



What does my child need to be "ready" for kindergarten?

Kindergarten has changed from when we were in school. Kindergarten previously lasted for two to three hours a day and focused primarily on the development of social skills. Today, many kindergartens last a full day (approximately 6 hours), have a major focus on reading and writing skills, and require significant amounts of seat work. This has implications for what skills our children need to have acquired prior to starting kindergarten.

- *Children need to be socially and emotionally ready for school.* This is one of the most important areas of readiness for children. Children need to be able to cooperate with their peers in group situations and activities. Children also need to be able to control their impulses and be able to relate to non-family authority figures.
- *Children need to have acquired motor skills.* Motor skills include large muscle activities necessary for walking in a straight line and throwing a ball. Motor skills also include small muscle skills such as drawing, coloring, cutting, and beginning handwriting.
- *Children need to be cognitively and intellectually ready for school.* Intellectual readiness is a term used to describe the learning skills a child needs to make a smooth transition into kindergarten. These skills include knowledge of colors, numbers through 10, at least some of the letters of the alphabet (e.g. particularly the letters in his/her name), and shapes. Other skills that children need are the ability to assemble simple puzzles, answer questions about his/her environment (e.g. how many legs does this spider have?), and understand similarities (e.g. how are an apple and an orange alike?), differences (e.g. how is an apple different from an orange?), and opposites (e.g. ice cream is cold, coffee is hot).
- *Children need to be curious and eager to learn.* Our children will be most successful if they learn to ask questions, think independently, and be creative. Our children need to be curious about the world, interested in how things work, and know how to creatively approach problems. So, if your child asks you a question like, "Do mosquitoes sleep?", resist the urge to answer (you may not know anyway!) or to give them the answer right away. Instead try asking them, "What do you think?" or "Where do you think we could find the answer to that question?". By doing this, you are encouraging them to think for themselves. This also helps build a child's self-esteem!