A child will revert to what he learned early, and any faulty constructions you have instilled in him will come out — to his embarrassment in front of his classmates. This is something for which he will not thank you, so don't let it take root.

Work on your own grammar. You are transmitting the language with which he will think and express his ideas. You surely want to transmit it as thoroughly and as correctly as you can.

Encourage curiosity

When your child is crawling, he shouldn't be confined to his playpen for overlong periods of time. It may be more convenient for the moment, but it can curtail his interest and curiosity, and curiosity is the beginning of learning.

As your child is crawling about, he is learning as he feels the toys, carpet, furniture. Of course, all dangerous things should be put out of his reach, but a certain amount of minor mishap should be allowed for. Don't be overprotective. He should have certain freedom or

begin to reject the authority of its parents, as many parents have found to their sorrow.

When a parent is inconsistent the child loses his sense of security. He wants to know his boundaries. He uses them as his fences. A child thrives on love and security. If one limits these, the child could become shy and nervous.

Children should be reared in an atmosphere of love and encouragement. Strive to have as few negative confrontations as possible. Loving pats on the back and big hugs will help your children learn in a warm way.

Develop right attitudes

Be careful not to show favoritism among your children. Let them love you and want to please you because of this love that is growing day by day. Strong family loyalty begins in early childhood. The parents' interests become the child's. He is growing in courtesy and is grateful for his parents.

Children should be taught to accept criticism, too, for it is a part of life. Your child will need

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else he can become withdrawn.

Of course, this is not to say that proper discipline should be absent. Certain activities should be positively prohibited. Because he has general freedom of the house, limits in certain areas should be set for the child's own good. Establishing self-discipline in him early is good.

Children will test their parents in every way they can. They will push to the limits they can go, but remember, they will accept authority if parents are firm. Parents must be consistent in handling their children. Love and discipline must go hand in hand. If they are not from the earliest days of a child's life, the child will

your comfort when he is criticized, but he must learn to make necessary corrections when he is wrong. He should learn to forget the sting of criticism and concentrate on its positive fruits. Your love will help him.

If one lets down in these areas, a child will become unresponsive both to his parents and his teachers at school. He'll become an expert at tuning out — he'll ignore directions and adjust poorly to situations.

Build confidence in your children. Don't talk to others about their faults and inner feelings. If a child knows that what he reveals to you from his heart goes out to others, he will stop

being open with you. Don't lay the foundation for a generation gap. Begin building family loyalty now.

Be highly interested

A parent should be highly interested in a child and all his

interests. This shouldn't be just a casual interest — the child will know the difference.

Children should be allowed to play near you when you are working, even though this leads to interruptions. Our job as parents is to train our children.

Answering their questions is a necessary part of this responsibility.

When the questions come at a time when you cannot answer, have the child wait. This is valuable training for school and later life. It develops patience and con-

Don't Neglect to Teach Your Children About God

By Dexter H. Faulkner

"Does God have a face?"
"Why can't I see God?"
"Why is this God's house?"
"Why is this day so special to God?"

When your child asks questions like these, what do you say?

God holds us responsible for teaching our children about His way. *And we can't start too soon!* We personally will to a tremendous degree determine what type of people our children will grow up to be. The Bible states, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6, New International Version).

Here are some vital keys that will help us teach our youngsters the proper concept of God and God's ways.

Teach children what God is like

God reveals Himself as our Father. We can explain to our child that, just as we are his or her father, God is also a father, only much wiser and stronger. Tell him that a good father loves his children more than himself, provides them food, a place to sleep, toys to play with. A good father wants his children to be happy. In simple, everyday terms, we can show that just as we do these things for him, God does them for all His children, only more so.

Jesus called His followers friends

(John 15:13-14). Here is another everyday concept we can use to help our child understand God. While we are being a friend to our children — playing with them, building kites, taking bike rides — we can show what friendship with God is like.

We can use the physical creation to open our child's mind to the Creator's characteristics. Job 37-41, Isaiah 40 and many of the Psalms describe God's power and authority in terms of the creation. Point out how majestic mountains, rushing rivers and other spectacular natural phenomena show God's grandeur.

For a young child, we might reduce it to even simpler terms. Explain that God can move mountains and also the large rocks that neither the child nor we can move. As an example, during a thunderstorm, remind him that God's voice is like the thunder (Ps. 29:3-5). As we talk or reflect on God's great creation, we should try to find new and interesting ways to explain God's nature.

Our children will wonder what God looks like. Point out the many scriptures that mention His hands, eyes, face and other body parts, showing that we are made in His image. Also, show them that God laughs (Ps. 37:13), rejoices in helping His people (Jer. 32:41) and shows us boundless compassion (Matt. 23:37). This helps our children to come to know His personality.

Bible training

Remember God holds parents personally responsible for teaching children His way (Deut. 6:6-7). Can our child tell who built the Ark, or how the first man and woman came to be? As soon as our children begin to put



trol. It is good, too, because he has to remember his question, which is excellent preparation for school. If, however, these questions are left unanswered, we have let valuable learning experiences go by.

As time goes on you will notice

your child's personality developing. At age 2, some children are capable of using expressive language and building compound and complex sentences can be handled, though some youngsters do take a bit longer.

At age 2 a child has a speaking

vocabulary of about 200 words, but during the next three years it reaches 2,000. This shows the steady, rapid progress that can be made during these crucial preschool years.

Help your child put his
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words together they can begin to comprehend these things.

We shouldn't rely on commercial Bible-story books, which tend to oversensationalize disjointed incidents without imparting any knowledge of God's plan. To teach our children about the Bible, we must be gaining a thorough knowledge of it ourselves through daily Bible study.

We should teach them with colorful, interesting stories. Without overfictionalizing, we can tell about what Jesus' childhood must have been like, or how David killed a lion while he was still a boy. "One day, as David's sheep grazed peacefully, they didn't know that a savage lion was lurking just 50 yards away . . ."

As a child grows, we can explain the Proverbs, illustrating one proverb at a time, using examples and anecdotes to apply it to the child's life. Or create hypothetical situations, asking the correct course of action based on the proverb.

Over and over, we should emphasize this principle: Obedience to God produces happiness and blessings; disobedience and rebellion bring unhappiness and punishment.

We should set aside a time daily to read to the child. A good time for this is just before bedtime. If we end stories on a note of suspense, they'll look forward to the next one. We can go over the "Stories From the New Testament" appearing in *The Good News*, or Basil Wolverton's *Bible Story*. Remember, we may have to tailor these stories to the child's understanding.

How to pray

In teaching our children to pray, we should first explain why we pray: to thank God, to credit Him with our many blessings, to ask Him for our own and others' needs.

We should teach children to pray by example, letting them hear us as we pray at mealtime, in the morning, in the evening. Gradually, as a child

learns to speak in short sentences, he can bow his head and repeat simple prayers after us.

Many opportunities for teaching about God and the Bible occur spontaneously. We should make the most of our mealtimes. For example, we can tell the children that God in His love for man provided good, delicious food. We can teach thankfulness and gratitude at the same time. The children can then more meaningfully participate when the blessing on the food is given.

As our children grow older, they can pray more detailed prayers, using their own words. We must be sure to praise and encourage — and, if they sometime get stuck, help them. As our children mature, they will understand more about to whom they are praying and what they are saying, but laying the foundation of how to pray at an early age is important.

We must be careful not to cause the child to deplore prayer time. We shouldn't embarrass him or laugh when he makes requests that seem humorous, but should respect his efforts, as God certainly does. We need to keep prayers short and enjoyable, never shutting a child in a room for a certain number of minutes to pray.

We should remember that different children's abilities to express themselves will vary at any given age. We must teach our children to be respectful, stopping them if they pray in a singsong voice or make intentionally silly requests. Teaching must be done with wisdom, balance, patience and example.

Teach about God's plan

Do our children understand why they were born? They deserve to. Parents ought to teach children the answers to life's most basic questions.

We can start by asking some easy questions. Why did God make chickens? If the children don't know, explain that the basic reason for

chickens is to give us meat and eggs to eat. Why did He make sheep? Point out that each animal has a specific purpose.

Then ask, "Why did God make people?" This is our chance to simply explain that God made us to someday be like Him.

A child won't grasp the meaning of being like God, so we should keep the explanation simple. But we should plant in his mind the progression from child to adult to God and impress upon him that in order to become God, we must obey God's laws and live God's way of life, which produces happiness.

Be aware that Satan will try his best to influence our children from birth. We must diligently fight his strong influence. New mothers, even when nursing or cuddling newborn children, should begin to rehearse God's truth by talking to their child about God and His greatness. This is also a great opportunity to include the older siblings in the conversation.

We are qualifying now for the Kingdom of God to teach others on a grander scale. As Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong put it to this year's Ambassador College graduating class: "The education of the future — I will say this, education will begin in the home and in the cradle. Parents will have to learn first how to teach infants in the first months of their lives, because infants are being taught by an invisible Satan self-centeredness and selfishness. . . . In the world tomorrow, education will begin in the cradle."

For those of us few and chosen parents, moms and dads, now is the time to be diligently teaching our children about God. □

