

Is My Child Ready for Kindergarten?

by Heather Grocott

As parents, we have hopes and dreams for our children from the moment we learn they are about to enter our world. We continuously hope and wish the best for them; and that they are able to lead successful, happy lives. But just how and where do we begin to ensure we are setting our children off on the right foot?

The first few years of a child's life are full of milestones and "firsts..." The first tooth, the first step, the first solid food, the first play date, the first trip to the zoo, etc. But before we know it, the "firsts" become less and less. Our baby strollers are in the dusty corner of the garage, the high chair has been given to the neighbor, and all of the Thomas the Train and Sesame Street DVDs are packed up in a box. Our child is no longer a baby, toddler, or preschooler! They are a tiny, independent, lively human ready to enter school and their first day of Kindergarten!

A child's first day of school is and should be a memorable one. Across cultures around the world, the first day of Kindergarten is unique and special. How do we as busy parents capture this memory? How do we know if they are ready? If they aren't ready? What preparation should take place, if any?

If you have a child you know will enter Kindergarten in September, it is important to start thinking now about this process. If your child has never experienced a childcare or early learning center, the first thing to focus on is the concept of **school**. Children should know ahead of time what a school is, who is there, and what happens there. It is imperative for your child to develop a positive rapport about school even before they enter it. You may consider reading children's books about the first day of school or the first day of kindergarten. Also, it will be important for you to contact your child's school the spring before he or she will start. Be sure to ask if the school will hold an open house and/or orientation for you and your child.

Typically, most parents worry whether or not their child is academically "ready" for Kindergarten. Although each school district follows their own unique process of children entering into Kindergarten, it is important to know that there is no standardized "list" of items your child must know for the first day of school. It is, however, beneficial to consider the following (what is sometimes referred to as "kindergarten readiness skills"):

- Enthusiasm toward learning
- Ability to listen
- Strong oral language skills
- Willingness and ability to be independent
- Ability to play well with others
- Strong fine motor skills
- Ability to write name
- Concepts of print
- Basic counting concepts

- Ability to follow directions
- Pencil grip
- Knowledge of shapes, letters, numbers, and colors

You will notice that the top items on this list are not academic focuses – although academics are extremely important kindergarten readiness skills, kindergarten teachers are just as interested in knowing that their new kindergarteners are excited about coming to school and learning. They are also interested to see if children demonstrate simple skills such as listening, speaking, and working well with others in order to survive the daily aspects of a kindergarten routine.

If you are still concerned about whether or not your child is ready for the first day of the big “K,” you may want to consider choosing a Pre-K or Preschool program that will ease the transition into Kindergarten. Early learning centers typically focus on preparation for entrance into Kindergarten, whether it be a public or private setting. This is also an excellent opportunity for your child to develop a positive attitude toward learning, and practice working and playing with other children. Pre-K programs also provide your child with the opportunity to practice being independent – can he/she take off their coat and put it on by themselves? Do they know how to care for their personal belongings? Are they able to use the bathroom and wash hands independently? Do they know how to eat lunch by themselves? Before putting all of these demands on your child the first day of Kindergarten, consider an early learning program (even part-time) to help your child transition into the world of big kid school.

Last but not least, remember to set **your** best foot forward during this special time with your child. Research shows that when parents are actively engaged and involved in their child’s learning and school experiences, children are more successful in school. This involvement includes in school, at home, and within your community. Be sure to connect with your child’s teacher from the very start – be the parent who not only cares for their own child, but for the well being of the class and school as a whole.