

Young Children and Kindergarten: Ready or Not?

Schools' expectations of kindergarteners have increased dramatically over the years, and parents may wonder if their children have the skills necessary to enter school ready to learn and succeed.

What skills do children need to enter school? In a national survey, the majority of parents believed that children need to know how to write their names, recognize and write all of the letters of the alphabet and be able to count to 20, write their numbers and tie their shoes before entering kindergarten.

Most of these parents would be surprised to learn that kindergarten readiness is not just about intellectual development -- it is physical, social, emotional and language development, too. In fact, a large sample of kindergarten teachers reported that the most important factors in determining school success are that children come to school rested and well nourished, curious, excited to learn, and able to follow directions and pay attention. Most teachers felt that knowing letters and numbers is not crucial for school readiness because they teach those skills in kindergarten.

As fall approaches, parents can do many things to help their children succeed in school. For starters, learn about your district's expectations for children entering kindergarten. Schools should be ready to help all children succeed in school, not just the ones who begin knowing how to read or write. Be prepared for what your district expects. Also, visit the school and classroom.

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Introduce your child to the teacher, if possible, and begin a bedtime and morning routine before school starts.

Make life meaningful. Allow your child to experience ordinary and extraordinary events and activities with the curiosity and eagerness to learn that often comes so naturally to children.

Remember that you are your child's first teacher, and every day offers many opportunities to teach, whether they be sorting laundry, setting the table, walking down the street or mixing pancake batter. Beyond the everyday experiences, go on as many outings as possible. Take children to museums, the library, the zoo, the park, the train station or any other place that will expand their minds.

Get your child involved in play groups and story times, where he/she can practice getting along with others, taking turns, and paying attention. These are all important skills for every kindergartener to have.

Read every day. Reading to children helps them become more familiar with print materials and teaches many pre-reading skills. It helps children learn new words and encourages their creativity and imagination. Reading also helps children develop a lifelong passion for reading and promotes long-term school success.

Remember, the journey to school readiness begins well before young children prepare to enter kindergarten and you are their first and most important teacher. Children are born ready to learn and thrive when given stimulating experiences and responsive, consistent and loving care. Do your best to promote all areas of your child's development, and you will prepare him/her for success in school and in life.

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