**KUMON MOMENTS**

**How Early Should Learning Begin**

When it comes to learning, the age-old question, “How young is too young?” arises in the minds of many parents.

“Children begin learning from birth. And, when it comes to literacy and numeracy development, a child can’t begin learning early enough,” says Dr. Donna McGhie-Richmond, Educational Specialist with Kumon Math and Reading Centres. ‘Learning to read is the foundation of all academic achievement.”

Parents need to provide developmentally appropriate ways of encouraging and supporting early learning. It is important to understand young children learn through play, exploration, dialogue and interaction.

While building sandcastles in a sandbox or moulding an inter-planetary spaceship with Play Dough may seem like only fun, children are actually fine-tuning their motor skills with every shape the create. They are learning about shapes and quantities, and if we look very closely we can see they are expressing their understanding of their world.

And while a child’s head may perk up over hearing about old Mother Hubbard got stuck in a cupboard, the child is also absorbing rich language and sounds of the words expressed in the nursery rhyme.

Nursery rhymes and songs are a good way to teach young children about rhythm, language and rhymes. Understanding and being able to manipulate the individual sounds in words is critical to learning to read.

Fundamental skills are learned through play and contribute to the development of early literacy and numeracy skills.

And, as the family becomes the child’s first teacher, the learning experiences they provide will have an impact on their child’s future reading and math skills.

But, there is a limit to how a baby or young child can be taught through structured learning activities.

Kumon recommends that children this young learn in a stress-free environment. “Learning should be stressed not stressful,” says Dr. McGhie-Richmond. “It can be a part of their routine, not all of their routine.”

In answer to the question it is important to remember that children are never too young to start learning, but in the early stages, critical fundamental math and reading skills are best developed naturally through play, exploration, and dialogue with family members.

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