

Building Background Knowledge: Activities that support School success (CBM matches)

My name is Laura Maynard Lane, and I've been a Big Sister for 11 years and an elementary school teacher for 9 years. So much of what we do as Bigs helps with school success for our Littles, but is sometimes hard to measure concretely. The idea of this list is twofold. First, as you read through it you will likely realize how much the things you already do contribute directly to school success. Second, I hope you will find some new ideas about how to deliberately weave more school success activities and more conversations into what you are already doing. This list is by no means comprehensive, so I hope you will continue adding to it as you think of more great ideas!

Building background knowledge:

Building life experiences and background knowledge are huge parts of increasing reading comprehension and school success. Here are some easy activities that will help build background knowledge.

- Find out what your Little is studying in school. Plan a “field trip” that relates to this topic
- Go to local museums (art museum, Health Adventure, Colburn, etc.)
- Take a walk by a river—notice the current, erosion, etc.
- Walk the Urban Trail through Downtown Asheville
- Visit the Carl Sandburg home—read some of Carl Sandburg’s tales and poems together
- Go to an apple orchard in the fall to pick apples. Go home and make applesauce or an apple pie.
- Go blueberry picking and make jam or a pie
- Visit local colleges—even young kids can benefit from walking around the campus and get a sense of what college feels like
- Volunteer with a local organization that is interesting to your Little—working with animals, the elderly, small children, plants, etc.
- Visit a local farm to see first hand where food comes from
- Visit an ethnic restaurant to try different kinds of food
- Visit local festivals
- Take your Little on errands with you that they might not have experienced—the bank, the post office, etc.
- Take a trip to the state fair, and spend some time in the educational parts
- Take a walk in the woods—notice what’s around you.
- Go to your local fire station or police department and ask for a tour.
- Share your hobbies with your Little—build their knowledge about the things that are important to you!

Reading and Writing!

Reading is a critical piece of school success. Many of our Littles do not have access to a home library, and may not have adults in their life who read. Here are some easy things you can do to promote reading and writing:

- Go to a used bookstore as an activity. You can often buy kids' books for only a few dollars. This will help build up your Little's home library. Older Littles also enjoy magazines and graphic novels (like comic books). These are also good for reluctant readers.
- *When picking books, make sure they are at a "Just Right" reading level. A good rule of thumb: have your Little read one page. If they need help with more than 3-5 words, it's too difficult for them.
- Visit your local library. Check out books, or take advantage of the in-library resources. For teens, look in the Young Adult section. Use the NC digital library for audio books – fun to listen to a book before you see the movie!
- Get your little a subscription to a magazine they are interested in.
- Tell your Little about the books you read.
- Tell stories while you're driving—you could start the story, and then leave it on a cliff hanger and have your little finish the story.
- Find out what your Little is interested in. Find a book on this topic.
- Find something you enjoy reading together—a magazine, a comic book, the newspaper.
- Get a craft book from the library and follow directions to make something
- Pick out an interesting recipe from a cookbook. Have your Little read the recipe while you cook
- Make a list of activities you'd like to do together. Have your Little do the writing
- Keep a scrapbook of activities you've done together. Take turns writing the stories of your adventures together.
- Write a letter together. This could be to a former teacher, a parent who does not live with the child, an out of town family member. Practice addressing the envelope and taking it to the post office to mail.
- Set a reading goal. Celebrate when your Little reaches their goal--maybe with a trip to the bookstore!
- Play the alphabet game while you're driving—find letters on signs around you
- For younger kids—make a game out of reading signs and billboards around you
- Buy magnetic poetry (or magnetic letters for younger kids). Make silly poems together on your fridge
- Don't dumb down your language! Use big words, but make sure to use them in context and explain what they mean to your little
- Teach your Little how to find valid information online. Have them help you research details for an activity you'd like to do together
- For older Littles—show them how to read utility bills, an apartment lease, a job application

Math, Memory and Problem solving skills:

As a Big Brother or Sister, you have a uniquely wonderful opportunity to show your Little many real concrete examples of using math in your day to day life.

- Play board games—these are great for teaching math and problem solving skills
- Cook together – measuring is a great way to build background knowledge of those concepts. Have them read the recipe aloud.
- Watch sports games with your little—discuss strategy and skills
- Teach your little a strategy game—like chess, checkers, backgammon, etc.
- Play memory games while you are driving—(I’m going on a picnic and I’m bringing....)
- Make your own memory card game with pictures of things your little likes.
- Build something—have your little help measure, make a plan, buy supplies, and follow a plan
- Sew something with your Little—have them help measure, make a plan, buy supplies, and follow a plan
- Discuss saving money—figure out how much something would cost, how much would need to be saved, how long it would take, etc.
- Find online educational games that teach math principals—Lemonade Stand is a great example
- At a holiday or birthday, consider opening a savings account instead of giving your little a big gift
- Have your Little help set a budget for your time together
- Talk about your own savings plans
- Have our Little make change and figure out tax and tip when you are shopping or eating out together
- Show your Little how to figure out the miles per gallon your car gets when you fill up with gas
- For older Littles—make a budget based on their income from an afterschool job

Developing Social and Communication Skills:

Many Bigs are very aware of this category, and are deliberate in thinking about how to help build social and communication skills with their Little. In this section I’ll try to highlight some ways that might connect back to school.

- Model for your Little how you interact with different kinds of people—friends vs. elders vs. authority figures vs. strangers, etc.
- When asking about school, help your Little problem solve about issues they might be having at school. If they’re having a conflict with a teacher, talk through and maybe even role play ways of dealing with the issue. If the conflict is with other students, talk through options and practice what your little could say to the friend.
- Ask your Little what they do when they need help with something at school. If they are reluctant to ask for help, offer suggestions about ways they might seek out help when they need it.