

What's Inside...

- ◆ Key Areas of Readiness
- ◆ Getting Your Child Ready for the "Big School"
- ◆ A Kindergarten Time Line
- ◆ Learning Activities
- ◆ Resources



What is Kindergarten Readiness?

As we watch a child strap on their new backpack and head out the door for their first day of school we may think it is the beginning of their kindergarten experience. In reality, children and parents begin preparing for this experience the day the child first enters the world. Children are born ready to learn. They are naturally curious and continuously try to make sense of the world around them.

Starting kindergarten is an important step in the lives of children as well as the parents. To determine whether a child is ready to begin kindergarten, parents and caregivers need to take a close look at the child's development in many areas. The National Education Goals Panel states that there are five areas of children's readiness for school: physical health, social/emotional development, approaches to learning, language, and cognitive development. It is important that one aspect of a child's development is not valued higher than the others.

The actual time of kindergarten readiness varies from child to child and no single or simple factor determines whether a child is ready. In reality, very few children are equally skilled in all these areas. Many children who are advanced mentally may lag behind emotionally, while children who are physically skilled may be slower in terms of language development. Some five-year-olds are already reading, while others may only know a few letters of the alphabet. The important thing to remember is that you play an important role in getting children off to a good start in kindergarten. You can help prepare a child for school by learning about his/her strengths, needs, learning style; by observing them in a variety of situations; and by talking with their pediatrician, preschool teacher, and other caregivers.

This *ECDC Bulletin* will: examine how you can determine if and when a child is ready to begin kindergarten, suggest how you can help make a smooth transition from home or preschool to kindergarten, and give examples and resources on preparing your child for "Big School."

SOURCE: Kagan, S.L., Moore, E., & Bradekamp, S. (1995). *Reconsidering children's early development and learning: Toward common views and vocabulary*. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel Goal 1 Technical Planning Group.

How Can I Tell if My Child is Ready?

All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten.

These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

—Robert Fulgum

There are different references to help you answer this question. If your child is in a preschool program then having a talk with the teacher about your child's development would be a good start.

This is also a conversation that you could have with your child's pediatrician. A commonly untapped resource would be friends and family who know your child well. You should definitely contact your child's school and ask for information about kindergarten. Talking to all these people will hopefully help you gather enough information so that you can determine if your child is ready for kindergarten. Here are some things to think about to help you make your decision.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- *Can my child listen to instructions and then follow them?* This is an important skill to help your child participate in class.
- *Is my child curious and receptive to learning new things?* A child's curiosity will be her motivation to learn. This excitement will give the child a positive outlook on school.

- *Does my child get along well with other kids, share and know how to take turns?* Social interaction will play a big part in a child's adjustment to kindergarten.
- *Is my child able to put on his coat and go to the bathroom by himself?* These self-help skills are important because children have a lot more freedom.
- *Can my child hold a pencil? Cut with scissors?* Your child will be able to express herself and be proud of it. Children need these fine motor skills to begin working on writing the alphabet and to keep up with classroom projects.
- *Does my child show an interest in books? Try to "read" a book by telling a story based on the pictures?* The interest in books shows their level of language and comprehension. In kindergarten children will be challenged to increase their attention span to follow a series of events in stories and expand their vocabulary to express their ideas.

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How Can I Tell if My Child is Ready?

(cont. from page one)

- *Can my child work together with others as part of a group?* The ability to compromise and join in easily with other children will create a positive and successful social environment for your child.
- *Can my child recognize a few letters and count ten objects?* Most kindergarten teachers assume that children have at least a basic familiarity with the ABCs and numbers.

If you answered "yes" to most of these questions and "sometimes" to the rest, your child is most likely ready for kindergarten. If not, your child might benefit from another year of preschool, or you may want to have your child evaluated by the school district in order to determine if a different learning style or environment is needed. Remember that you do not have to make this decision in haste. You will not have to make this decision until a few months before your child starts school.

SOURCE: *Babycenter.com*,
 "Kindergarten Readiness:-
 Is Your Child Ready for School?"



PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR "BIG SCHOOL"

After answering these questions, you may see the areas where your child needs more practice. You can help your child brush up on these skills with simple activities that are incorporated into your everyday routines (see page 3). These activities will address the areas of readiness that are listed below.

This chart is a general guideline. Keep in mind that it is fine if your child is not able to perform all of these tasks. This will give you goals to work towards.

KEY AREAS OF READINESS

LANGUAGE & SPEECH

- Speaks understandably
- Speaks in complete sentences (5-6 words)
- Looks at pictures and tells stories about themselves and about books
- Answers questions about stories
- Follows three-step verbal directions in sequence (at least two)

SELF-CARE SKILLS

- Toilet trained
- Dresses themselves with minimal supervision (also able to zip zippers, button buttons and snap snaps)
- Washes and dries hands
- Eats meals on their own and using forks when necessary

MOTOR SKILLS

- Able to pick up small items with their finger tips
- Draws a person with head, body, arms and legs
- Cuts with scissors
- Holds and uses a pencil properly
- Draws rather than scribbles
- Runs, hops, balances, and throws and catches a ball

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Able to share and play with other children in a group
- Able to ask for help when needed
- Separates from parents without becoming upset
- Beginning to control behavior and emotions with little help from an adult
- Able to express emotions (excitement, frustrations, anger, confusion)
- Follows basic rules
- Works independently for at least 5 minutes

THINKING SKILLS




- Understands that actions have causes and effects
- Understands today, yesterday, and tomorrow
- Identifies some letters of the alphabet
- Counts ten objects
- Sorts similar objects by color, size and shape
- Tells right from left
- Pays attention for short periods of time to adult-directed tasks



LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO HELP CHILDREN BE PREPARED FOR KINDERGARTEN

Our job, as adults, is to make learning fun for children. If we are excited and curious about what the child is learning, then in turn, the child will develop the eagerness to learn more. You can incorporate learning activities into your child's day, and your child will have so much fun playing with you that they won't even know they are learning! You will probably be surprised at how many of these activities you are already doing with your child! Remember, all children develop both mentally and physically at different rates so children who are the same age won't be at the same skill level. Some of these activities might be difficult for your child, but it is important to be positive and encouraging. They will get the hang of it with time.

Every family has a different schedule and routine. These are just suggestions on the time of day that you may do these activities with your child. Some of these games will require a bit of time, but it can also keep your child engaged so that you could potentially spend more time at the grocery store or at a restaurant. You will find that some of these activities may become one of your child's favorite games.

Time or Place	Activities	
Wake up!	<i>Choose an outfit:</i> Put out two outfits, and your child chooses the one with the most buttons, long sleeves, stripes, a zipper, or certain color. The variations are endless. Next, have the child put on their clothes on their own. If they have a hard time buttoning, have them just do one to start with and build up from there. <i>Eating breakfast:</i> Play "I Spy" with the cereal box. Eat your cereal by color, shape, or size.	
Riding in the car	<i>Sing silly songs.</i> Sing songs that rhyme or have words that start with the same sound. <i>Road Scavenger Hunt:</i> Look for things that they can read such as "Stop," or "McDonalds." Also have them guess what signs mean by the picture—"Deer Crossing" or "School Zone." Clap to the beat of a song on the radio.	
Cooking	<i>Let's make it together:</i> Read the recipe together. Have children participate in cooking and teach them vocabulary about cooking like whisk, combine, chop and knead. Children can count the number of scoops and learn to measure. Teach your child how to use a plastic knife and have him cut up fruit. Talk about safety and good hand washing habits. Having children work with and knead dough helps build muscles in their hands and fingers that lead to writing.	
Grocery store	<i>Our grocery list:</i> Have the child cross off items on the grocery list or have the child make a grocery list of his own. Encourage them to draw the item if they are not able to write the words. <i>Play the "I Spy" game.</i> <i>Go on a scavenger hunt:</i> Look for different shapes or letters or colors.	
Dinner at home	<i>Help set the table.</i> Talk about the taste, texture and color of the food. Let them put the food on their plate and pass things to other people.	
Eating out	<i>What's on the menu.</i> Make a rhyming word with an item on the menu and have the child guess the word. "I'm getting a bicken bandwich." <i>Sugar packet fun.</i> Sort the sugar packets. Make letters, shapes, and numbers using the sugar packets.	
Bedtime	<i>Snuggle with a book:</i> Point to the words when you read, showing the child that you read from left to right. Have your child look for words that start with certain sounds. Have him guess the letter of the sound you are making.	

Different Activities, Different Times

Flashlight Game. Shine the flashlight at an object and the other person has to say a word that rhymes with it or clap the number of syllables in the word or make the beginning sound of that word.

Weekend Family Fun Time! Play some classic board games with your child. Stress the importance of turn taking and quality time together. This is a good time not to stress winning, but to help your child with her emotions if they get upset about losing. Playing board games on a play date is great because both children can practice this social skill together.

Misc. Art Projects. What can you make with things we won't need anymore? This also helps your child learn to use materials that they will use at school, such as glue, scissors, crayons and pencils. Have your child use old newspapers or materials that you do not need anymore (paper towel rolls, boxes, plastic bottles, leaves, branches). You do not need to buy art materials to make art! Have your child cut things of different thickness to help her gain fine motor control. Make a house for a stuffed animal with your materials. Make a card for a friend. Make a collage with things you have collected.



TRANSITION, TIME FOR “BIG SCHOOL”

Children as well as parents will have a surge of emotions when they are getting ready for kindergarten. Many children are conflicted because they feel excited yet scared at the same time. It is the duty of the parents and caregivers of the child to help them figure out their feelings. The first step is to acknowledge their feelings. Instead of saying, “There is nothing to worry about, you are going to be fine,” consider saying, “This is a big change for both of us. It’s okay that you are a bit scared.” Share a time when you started something new that made you nervous, like starting a new job or *your* first day of kindergarten. Ask them what makes them anxious about going to kindergarten. It may be leaving their friends, having a new teacher, or they’re worried that they will not have toys at the new school. These are all valid fears for a five-year-old child. After you find out your child’s fears about starting a new school, talk to him about what he should expect in kindergarten.

Read your child books about going to kindergarten. Talk about things that he will have in kindergarten that are the same as home or their current preschool. Talk to him about things that will be different at their new school that they will like. There will be a new playground, a library, a cafeteria, new toys and new friends.

Here is a timeline to help you and your child get ready for kindergarten. The preparation for kindergarten starts months before your child starts.



A TIMELINE TO PREPARE FOR KINDERGARTEN

MONTH	THINGS TO DO
January:	Call your local elementary school and schedule a tour of the school and ask about registration. Refer to the chart on page 5 for helpful questions that you should ask the school.
February/March:	Pre-register your child for kindergarten. Although you may not be required to pre-register your child, it is helpful to do so. This will help better prepare you and your child for the transition. Ask when your school will have “Kindergarten Orientation.” This is when you and your child can visit the school. Each school has different activities planned for this day. Usually your child will be able to visit the classrooms and have a tour of the school and maybe meet the teacher. This is a good time for parents to meet each other. These people will be in the same boat when September comes around. See which families live close to you so that you may set up play dates.
April/May:	Make visits to the school’s playground to play on the weekends. Make play dates with children from the community who may be going to the same school.
June/July:	Start a bedtime routine that is much like that of a school day. This may be harder for the parents than it is for the children, but it will benefit you in the end. When school starts, there will be many changes to your child’s routine. Having your child on a set bedtime schedule will help create a positive transition for them. When they start school there will be many changes, and it will be comforting for them to have this consistency at home.
August:	Go buy school supplies together. This will help get the child excited about school. Pretend to play “school” at your house. This will give the child an idea of what he/she can expect out of school and help you inform your child about kindergarten.
September:	Remember that this is a transition for you as well as your child. Many parents shed a few tears while their child struts into the class with a big smile on their face. This is normal because this is a big change for both of you. Some children’s behavior may seem to regress when they start kindergarten: this is part of the transition. There are so many things that the child has to take in such as a new daily routine, new friends, new rules, new teachers and a new classroom. Be positive, tell your child about the things that they are doing well. If you have some continuing concerns, you should talk to your child’s teacher.

Children's Book Suggestions

Alphabet

Chicka Chicka, Boom Boom by

Bill Martin & John Archambault

A is for Africa by Ifeoma

Onyefulu

Dr. Seuss's ABC by Dr. Seuss

Bunny Cakes by Rosemary Wells

Math

Miss Spider's Tea Party: The Counting Book by David Kirk

Richard Scarry's Best Counting Book Ever by Richard Scarry

A House for Birdie by Stuart J.

Murphy and Edward Miller

Rhymes & Songs

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by

Michael Rosen

The Orchard Book of Nursery

Rhymes by Faith Jaques

Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed by Eileen Christelow

The Wheels on the Bus by

Maryann Kowalski

Down by the Bay by Raffi and

Nadine Bernard Wescott

The Lady with the Alligator

Purse by Nadine Bernard

Wescott

Pattern Books

The Very Busy Spider by Eric

Carle

I Went Walking by Sue Williams

Folk Tales

Goldilocks and the Three Bears

The Three Little Pigs

The True Story of the Three

Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka and

Lane Smith

Kindergarten Readiness

The Night Before Kindergarten

by Natasha Wing

First Day Jitters by Julie

Danneberg

Miss Kindergarten Gets Ready

for Kindergarten by Joseph

Slate and Ashley Wolff

Countdown to Kindergarten by

Alison McGhee

Getting Ready for Kindergarten When Your Child has Special Needs

For your family, getting ready for kindergarten also starts months before your child enters into the classroom, but the steps are a bit different. You will still register for kindergarten, take tours, talk to the school and help hone your child's skills. The slight difference is that your child is now transitioning from CPSE (the Committee on Preschool Special Education) to CSE (the Committee on Special Education). We have created an informational booklet called [A Guide to Special Education for Children Transitioning from Preschool Special Education](#) that details the steps in this transition. Please contact us if you need more information or would like a copy of the booklet.



QUESTIONS ALL PARENTS SHOULD ASK THE SCHOOL

- How long is the school day?
- How large are the classes?
- What forms do you need to fill out?
- What immunizations are required?
- What are the expectations in K?
- How long is the bus ride?
- What supports are available if your child needs them?
- How many aides are in the classroom?
- What are the principal and teacher's name?
- What are the yearly and daily schedules?
- What are the procedures for going to and from school?
- What food services are available?

Conclusion

Before you know it you will be saying, "Have a great first day of kindergarten!" This day will be full of nervousness and joy not only for your child but for you, the parent, as well. Be assured that you all have been preparing for this day for awhile and this is a great part of growing up.

For More Information

[Kindergarten Here We Come! Resources and Activities for Parents and Caregivers of Next Year's Kindergarten Students](#)

This booklet is available from Child Care Solutions on their website.
<http://www.childcaresyracuse.org>

[Listings of School Districts in NY State](#)

This website has contact information for all NYS school districts.
<http://www.nysed.gov/admin/admindex.html>

[A Guide to Special Education for Children Transitioning from Preschool Special Education](#)

This booklet details transition for children moving into kindergarten and is available on our website
<http://ecdc.sye.edu>





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WE KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR ANSWERS.



Workshops of Interest

The ECDC can provide information and workshops on a variety of topics tailored to the interests and needs of parents and early childhood professionals. Resources are available on such topics as general child development, developmental issues for children with special needs, coping strategies, and specific disabilities.

Workshops include:

- **Including Children with Special Needs in Child Care**
- **Creating Working Alliances with Families**
- **Early Childhood Development: The Meaning of Red Flags**
- **What Are Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education**
- **Moving On: Children and Families Facing Transition**

Who We Are

The Mid-State Central Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is a regional technical assistance center for the State Education Department providing information, referral and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with young children birth to five. We are located at Syracuse University's Center on Human Policy.

ECDC services to families are free and confidential.

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