

Has Preschool Prepared Your Child for Kindergarten?

Preschool can provide an important introduction to the notion of schooling. For many children, preschool provides a "head start" in learning certain academic skills that they will be expected to learn in kindergarten and first grade. If your child has attended a good preschool program, he will already have some rudimentary knowledge of such concepts as colors, shapes, numbers and letter recognition, as well as the sounds that different letters produce.

Although the introduction to academic skills can give preschoolers a head start on kindergarten learning, preschool can have an even more important role in preparing kids for school. If your child has been attending preschool, the experience has given him the opportunity to develop social skills in group situations. Day care or preschool also gave your child the opportunity to develop strong friendships. Preschool provided day-to-day (or every other day, depending on how often your child attended) contact with the same children. Hopefully, this regular contact has allowed certain friendships to build. His ability to form friendships will go a long way toward making your child's kindergarten experience easier.

Does this mean that if your child hasn't attended a preschool program that he will be socially backward when he first enters kindergarten? Of course not. A child who has had little or no contact with other children his own age may have a more difficult time adjusting to kindergarten. But classes for preschoolers (in swimming, gymnastics, dance, crafts, and so on), library reading groups, informal play at local parks and plenty of playdates - in other words, a preschool program that you've designed and supervised yourself - can offer similar opportunities to practice social skills both in groups and one-on-one.

So if you have made sure that your child has had opportunities to play and learn with other children his age, he will have had plenty of practice at getting along and cooperating with others. If you have made sure that your preschooler had the opportunity to make close friendships by seeing one or two other children on a regular basis, then you can be confident that he will make friends in kindergarten.



Kindergarten Readiness Checklist

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While there is no perfect formula that determines when children are truly ready for kindergarten, you can use this checklist to see how well your child is doing in acquiring the skills found on most kindergarten checklists.

Check the skills your child has mastered. Then recheck every month to see what additional skills your child can accomplish easily. Try the accompanying activities to work with your child on each skill. Young children change so fast - if they can't do something this week, they may be able to do it a few weeks later.

- Listen to stories without interrupting
- Pay attention for short periods of time to adult-directed tasks
- Understand actions have both causes and effects
- Show understanding of general times of day
- Cut with scissors
- Trace basic shapes
- Begin to share with others
- Start to follow rules
- Be able to recognize authority
- Manage bathroom needs
- Button shirts, pants, coats and zip up zippers
- Begin to control oneself
- Separate from parents without being upset
- Speak understandably
- Talk in complete sentences of five to six words
- Look at pictures and then tell stories
- Recognize rhyming sounds
- Identify the beginning sound of some words
- Identify some alphabet letters
- Recognize some common sight words like "stop"
- Sort similar objects by color, size and shape
- Recognize groups of one, two, three, four and five objects
- Count to ten
- Bounce a ball

If your child has acquired most of the skills on this checklist and will be at least four years old at the start of the summer before he or she starts kindergarten, he or she is probably ready for kindergarten. What teachers want to see on the first day of school are children who are healthy, mature, capable and eager to learn.

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