

# Ways to Make Sure Your Child is Ready and Set to Go to Kindergarten

By Dawn Lorenz

For better or worse, kindergarten isn't what it used to be. Are we rushing children beyond their developmental abilities? Are all of the tests valid or necessary?

No matter how we feel about it, agree or disagree, it's what we are facing right now.

There are ways you can help make your child's transition to kindergarten as smooth as possible. Even though children learn and develop at different rates, they are all born with an amazing capacity to learn. Kindergarten readiness doesn't have to take over your summer; just 15 to 20 minutes a day of playing, exploring and learning can make quite a difference.

There's no perfect formula for knowing if a child is ready for kindergarten. You may be surprised to hear that, especially with all of the recent national focus on standards and academic skills. Most kindergarten teachers are hoping for a range of abilities that are mostly social and emotional in nature. A student entering kindergarten "ready to learn" sets the perfect foundation for future academic endeavors.

Independence, the ability to listen and follow directions, the capacity to play well with others (sharing, turn-taking, compromising), good manners and respect for authority, the ability to focus and concentrate, developed

fine-motor skills, a diverse vocabulary and a curiosity for learning are good indicators for kindergarten readiness. A strong, positive self-esteem and a "can-do" attitude will also go a long way in making your child a successful learner. It's important to remember that no child will be equally competent in all areas; rather they'll have areas of proficiency and areas that will require more support.

We can't disregard the academic skill set totally, however. Most kindergarten teachers expect students, especially those who have attended one or more years of pre-school, to come in being able to label the letters of the alphabet, name shapes and colors, recognize numbers 1-10, count to 20 and recognize, write and spell their name. Without a foundation of skills such as these, young students are at risk of falling behind when more rigorous curriculums are presented.

Here are some ideas of what parents can do at home or on vacation to help their child's academic readiness this summer.



1. Read Every Day. Whether at the pool or beach, on the hammock, under a tree or in the bathtub, discuss stories and ask comprehension questions. Who? What? Where? When? Why?
2. Point Out Common Sight Words.

The, a, an, as, at, on, of, or, etc. Bring attention to conventions of print: capital letters, spaces between words, upper vs. lower case letters, punctuation. Also point out letters in words, signs and books.

3. Encourage Curiosity. Be ready to Google together questions that arise.
4. Constructive Play. Play with rhyming words, a great activity for the car. Play turn-taking games like Chutes and Ladders, Hi Ho Cherry-O and Trouble, which encourages sportsmanship.
5. Limit Screen Time. An hour is fine for a TV or iPad. Limit your screen time, too, so you're available and engaged.
6. Play With Math. Sort objects like Legos by color, shape or size; count cookies, goldfish or pretzel sticks by ones and groups of 10. Also, group items and have your child count and label the group with a number quantity.

### Other Ideas to Try

- Work with Play-Doh to strengthen fine motor skills, including rolling, squeezing and cutting with kid-safe scissors. Roll Play-Doh "snakes" and make letters and numbers—even your name!
  - Practice name and alphabet writing in a tray filled with sand, rice, shaving cream, pudding.
  - Build letters with pompoms, Legos, buttons, blocks or beads.
  - Encourage independence, such as tying shoes, zipping a jacket, buttoning, cleaning up.
  - Get a Kindergarten Readiness activity book for the car, plane rides, rainy days, down time.
  - Talk about the tough stuff, including being yourself, bullying, friendship, anxiety about school. Check with your local library for books on these topics and more.
- Most importantly, take time to enjoy your child and make wonderful memories together. Once school begins there will be lots more things to do to support their learning – but that's a thought for the fall. Happy learning!

Dawn Lorenz is a New York State certified teacher at World Cup Nursery School and Kindergarten in Chappaqua. She has taught kindergarten for more than 20 years.

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