

iBlankie

every parent's security blanket



IS MY CHILD READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

"Education is a process, not a race."

~Anonymous

INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten readiness is one of the most important questions that you can ask about your child in relation to school. Grade placement is a decision that will impact the next thirteen years of your child's and your family's life. The question, "Is my child ready for kindergarten?" can be anxiety-provoking; this article provides important guidelines to help with this decision for your child.

This article discusses concepts relevant to the kindergarten readiness question, identifies areas for developmental assessment and provides a "rule of thumb" that assists with your decision for your child. Starting kindergarten at the right and ready time is crucial in helping your child thrive in the coming school years.

CONTENTS

<i>KINDERGARTEN PLACEMENT MATTERS</i>	3
<i>KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM & READINESS</i>	3
Kindergarten Curriculum	
Readiness	
<i>THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRONOLOGICAL AGE</i>	5
<i>DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS FOR ASSESSING YOUR CHILD</i>	5
Emotional Development	
EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA	
Social Development	6
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA	
Physical Development	7
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA	
Cognitive/Verbal Development	7
COGNITIVE/VERBAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA	
ASSESSMENT	
<i>RULE OF THUMB FOR DETERMINING KINDERGARTEN READINESS</i>	8
<i>SUMMARY</i>	8
<i>FAQ</i>	8

KINDERGARTEN PLACEMENT MATTERS

Appropriate grade placement is paramount for a child's success in school. One of the most critical decisions that you can make for your child's education is not to start them in school too soon. A girl should be at least five years old and a boy should be a minimum of 5-1/2 years old before starting kindergarten. A certain level of maturity helps ensure that your child will not just survive, but will thrive, in kindergarten.

It is important to assess the three key components within the question "Is my child ready for kindergarten?"

- Kindergarten:** Evaluate kindergartens in the current school environment
- Readiness:** Explore the concept of "readiness"
- Your Child:** Examine your child's chronological age and then evaluate your child by focusing on the four components that you can quantify to determine your child's maturity level in terms of kindergarten readiness.

KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM & READINESS

Kindergarten Curriculum

Let's look closely at kindergarten today. This isn't your kindergarten experience anymore. In general, throughout the country, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has had a huge impact on public school curriculum, and even some private school curriculum.

Believing that the earlier children read the better, the curricula in all grades has been amped up in terms of subject matter and intensity. What was formerly taught in first grade is now being taught in kindergarten; what was formerly taught in second grade is now taught in first grade; these push-down curricula are developmentally inappropriate for many children and can cause a great deal of anxiety and frustration on your child's part.

There are often reading groups in kindergarten, despite the fact that research has supported the concept of "reading readiness" by indicating that most children are not neurologically ready to read until age seven.

The question, "*Is my child ready for kindergarten?*" should also be followed by the question, "*In a year, will my child be ready for first grade?*" where the academic demands are even greater and possibly still developmentally inappropriate. Since it is recognized by early childhood specialists that boys often mature at a six months' slower rate academically in the early years, these more recent changes in curricula can cause particular difficulty for boys.

Readiness

The concept of readiness is important. We would never think about trying to have our six-year-old's first tooth pulled early, rather than wait for it to fall out naturally, just to be on a predetermined schedule based on age. It should be the same with kindergarten—you can't force your child to be ready for kindergarten with its current curriculum demands merely based on your child's age.

In the past, with the older more developmentally appropriate curriculum, this was not such an issue; schools espoused the concept of meeting each child where the child was developmentally when they entered school. With the current curriculum push, children have to meet the standards set by the school; the concept of readiness is put on the child rather than the school. So it is essential your child not only be ready for kindergarten, but that your child be SUPER-READY for kindergarten. Your child shouldn't just survive kindergarten; your child needs to be ready to thrive in kindergarten.

Every autumn I receive calls from parents who are upset, frustrated and angry about their kindergartener's school situation. These parents have received a call from their child's teacher saying that their child is failing or struggling in kindergarten—either they are having attentional issues, such as difficulty starting, focusing on, finishing, or organizing their work, not listening to directions, staying in their seat; or they are having social issues, such as talking too much, disrupting the class lessons, or having playground conflicts.

Most of these issues are the result of a mismatch of their child's developmental stages and the expectations of the kindergarten curriculum. Many parents are surprised at the expectations in kindergarten classrooms, such as short recess and little play time, if any, and hours of desk work and listening rather than hands-on learning.

These parents are in a difficult dilemma: have their child struggle through, and possibly repeat, kindergarten or have their child return to a private preschool program and restart kindergarten the following fall. And their child's self-esteem is often starting to become an issue; their children are starting to feel "dumb" or like failures. No parent wants to be in this difficult quandary.

I have never worked with a family who was disappointed with the decision to have their child wait the extra year before starting kindergarten. Many parents and children are relieved at this extra gift of time. It's as if everyone knew that the timing was not right. And all parents have, as their child's school career progresses, been grateful for starting their child at the developmentally appropriate time. Their child has benefited immensely from starting kindergarten at the right and ready time.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRONOLOGICAL AGE

In deciding about kindergarten readiness, it is paramount to focus on your individual child. The first red flag in terms of kindergarten readiness is chronological age—when is your child's birthday? Several years ago, preschool teachers and early childhood professionals would look closely at summer birthdays to begin exploring the kindergarten readiness question. As stated earlier, girls should be 5 and boys should be 5-1/2 before they start kindergarten. Currently, even children with spring birthdays, especially boys, need to be considered as possibly delaying kindergarten for a year. Children with spring birthdays may need the gift of an extra year of time before starting kindergarten.

In some cases, chronological age should be adjusted down for the following factors: developmental delays, premature birth, low birth weight, adoption at a later age, serious trauma and/or hospitalizations. All of these factors can impact growth and development and should be subtracted when considering the chronological age of a child.

DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS FOR ASSESSING YOUR CHILD

Assuming a child, especially a boy, has a spring or summer birthday, it is important to assess the following four areas in terms of maturity: emotional development, social development, physical development (fine motor skills, activity level, height), and cognitive/verbal development.

Emotional Development

Does your child have the focus, self control and attentional control to function in a teacher-directed group with other children?

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA

- Listening skills
- Observation skills
- Self-starting skills
- Attention span; ability to listen for periods of time
- Ability to follow several-step directions
- Tolerance for frustration
- Impulse control; self-regulation; self-control

- Solid self-esteem
- Independence—no separation anxiety issues
- Adaptability; ability to adjust to new situations; ease with transitions
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to complete a task
- In process of organizational skills

Social Development

Can your child have a friend and be a friend, share and wait their turn in a group situation, engage in give-and-take conversation with peers and adults, show compassion toward others, cooperate with peers and adults?

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA

- Social skills with peers: taking turns, sharing, listening, feeling empathy
- Cooperation and compromise skills with children
- Cooperation with adults
- Interest in social interactions; control in social interactions
- Respectful of other people's bodies, feelings, possessions, creations
- Ability to concede individual needs to needs of the group
- Ability to advocate for self in group situations, when appropriate
- Ability to exercise impulse control in balancing socialization and focus on work
- Emerging conflict-resolution skills with peers

Physical Development

When assessing your child's physical development, it is important to examine three areas: fine motor skills, activity level, and height. Does your child have adequate hand skills/fine motor development for writing? Can your child's activity level allow for long periods of independent desk work or sitting at a floor circle for extended periods? Is your child small in stature, which is especially a concern for a boy in American culture, so that having an extra year to mature would be an advantage as your child continues through their school years?

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA

- Fine motor skills:** writing, drawing, scissors
- Activity Level:** Ability to sit still and focus at a desk or a floor circle for 20-30 minutes
- Height:** Should be 35 percentile or more, according to pediatrician's chart

Cognitive/Verbal Development

Does your child have the intellectual and verbal capacity to do academic work? This issue is rarely a concern for children. Unfortunately having the cognitive and verbal capability to do kindergarten work is often not the criteria for success in school, as much of success in school is determined by emotional and social maturity. We all know adults who are bright and verbal, but who are challenged in their lives due to their emotional and social immaturity.

The "Boredom Question" is often raised here: "My child is bright and if he/she waits a year to start kindergarten, won't he/she be bored in kindergarten?" This shouldn't be an issue, as the area of growth for your child is in emotional or social or physical development; a very bright child can be doing independent academic study or enrichment work within the classroom to eliminate the "Boredom Question." See [FAQ](#) for additional comments.

COGNITIVE/VERBAL DEVELOPMENT: CRITERIA

- Ability to problem-solve and make appropriate decisions
- Ability to express thoughts and ideas to others
- Ability to understand peers' and adults' thoughts and ideas

ASSESSMENT

In the United States, every county in every state, including The District of Columbia, is federally mandated under The CHILDFIND Mandate program to provide free assessments for testing children up to the age of 4 years 9 months. These programs, often called CHILDFIND (in DC, called DC Early Stages), provide free speech and cognitive evaluations and can be very helpful in assessing your child's language and cognitive development. Contact information for CHILDFIND can be found through the internet or telephone directories.

RULE OF THUMB FOR DETERMINING KINDERGARTEN READINESS

The Rule of Thumb is: If there are any concerns in any two of these four areas, it is far better to wait to start your child in kindergarten. It is far better to give your child an extra year to mature, and in that year to foster and encourage and work with those areas of development where additional growth is needed. It is important to program your child's school years for success as much as possible.

SUMMARY

The importance of focusing on a child's chronological age and then further examining your child's four key areas of development—emotional, social, cognitive/verbal, and physical—have been explored. The rule of thumb is: If there are concerns in any two areas of your child's development, it is best to give your child the gift of an extra year of time for maturation before beginning kindergarten. It is best to have your child be super-ready for kindergarten. Starting kindergarten at the right and ready time is crucial in helping your child thrive in the coming school years.

FAQ

Q: My child's preschool teacher says he is ready for kindergarten. According to the above criteria, he is not ready for kindergarten. What about the preschool teacher's evaluation?

It is important to carefully examine your child's preschool teacher's evaluation of your child's readiness for kindergarten. As a former preschool teacher and director, I have seen preschool teachers recommend that a child continue on to kindergarten even when it seems clear to me that child is not ready. In my experience, preschool teachers can make this erroneous recommendation to begin kindergarten for various reasons:

- ☑ The preschool teacher may be unaware of the increased demands of the school curricula as a result of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); a preschool teacher may say, “He will be ready,” not realizing that the current school situations require super-readiness.
- ☑ The preschool teacher may not have an accurate assessment of your child’s development.
- ☑ The preschool teacher may be hesitant to recommend that your child wait, out of fear that some parents would blame the teacher for not adequately preparing their child for kindergarten.
- ☑ The preschool teacher may be too reticent to make an uncomfortable recommendation to parents.
- ☑ The preschool teacher may be basing her assessment on your child’s intelligence, but may not realize the importance of emotional and social maturity to a child’s success in school.

Q: My daughter is very bright. If we give her “*the gift of an extra year of time*” and start her in kindergarten next fall rather than this fall, won’t she be bored?

This question is asked so frequently that it could be termed “The Boredom Question.” It is an important question. When a child is intelligent and will be capable of the academic work in kindergarten, parents are often concerned about boredom. This is an important consideration; however, it is rarely an issue for young children. Kindergarten requires an important adjustment for most children—larger classes within a framework of new children, transitions between special subjects (music, art, PE, cafeteria), sitting at desks for longer periods of time, less play time—so that the increased emotional and social demands rarely result in intellectual boredom, as much energy is expended in adjusting and functioning in the kindergarten environment.

If a child should be bored, a good classroom teacher would be able to provide enrichment work or free choice work (reading, drawing) after regular assignments; teachers can also form small study groups of two or three bright, self-motivated children for special assignments, as well as have specialized resource teachers (reading, math) provide regular individual or group “pull-outs” from class for supplementary material. The boredom question very rarely becomes a reality; if so, then parents need to contact the teacher to fine-tune her class to challenge their child’s needs.

Q. My child’s father thinks that he is ready for kindergarten this fall. I don’t think he is ready. My husband says that he himself started kindergarten although he was a late summer birthday and he did okay in school; he feels that our son should just “buck it up” and go to kindergarten on schedule. He thinks that having him wait another year is coddling him. He read that red-shirting him is a yuppie thing to do.

There is often a gender divide on this issue. Often fathers, who want their children to be tough enough to make it in the world, feel that their child should go to school whenever eligible and that they will learn a lot from the school of hard knocks. Often mothers feel like they want to nurture their child and feel that their self-esteem is very important. These two opinions do not have to be mutually exclusive.

It is important to program a child's school experience in every possible way to ensure success, since there are so many ways in which parents cannot control a child's school experience. And, no matter what year a child enters kindergarten, there will be plenty of challenges to test a child.

If co-parents are of different opinions as to kindergarten readiness, it is important to have a genuine and detailed discussion concerning your child and the four criteria described earlier concerning your child's maturity levels. Assessing your child's strengths and weaknesses with this framework can provide a more objective evaluation of your child's readiness for kindergarten. When speaking about kindergarten readiness, it is important to help a child be super-ready so that they not only survive kindergarten, but thrive in kindergarten.

Q: Do parents' own school experiences influence their decision about their child's time of entry to kindergarten?

Often parents' own school experiences provide a significant filter when considering the kindergarten readiness question. Often parents with fall birthdays, especially fathers, have had difficult experiences in school and are concerned about having their child repeat the same difficulties. Often parents with January through May birthdays recall more positive school experiences. It is an interesting exercise for parents to reflect on their own early school experiences and how that may have been related to their birthdays and to their emotional and social maturity at a young age.

One of the joys of relating to our children is identifying how they are like us in many ways. This identification is even deeper with our same-sex children. Mothers often identify with their daughters and fathers often identify with their sons in such a strong way that it can make the kindergarten readiness decision more complicated. Sometimes mothers have a difficult time having their daughters wait a year and sometimes fathers have a difficult time having their sons wait a year because of that strong identification; sometimes parents can feel that this is a reflection of them, even perhaps an inadequacy on their part. It is important to reflect on this and see our children in their own light rather than in the reflected light of our identification.

Q. Our family has experienced a great deal of stress in the past year and our child has regressed considerably in her behavior. Should this be a consideration in the kindergarten readiness issue?

Sometimes there are also family issues to consider when evaluating kindergarten readiness. Because kindergarten is such an important adjustment for a child, if a family has experienced recent family stress, then the decision to give a child an additional year of adjustment can be very important. Stressors would include: family financial concerns, family experiencing a separation or divorce, family experiencing a close member's illness or death, family experiencing multiple relocations and moves, or extended parental absence due to business travel or military deployment. Giving a child more time to process these stressors can be so helpful, rather than having a child be challenged by an adjustment to kindergarten amidst stress at home.

Q. We have decided not to send our son to kindergarten in the fall, but, as you say, to give him "the gift of an extra year of time." What should we do in terms of his upcoming schooling and what should we do during this interim year before he starts kindergarten?

In terms of school this Fall, first see if the educational program that he attends has a class for older four-year-olds. These programs are often called "Older Fours," or "Pre-K" or "Transitional K." If not, there are often schools, either private or within the public school system, that have a Pre-K or Transitional K program. Also, be aware of the areas in which your child needs to mature (for example, speech development, emotional development) and be certain that the program is strong in addressing these specific needs for your child. (See article: [Choosing a Childcare Program.](#))

In terms of the extra year, it may be helpful to have your child tested, possibly by CHILDFIND (see [Cognitive/Verbal Development section](#)) or privately, to see if there are some additional special services that may be helpful for your child. Your child may benefit from: speech therapy, occupational therapy for sensory integration issues, vision therapy from a developmental optometrist, auditory processing therapy, and/or a nutritional consultation. If any special services are needed, this extra year can be very helpful in your child's maturational process in preparation for kindergarten.

Q: I have decided not to send my son to kindergarten this fall. What should I say to him? I am concerned that he might feel bad about himself, especially since all of his friends are going to kindergarten.

As always, tell your child the truth in a way that is simple, concrete, age-appropriate and supportive. Also, it may be helpful to already have a school program selected for the fall prior to your discussion with your child.

For most children, chronological age is a big factor, so it is often easier to focus on your child's birthday, which is unchangeable and doesn't relate to self-esteem issues. Here are some suggestions:

"Wilson, I have decided that you should start kindergarten next school year, not this coming school year. I learned recently that boys should be 5-1/2 before they start kindergarten. The kindergarten year is smoother when children are older. I've enrolled you in _____ school, which is a terrific match for you. They have a great playground and those large blocks that you love for building. Then next year you will be super-ready for kindergarten."

You might need to add, "Yes, your friend Keith is the same age as you and is going on to kindergarten, but kindergarten will be a better experience for you next year. Perhaps Keith's parents don't realize how important age is to having a successful year in kindergarten."

You might add, "It may not be easy to wait another year to start kindergarten, but we've decided that kindergarten the following year is a much better match for you."

Or you might add, "Some children are relieved that they aren't continuing on to kindergarten, because they don't feel ready yet, and that's okay. We are taking one year at a time and _____ school feels like a great school for you this fall."

It would be best to discuss any special services for the Fall, such as speech therapy or fine motor work, at another time and not make the connection to kindergarten.

Q. I have twins (triplets). Only one of them is ready for kindergarten on the "usual schedule." What should I do? Should I enroll one in kindergarten this year and the other(s) next year?

This situation with twins (or triplets) can be complicated—certainly a parent feels concern at the thought of delaying one child's entry to kindergarten so that the other child can mature and be ready for kindergarten in another year. But enrolling twins (triplets) in kindergarten at different years can be a challenging issue for the self-esteem of the child who is not entering kindergarten and can complicate the sibling relationship. Almost without exception, even the child who is ready for kindergarten can benefit from waiting a year to start kindergarten. In most situations, it is best to have the twins (triplets) both(all) wait a year and begin kindergarten at the same year, so that the siblings will both (all) be super-ready for kindergarten.

Q. My son started kindergarten two months ago. He is having a difficult time at school, according to his teacher, and he comes home and beats up on his little brother. He seems very angry and frustrated most of the time. Is it possible that he shouldn't have started kindergarten? I feel so bad that we may have made a mistake. He's an August birthday and we didn't know that he would be so young for kindergarten. We had checked with the school system and they said to send him since the official kindergarten cut-off date is September 1.

There is nothing that you did wrong here. Nobody plans for their baby to have a spring or summer birthday, but chronological age is a huge contributing factor to kindergarten readiness, especially for boys. Certainly if the kindergarten program is not a good match then that causes your son anxiety. This anxiety may then be undermining his performance and he may be in a challenging spiral where his nervousness about not living up to expectations makes it even harder for him to meet the school expectations. And I've never met a child who didn't think school challenges weren't their fault; children never blame school.

Some of your struggles at home now may be fall-out from school. It's so hard to be good for six hours, so some children come home and take it out on their parents or younger sibling. Your child may be feeling unsuccessful and bad about himself and taking those feelings of disappointment, frustration, sadness or anger out on you. He may be acting out with you about the things that he dare not act out about at school, such as so many rules and so little time to play and to be with friends.

This is a very difficult situation. At this point it is often best to find an alternative private placement in a pre-K or transitional K program for this year and begin kindergarten again next fall. See the above FAQ as to how to proceed and what to tell your child. This transition will be challenging, but it will be a short-term challenge that will help your child feel successful in the long run, rather than have your child struggle through the next thirteen years of school.

Copyright 2023 Blue Wildfire, LLC