

10 Kindergarten Readiness Skills Your Child Needs

What do teachers really want your child to know on the first day of kindergarten? Kindergarten is changing and parents are feeling pressure to prepare their children for their first school experience. But while some may fret that reading and doing addition are prerequisites for kindergarten these days, your child likely possesses many of the skills she needs to be successful as she begins school.

"Some of the things I would like my kids to know coming into kindergarten are their letters and some sounds, recognition of numbers 1-10, being able to write and recognize their name and being able to cut with scissors," says kindergarten teacher Nicole Barton. "It is also important for them to be able to follow directions and to have the ability to express their feelings." Here are the 10 kindergarten readiness skills to focus on as you work with your child. Don't be concerned if she does not have them all down before the first day of kindergarten, as she will continue to work on them throughout the year. Try a few activities listed for the skills your child might need to work on a bit more before she starts school.

1. Writing

- Help your child practice writing letters, especially the letters in her name.
- Teach your child how to write her name with an uppercase first letter and the remaining letters in lowercase.
- Write in shaving cream in the bathtub, salt or sugar in a cake pan or in finger paint to make practicing more fun and multisensory.

2. Letter Recognition

- Play games to help your child recognize some letters of the alphabet.
- Play hide and seek with refrigerator magnets.
- Rather than drilling your child with flashcards, use them to play a game of alphabet go fish.

3. Beginning Sounds

- Make your child aware of the sound that each letter makes.
- Find items around the house that begin with the same sound and identify the letter that makes each sound.
- Overemphasize the first sound in words to help your child hear the individual sounds in words.

4. Number Recognition and Counting

- Count throughout the day (for example, the crackers she is eating for a snack or the socks that you take out of the dryer).
- Point out numbers you see in your environment and have your child name them (for example, the numbers found on food boxes or street signs).

5. Shapes and Colors

- If your child is having trouble recognizing certain colors, you might add a little food coloring to cookie dough, milk or vanilla pudding to emphasize those colors.
- Help your child recognize more difficult shapes such as diamonds and rectangles by showing her how to draw them on paper and cut them out.
- Play games in which your child finds objects of particular colors and shapes around the house or in the neighborhood as you drive.

6. Fine Motor Skills

- Give your child several different writing options (colored pencils, crayons or markers) to help keep her interested in writing and drawing.
- Playing with play dough is a fun way to strengthen the muscles of the hand that will be used for writing.

7. Cutting

- Purchase a good pair of child-safe scissors and let your child practice.
- Give her old magazines or newspapers to cut up, or allow her to make a collage of the things she likes by cutting them from magazines and gluing them to a piece of paper.
- Cutting play dough is also fun for children.

8. Reading Readiness

- Run your finger under the words as you read to your child to help her learn that words go from left to right and top to bottom.
- Play games with rhyming words to help your child hear similar sounds in words. For example, as you are going up the stairs, name one word that rhymes with cat for each step as you go up.

9. Attention and Following Directions

- Read lots of stories with your child and work up to reading longer chapter books, one chapter each night or as long as she remains interested and focused.
- Give your child two and three step directions. For example: "put on your pajamas, brush your teeth and pick a book to read."
- Play Simon Says with two or three step directions. For example: "Simon Says jump up and down and shout hooray."

10. Social Skills

- Give your children opportunities to interact with other children in preschool, church or social groups or play dates.
- Teach your child how to express her feelings if she doesn't like something.
- Role-play different situations she might experience on the playground or at school. Help her find solutions for typical problems she might encounter.

Chances are you're already practicing many of these skills your child will need for kindergarten. Remember to keep it fun and don't make it stressful for you or your child. With just a little fun practice, your child will be prepared for her elementary school debut!

