

## Parents are a Child's First Teacher

### What Do We Mean By School Readiness?

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The research suggests that there are four key dimensions of readiness: language and literacy, thinking skills, self-control, and self-confidence. These capacities develop during the earliest years of a child's life and provide a solid foundation for kindergarten readiness and later academic success. There is much that parents and other caregivers can do to support the development of school readiness skills.

Children are born learning and parents are the child's first teacher. The child's life from birth to three years old is a critical time in preparing for their educational experience in kindergarten. Kindergarten may be one of the first times a child has been separate from their parents for an extended period of time. Kindergarten may be one of the first times a child interacts with a multitude of children with assorted backgrounds. Kindergarten may be one of the first times a child is given a command from an unfamiliar grown-up called a teacher. There is much more to being "ready for kindergarten" than being physically healthy and fostering cognitive development like being able to count to 20 or knowing some of the letters of the alphabet. School readiness is more relevant to characteristics such as: listening and asking questions, expressing thoughts and communication with others, thinking before performing actions, possessing curious eagerness to learn, being experienced with books, knowing how to share and take turns, being able to work alone and with others, and understanding written words and how they are put together to make a sentence.

#### Activities for Parents

There are many activities parents can do to help their child grow and develop. However, parents need to encourage the development of four key areas during the child's first three years in order to foster a kindergarten ready child. These four areas are: Language and Literacy, Thinking Skills, Self-Control, and Self-Confidence. The most important time for a child's development is the beginning because this is the foundation from which the child will continually progress. Therefore, it is important to provide a child with experiences in the first 3 years that contribute to the four areas of language and literacy, thinking skills, self-control, and self-confidence.

## Language Development

Language and literacy skills could be some of the most important skills a child could possess. Not only do these skills incorporate vocabulary acquisition and the first stepping stones to reading, but these skills give the child the ability to communicate wants and needs. The end goal with this skill area is for the child to be able to verbally communicate wants and needs to teachers, understand and respond to questions, and build an essential vocabulary providing a base for future reading skills. Kindergarten may be the first time a child is away from his or her parents for an extended period of time so the child must be able to communicate clearly. The child should be able to communicate to the teacher important things like if something is wrong, if the child does not feel well, or if the child needs to use the restroom. Kindergarten may also be the first time a child gets to interact with many different children. On top of communication, language and literacy skills are well-known to be essential in reading which are crucial in the following years of academics.

## Key Thinking Skills

Another area is thinking skills. Concepts such as cause-and-effect and object permanence (an object still being there even if it is hidden under a blanket) are learned during the child's first year. Since small children cannot read yet or fully understand language, the majority of their learning comes from first-hand and repeated experiences. The important concept parents need to recognize in this area for preparing their child for kindergarten is the encouragement of a child to learn. Parent should foster the curiosity and encourage the exploration of new activities in a young child. This sort of reinforcement will translate into an eagerness to learn which is vital for the kindergarten environment. During the child's second year, the continual question of "Why?" is a great sign that the child is eager to learn.

## Mastering Self-Control

Self-control also proves to be an essential aspect of kindergarten readiness. The ability to communicate wants and needs, as mentioned in the language and literacy section, is important. It is even more important for the child to understand the appropriate way of communicating wants and needs. Children must understand limits. More specifically, children need to understand appropriate behavior: When is it ok to be loud when playing? Where can I draw with my crayons? Where can I throw and kick this ball? On top of understanding limits, an important aspect of self-control is patience. When a child is taught to wait and be patient, it allows the child to realize that other people have needs, too. Patience and self-control are integral to a child's ability to share and cooperate with others and resolve frustration and conflicts which are both essential to a kindergarten classroom.

## Building Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is essential for kindergarten readiness. A confident child is more willing to take on new challenges, interact with other children, and be away from parents for an extended period of time. Confident children see other people like them and expect relationships to be fun and exciting. Kindergarten involves individual and group work. In either case, confidence is key: a confident child will feel comfortable working alone while feeling comfortable with interacting with fellow kindergarteners during group work.