

Starting School: Kindergarten and Your Child

The Move to Kindergarten

Starting kindergarten is an important first step in your child's education. It lays the foundation for future schooling and is where your child can truly develop a love of learning. It is also where children begin to learn social skills and how to interact with peers.

The transition to kindergarten is a big move for you and your child. Your child may be excited, happy or anxious. You may be sharing in some of these same emotions. Staying positive and showing enthusiasm for this change will help your child also feel more comfortable as the big day approaches.

Is My Child Ready?

Not all children start kindergarten at the same level. Some children may still be learning to recognize letters while others might be able to read short words. Some kids may play well with others while others are still learning to share toys.

Do not worry if your child is still trying to learn some of these skills. Avoid comparing your child with others. Encourage your child to learn, but don't pressure him or her excessively. Kids need time to play and explore the world.



Kindergarten Readiness: Skills to Practice

- Playing cooperatively with other kids
- Listening without interrupting
- Following directions and obeying rules
- Using the bathroom without help
- Writing his or her first and last name
- Recognizing and writing numbers 0 to 10
- Counting objects
- Naming and writing letters
- Recognizing basic colors and shapes
- Reciting address and phone number
- Coloring within the lines
- Cutting on the lines

Building Confidence

Encouraging independence helps to build your child's self esteem. As they grow, children are expected to take on more responsibility. To help your child become more independent, allow him or her to:

- Choose which clothes to wear and get dressed alone.
- Put on and remove shoes and coats.
- Make choices whenever possible; let him or her pick between healthy snacks or choose which books to read before bed.
- Have responsibility for one or two household chores like clearing the table or making his or her bed everyday.

Preparing for the First Day

Starting kindergarten is sure to cause changes in your family's daily routine. Below are some tips to help make the transition smoother.

- Attend an open house, or arrange a visit to the school and classroom in advance.
- Meet the teacher and the parents of the other students.
- Ask for a copy of the school newsletter or monthly calendar.
- Practice your new morning routine the week before school starts.
- Encourage your child to eat a healthy breakfast every morning.
- Limit the amount of time your child spends in front of a TV or computer or playing video games.
- Enforce a reasonable bedtime. Children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep a night.

The Kindergarten Physical

Preparing your child for school includes a visit to your child's health care provider. This visit should occur in the spring or summer before your child starts kindergarten.

During the visit, your child's provider will:

- Review your child's growth.
- Perform vision and hearing tests.
- Ensure your child's immunizations are up to date and recommend any necessary booster shots including DTaP, polio, MMR and chicken pox vaccines.
- Determine if a skin test is needed to screen for tuberculosis (PPD). You will need to return in 48 to 72 hours with your child so the skin test can be read. Your child's provider may also order a blood test to screen for anemia (low hemoglobin) and/or urine test.
- Address questions you have about your child's readiness for school. It may be helpful to make a list of the questions you would like to discuss during the visit.
- Complete and sign enrollment forms for your child. Remember to bring these with you to your visit.

Special Considerations

If your child has special health needs, like food allergies, or your child needs to take medications during school hours, be sure to discuss these needs with your child's teacher and other school staff before school starts. Your provider may need to fill out special forms for the school, so ask about this as well.



Q: My child was born in the fall and will turn 5 years old after kindergarten starts. He will be one of the younger kids in his class. Should he start kindergarten this year or wait until next year?

A: There is no "right" answer to this question. This is an individual choice for every family. Consider your child's readiness both socially and academically. Get input from your child's preschool teacher. Talk to other parents about their experiences. Speak with the principal or teacher at your new school. You may also want to discuss your concerns with your child's provider.