

Is my child ready for Kindergarten?

Being ready for kindergarten means a lot more than being 5 years old by a certain date. Parents, physicians and teachers must consider each child's intellectual, physical, social and emotional development.

Hurrying school entrance seldom does much good and often does harm. Teachers say the youngest children in a classroom often struggle the most. These children may feel school is hard, and may be forced to keep up with students who are older and more ready for school. As a result, they may begin to feel bad about themselves and their abilities.

The object of kindergarten is not to make your child a star in the academic Olympics. It's to provide the foundation needed for a solid start in education.

If you aren't sure your child is ready for kindergarten, holding him back is better than setting him up for failure. Here are some guidelines to follow in deciding whether your child is ready for kindergarten.

READY, WILLING AND ABLE

Your child **may** be ready for kindergarten if she or he:

- Plays well with other children.
- Takes turns.
- Follows directions.
- Conforms to simple rules for behavior.
- Feeds herself (uses a spoon & fork)
- Dresses himself, (buttons, snaps & zips)
- Manages toileting.
- Is able to separate easily going from home to school.
- Recognizes symbols and shapes.
- Uses child safety scissors to cut simple shapes.
- Listens to a story for five to 10 minutes and understands it.
- Hears rhymes.
- Sees similarities and differences.
- Speaks clearly enough to be understood.
- Understands concepts of size and direction, such as large, small, up, down and beside.
- Can adjust easily to changes in routines and plans.
- Can hold a pencil well and copy shapes such as circles, rectangles and triangles.
- Can bounce and catch a ball.

NOT READY YET

Kids not ready for kindergarten may show:

- **Poor coordination.** With poor finger dexterity, the child may have trouble with pencil skills. A child who is not as physically coordinated as other children may find physical education activities difficult and develop a poor self-concept.
- **Psychological immaturity.** The child who can't concentrate, can't make simple decisions, can't wait his turn, can't follow directions and can't remember events may find it hard to handle the school setting.
- **Emotional immaturity.** The child who can't separate from Mom and home will not adapt well to school. Expecting a child to compete in a situation beyond his present capacities may cause him to develop a negative self-image and a desire to avoid all types of competition.

If your child is showing signs of these problems, discuss them with his doctor. There may be things to do to strengthen these areas of development.

THE PARENT'S ROLE

Most children who move into kindergarten aren't making a transition straight from home to school. Many kids today have experienced preschool or day care. That means today's kindergartens should have changed, too.

Parents should work with members of the preschool community – as well as the elementary school teachers, principals, school boards and PTAs – to make sure kindergarten offers positive experiences for today's kids.

If you decide to hold your child out for a year, use that time well. Enrich your child's life with social experiences with other children. Encourage independence and physical activity. Offer continuous exposure to writing, drawing and storytelling – and lots of play!

Most of all, don't worry. There is absolutely no shame if your child isn't ready for kindergarten. If you fret over delaying the start of school, the child may notice and begin to worry, too. More and more parents are making the wise decision to wait one more year to give their kids a solid start in education.