



When is the Right Time to Start Kindergarten?

Educational Exchange - April 2008

By Susan Shapiro, M.S.

“My child has a late birthday. How do I know if he/she is ready for kindergarten?”

Many parents struggle to determine if their child with a late birthday is ready to start kindergarten. Before your child heads off to the bus stop, you as a parent should be aware of what your child will need to be successful. Keep in mind that kindergarten is one of the most important years for your child and a significant step on the road to learning. Kindergarten readiness can be a very confusing concept.

While all children are certainly unique and typical development varies from child to child, kindergarten teachers expect that students entering their classrooms will have developed certain physical, social, motor, and academic skills. For instance, how close is your child in age to the school's cut-off date? Being one of the older kids in the class often allows a child to have more time to mature physically and athletically. A younger child who can't tie his shoes, hold a pencil properly, or is small in stature, may not feel as comfortable as other children in the classroom.

Look at your child's social development. Does she enjoy playing with other children and is she able to learn in a group situation? Can he regulate his behavior, share, and wait his turn? Most 5-year-olds are able to communicate fairly easily with adults, understand directions, and express their ideas and needs. Emergent skills such as reciting the alphabet, understanding the relationship between letters and sounds, and being able to count to 10, are just a few important indicators of academic success.

If, after asking yourself these questions, your child seems to be lagging a little behind the kindergarten developmental curve, it's time to “check in” with his preschool teachers to review school progress. Many early childhood educators use skill checklists to assess kindergarten readiness. Some parents even enlist the services of educational testers for more formal assessments, especially when developmental delays are suspected.

If a determination is made that your child is ready to enter kindergarten the following September, make sure to visit the new school or classroom to make the transition a little easier. If a kindergarten placement is not recommended, it's probably a good idea to pay close attention to those voicing concerns.

Kindergartens are becoming more and more academic, doing what was once considered first grade work, and some children will adjust better if you wait until they are a year older.

I recommend investigating additional kindergarten options or pre-k programs in your area so your child won't be directly repeating the same curriculum learned during the previous year.

One way or the other, the decision is ultimately up to you, the parent. Carefully contemplate your options.

An extra year for maturation and skill bolstering may help your child feel happier and more comfortable in the kindergarten environment. However, keep in mind, the oldest or the tallest child in the class isn't necessarily the smartest. **BC**

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