
"Childhood should be a journey, not a race."

Getting Ready for the Road to Kindergarten!

By Helma Rosenthal, Parkland Elementary Counselor

We are ready and looking forward to meeting both you and your school age child! However, parents frequently wonder about and ask if their child is ready for kindergarten. Others wonder, what exactly is "kindergarten readiness"?

Experts say no single or simple factor determines whether a child is ready for kindergarten. A child's development needs to be considered on several fronts. Your child's ability to think logically, speak clearly, and interact well with other children and adults are all critically important to success in school. A child's physical development also needs to be considered. Very few children are equally competent in all these areas. Many children who are advanced mentally may lag behind emotionally, while children who are extremely adept physically may be slower in terms of language development. But most early childhood educators agree that a child's brain development is the most important gauge of readiness for kindergarten. In other words, your child may be small for his/her age, and lagging behind other kids socially and physically, but if his/her language, thinking, and perceptual skills are in place, then your child probably will do well in kindergarten.

As a parent or caregiver, you can help your child succeed in kindergarten. Research shows that language development (speaking and listening) during early childhood is important for success in school. Children don't need to know how to read before kindergarten, but they need to practice many skills to get ready. They love repetition and hearing the same sounds and stories over and over. This builds strong pathways or bridges in their brains to help learning. You can help with two main activities—talking to your child and reading aloud. Children who hear a variety of words from adults recognize and understand important concepts when they begin to read. Your partner in this process is your library, with free books, activities and advice.

Children's play is their work, and they learn by doing and experimenting. Fascinated by the world around them, they love to ask questions and talk about everything. You can increase their curiosity by showing interest in what they are saying. Pre-schoolers are learning about letters and sound, pictures and print. When you read to children, you teach them how letters and words work, how to hold a book, turn pages, listen and gain meaning from the written word. At this age, children also develop a basic understanding of numbers, can match and label shapes, identify colors and understand spatial concepts.

Most children entering kindergarten can perform the tasks listed in the following sections at least sometimes. Your child's development may be a little faster or a little slower in a certain area. Have patience, trust your judgment and don't be overly critical. If you make time for your child and have fun, the rest will follow.



Physical Development

Most four to five year olds can:

- Put simple puzzles together.
- Cut with paper with blunt scissors.
- Hold a pencil correctly.
- *Try* to tie her/his shoes.
- Enjoy outdoor play such as running, jumping and climbing.
- Hold a crayon, marker, or “fat” pencil.
- Ride a tricycle.
- Bounce a ball.

Here are some tips to help children in their physical development:

- Take your child to a park to play on outdoor equipment.
- Allow your child time to dress her/himself.
- Provide experiences with scissors such as cutting pictures from a magazine.
- Provide opportunities to use crayons, markers, and pencils.
- Provide opportunities for your child to experiment with balls, tricycles and jump ropes.

Health and Safety

Most four to five year olds:

- Have a set routine and schedule for: preparing for bed, personal hygiene (brushes teeth, takes a bath), and eating meals.
- Use good habits (e.g., uses spoon to eat, closes mouth when chewing, covers nose and mouth to sneeze, washes hands after using toilet and before eating).
- Follow simple safety rules.
- Visit the doctor and dentist regularly.
- Eat healthy foods.

Here are ways to help children be safe and healthy:

- Make sure your child has regular medical check ups and up-to-date shots.
- Remember trips to the dentist and regular teeth brushing.
- Remind your child to get rest and establish a set bedtime.
- Provide opportunities for your child to get exercise.
- Teach your child to swim or take him/her to swimming lessons.
- Model and encourage healthy eating, and limit junk food.
- Teach your child simple safety rules (e.g., fire, traffic, bicycle, poisons).
- Keep a watchful eye on your child and remove hazards from your home and outdoors.
- Practice emergency situations to use 911 and have home fire drills.
- Alert your child to the dangers of strangers and drugs.



Social and Emotional Skills

Most four to five year olds can:

- Follow a routine.
- Use words such as “please”, “thank you” and “excuse me.”
- Label and express feelings and emotions.
- Try new activities willingly.
- Use words to solve problems when angry or frustrated
- Stand up for themselves, but know that bullying and violence are wrong.
- Pay attention to a story or activity for ten minutes.
- Attempt new tasks knowing it’s okay to make mistakes
- Do things for her/himself (dress self, put away toys and belongings, take care of own toilet needs).
- Wait fairly patiently for taking a turn at a game, speaking, and sharing.
- Interact appropriately and cooperatively with peers.
- Make a friend.
- Ask for help when necessary.
- Stay with an activity to completion (finish a picture, build something with blocks/Legos).
- Follow through when you give directions.
- Comply with rules, limits and routines.
- Interact appropriately with adults.
- Respect the rights, property and feelings of others.

Here are ways to help children develop their social and emotional intelligence:

- Listen to your child. This is the best way to learn what’s on his/her mind, what he/she knows and doesn’t know, and how he/she thinks and learns.
- Remember that discipline is teaching your child how to behave rather than punishing her/him for misbehavior.
- Explain consequences of good and bad behavior. Be reasonable and loving, but follow through.
- Remember to always love your child and let her/him know it’s the misbehavior you dislike.
- Have high, yet realistic expectations for your child. Understand your child’s limits.
- Treat your child and others with respect by being a good example.
- Be positive through the use of praise and encouragement. Accept your child’s honest efforts without criticism.
- Let your child know what she/he SHOULD do, as well as what she/he should NOT do.
- Show your love to your child frequently.
- Encourage children to talk about feelings. Share books that explore emotions.
- Help your child think about how to cope with strong emotions appropriately.
- Teach your child to feel good about himself/herself and that he/she can succeed.
- Set the tone that learning is good, fun and important. Tell your child about the fun things you remember from school.
- Encourage your child to attempt new tasks and support her/him when she/he is unsuccessful.
- Provide opportunities for your child to be with other children, such as joining a play group, going to story time at the library or playing at the park. *Notice how he gets along.*
- Encourage children to try different activities and games. Arrange outings to the library, zoo, park or museum. Talk about what you see.
- Play games that require taking turns and paying attention, such as children’s board games with easy-to-follow instructions.
- Describe ways your child can solve disagreements and conflicts with siblings, friends, and with others.
- Model the use of words such as please, thank you and excuse me.
- Talk about the processes of taking care of a houseplant *or* a pet. Allow your child to help watering, feeding, etc.
- Give your child small responsibilities around your home (making her/his bed, picking up toys, emptying trash, helping in the yard). Let your child know you respect her/him for being responsible.
- ***Set a good example for your children. They will imitate what you do.***

Concept Development

Most four to five year olds can:

- Recognize and/or name colors.
- Match or sort items by color and shape.
- Participate in art and music activities.
- Understand concepts such as: in, out, under, on, off, front and back.
- Know her/his body parts (head, shoulder, knees, etc.).
- Draw a picture of her/himself including head, body, arms and legs.
- Demonstrate curiosity, persistence and exploratory behavior.



Here are some tips for helping young children construct their own understanding of concepts as they interact and work with materials, people, events and ideas:

- Provide age appropriate toys which require thinking (puzzles, blocks, or sorting toys).
- Save scraps, bits, boxes, and other things from around the house to use for creative experiences.
- Count objects around the house, such as plates and forks for the table, crackers for snacks.
- Play games with your child using words such as: "put the ball on the chair" and "get the pot from under the sink."
- Play Simon says. For example: Simon says, "put your hands under your feet." Simon says, "put your hands over your head."

Language

Most four to five year olds can:

- Talk in sentences.
- Follow through when you give her/him one or two directions.
- Use descriptive language. ("That's a **tall** building with **round** windows.")
- Use simple conversational sentences.
- sing and/or recite nursery rhymes.
- Use sentences that include two or more separate ideas.
- Pretend, create and make up songs and stories.
- Talk about everyday experiences.
- Ask questions about how things work in the world around her/him.
- Express her/his ideas so that others can understand.
- Tell or retell stories.



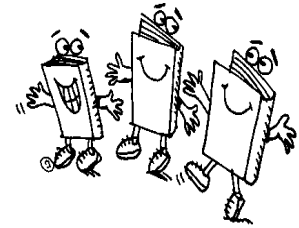
Here are some tips for parents that can help foster language skills:

- Talk with your child about what interests him or her.
- Use questions which have more than one answer such as: "What do you think?" "How would you feel?"
- Play rhyming games.
- Let your child know what she/he says is important. You do this by *listening* to your child.
- Get down at eye level and show your interest.
- Encourage other members of the family to listen.
- Encourage your child to develop and share ideas by asking questions and offering suggestions.

Reading

Most four to five year olds can:

- State their names, home addresses and telephone numbers.
- Identify some labels and signs (like McDonald's or stop sign).
- Know some letters and make letter-sound matches.
- Understand that writing carries a message.
- Enjoy listening to and talking about story books.
- Ask and answer questions related to the story.
- "Read" familiar books alone, often by memory, using picture cues.
- Understand that we read English from left to right, top to bottom.
- Speak clearly and understandably.



Here are ways to help children develop early reading literacy skills:

- **Read aloud to your child daily.** Ask questions about the story, or guess what might happen.
- Use different voices for characters to make the reading interesting.
- Provide a wide variety of print material for your child, including books, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, magazines, newspapers, recipes.
- Look for simple concepts (letters, numbers, shapes, and colors), easy plots, rhyming language, and nice pictures.
- Ask for help in finding letters and words.
- Use games (for example, pretend to be a mail carrier) to teach the child his address and phone.
- Play listening games with verbal clues and directions (I Spy...).
- Obtain a library card for your child and visit the library regularly. Attend story times. Choose books and participate in activities.
- Write or make up stories together. You can start a story, and your child can finish. Or take turns. If you write it down, have your child draw pictures for the story.
- Give your child books as presents.
- Accept your child's "pretend reading."
- Point out print in the environment (signs, cereal boxes, restaurants).
- Read your child's favorite stories over and over again.
- Allow your child to select the story that she/he would like to hear.
- Sing familiar songs and stories (Old MacDonald, The Itsy, Bitsy Spider, etc.).

Writing

Most four to five year olds:

- Try to write, scribble or draw.
- Have a collection of paper, pencils, and crayons.
- Like to receive notes from you and others.
- Ask you to write words or notes to people.
- Use chalk or magnetic letters.
- Attempt to write letters and/or numbers.
- Attempt to write her/his name.
- Attempt to invent her/his own spelling while writing (scribbling sentences).



Here are ways to help children with early writing skills:

- Provide your child with materials (e.g., crayons, pencils, paper) and a space for writing.
- Focus on what your child can do.
- Have a place to display your child's writing efforts.
- Answer your child's questions about writing.
- Accept your child's trial and error (e.g., scribbles, pictures, alphabet soup).
- Make signs to label objects in your child's room or other rooms in the house.
- Let your child see you write.
- Encourage your child to read her/his writing to you.
- Provide magnetic letters for your child to practice forming her/his name and words she/he wants to know.

Number Concept Development

Most four to five year olds can:

- Arrange items in groups according to size, shape or color.
- Group items that are the same.
- Arrange toys or objects in size order, big to small or small to big.
- Use words like bigger, smaller or heaviest to show comparison.
- Compare the size of groups of toys or items.
- Correctly count four to ten objects.
- Show an understanding of the passing of time.
- Copy letters and shapes, such as circles and squares.
- Understand the ideas of numbers, days of the week.
- Draw a vertical and horizontal line.
- Group items according to form, color and use.
- Have some understanding of how the world works (grandpa is older than a child; an umbrella is used when it rains).
- Know basic colors and numbers up to twenty.

Here are ways to help children with number concept development:

- Practice counting at home.
- Encourage sorting when your child helps you with the laundry. Finding the match to a pair of socks is an excellent exercise for teaching matching pairs.
- Let your child set the table ("How many forks do we need?" "How many chairs?" etc.). Provide opportunities to put away groceries.
- Allow your child to assist you in the kitchen—reading recipes, measuring, pouring, etc.
- Provide opportunities to compare objects.
- Observe the weather outdoors and talk about the changes.
- Talk about the world and things in it, like spring comes before summer.
- Frequently refer to the calendar. Discuss the days of the week, the numbers on the calendar, what day comes next, how long until a specific holiday/trip, etc.
- Play dominoes and other board games that encourage taking turns or identifying numbers.
- Use building blocks to show form, color and groups.
- Point out different shapes in your house, as you travel, in a store. A stop sign is an octagon, a price tag is a rectangle, the traffic light has circles.

When School Starts

- Talk to your child daily about school activities and experiences.
- Talk with teachers regularly, even when no problems exist.
- Attend school activities.
- Read information sent home from school (flyers, newsletters).
- Remember, you know your child better than anyone else does.
- Nothing makes children feel better than seeing a friendly, respectful relationship between the most important grownups in their lives: *their parents and their teachers.*



Please Remember

You are your child's first and most important teacher. Readiness is a combination of age, individual growth and experience. Every day your child is learning as you talk, play and work together. To be able to learn, children need trust and stability, times of quiet and peacefulness. Turn off the television and electronic gadgets; share family time. Although many times it will be easier and less time consuming to do it yourself (picking up the mess, setting the table, etc.), don't. Allow your child the opportunity to learn and practice. The good rule of thumb is to allow your child to do the things they can do for themselves.

Your child will develop at his or her own rate; however, your involvement will promote readiness. *Your child learns best when he or she is involved in activities that are interesting and fun!* Just as childhood is a journey, not a race, the road in becoming educated is life long. Kindergarten is just the first step in your child's formal education. We here in the Parkland School District are happy to be your traveling companions. Best wishes along the way to the many milestones ahead!

Resources

[ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education](#) (based at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, ERIC is a "national information system designed to provide users with ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature.")

[FamilyFun](#) (a family-oriented web site sponsored by Disney)

[Family Education Network](#) (Preschool activities and ideas to help young children learn and grow.)

[National Center To Improve Practice In Special Education Through Technology, Media And Materials](#) ("promoting language and literacy among young students with developmental disabilities in early childhood classrooms")

[National Association For The Education Of Young Children](#) ("promoting excellence in early childhood education")

[National Coalition For Parent Involvement In Education \(NCPIE\)](#) (an advocacy group "dedicated to developing effective family/school partnerships in schools throughout America")

[National Institute For Literacy \(NIFL\)](#) (federal program to promote literacy)

[National Parent/Teacher Association](#) ("largest volunteer association in the United States working exclusively on behalf of children and youth")

[National Parenting Center](#) (provides parents with guidance from renowned child-rearing authorities)

[U.S. Department of Education](#)

[U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education](#)

