



Preschooler, put down the cell phone

By Jo-Anne Sbrega

You may remember a poem from years ago, “All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten” by Robert Fulghum. In it he outlines the basic social skills learned there that are carried through life, such as “Play fair” and “Share everything.” That was a time when Kindergarten was the first experience outside the home for young children. Our state recognized the importance of an educational experience that introduced children to the academic world and offered it for free, as part of the public school system.

Today, many children attend early care as infants and toddlers and then preschool where they learn these skills for life, as well as important pre-academic skills, such as using scissors (teaching a fine motor skill) and drawing shapes (a pre-reading and pre-writing skill). Because so many children enter Kindergarten with these skills, Kindergarten has become much more academic than it used to be years ago. That’s why early childhood education has become so critical for our children – because it has become that introduction to basic skills, that while it looks like “play,” build a base for academic success. That is why it has become so important to provide at least our 4 year olds planning to enter Kindergarten the next year enroll in at in a PreK Program. But in Gateway cities such as Fall River, recent studies show that more children entering Kindergarten don’t have the basic skills needed to enter Kindergarten. Such as drawing shapes, recognizing letters, counting to 10, or grasping a pencil. Many of our children have speech challenges as well as fine motor skills needed for writing and cutting with safety scissors.. Our kids also need physical exercise to develop gross motor skills as well --. running, jumping, skipping, and catching a Ball.

Why are we seeing these results? Certainly the lack of early education opportunities for low-income families is a cause. But until we offer all our children this opportunity to start their education on a level playing field, there is something we all can do.

Put down the electronics! Most 2-year-olds are able to “swipe” and get into their favorite apps on Mom and Dad’s cell phones and tablets. While it is often convenient to quiet a child in a waiting room or at a store, dependence on these ubiquitous devices don’t offer those pre-academic skills children need. They don’t take the place of talking to your child or sitting down with them to practice writing their name or read a story.

It is all a balance isn’t it! Some technology with back to basics lessons as well. Interact on car trips by playing “I Spy” or the license plate games on car trips or on a walk. Carry paper and crayons for those “waiting” times. You don’t have to spend money to improve these early skills. Think of how you can incorporate 10 to 15 minutes into your day to practice some pre-Kindergarten skills. Spending time interacting with your child will reap great benefits in school and life. So put the phone, and show your children how to entertain themselves in ways that builds their futures.

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