



Is Your Child Ready For:

Kindergarten???



Descriptions and Checklists in:

- ◆ Academic Benchmarks
- ◆ Speech & Language Development
- ◆ Social Skills
- ◆ Fine & Visual Motor Skills
- ◆ Gross Motor Skills

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IS YOUR CHILD ACADEMICALLY READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

Peter Dodzik, PsyD, ABPdN, ABN

THE OUTCOMES OF KINDERGARTEN PERFORMANCE

There is always a bit of trepidation for parents when the first day of school finally arrives. For parents with beginning kindergarteners, this is heightened by the fact that this is often their child's first introduction to a formal curriculum. Many children begin their educational lives in preschool; but formal academic instruction is not always emphasized. This leads many parents to wonder whether their children have the needed academic skills. This is an important question to ask given the emerging research on the importance of children's kindergarten experience. In a recent study from Harvard Economist, Raj Chetty, he and his team found that children who progressed more in kindergarten were more likely to go to college, less likely to become single parents, saved more for retirement and earned higher wages than students with otherwise similar backgrounds. Results indicated that all children earned an average of \$100 extra per a year at age 27 for every percentile they had moved up the test-score distribution over the course of kindergarten. This means that the amount of progress seen during this narrow window of time had long-term impacts on the course of the child's academic and professional career.



It may seem that studies like these suggest that parent education or family income predicts better school performance. Or that those families who can afford the best schools are at a competitive advantage over children with less access to enrichment opportunities; but that is not always true. In a 1998 study in the Journal of Early Childhood Research, the study found that parents who spent more time in literacy related activities (such as reading to their children) had children who scored higher in kindergarten on academic measures (such as reading, letter recognition, vocabulary and general information) than children from families with less parental involvement. In fact, parental involvement was more predictive of kindergarten success than parental education, economic status, or other demographic variables. This study suggests that the preparation for school can't begin soon enough and that the support provided by parents before and during the kindergarten year is critical to student success.

There are, of course, tangible skills that every kindergartener should have. Following is a short list of the primary academic benchmarks for kindergarteners.

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ACADEMIC BENCHMARKS FOR KINDERGARTEN

- Identify most letters of the alphabet
- Identify colors, sizes, shapes and perform basic comparisons (more/less, thick/thin, etc.)
- Grip a pencil, crayon, or marker correctly (with the thumb and forefinger supporting the tip)
- Use scissors, glue, paint, and other art materials with relative ease
- Write his first name using upper- and lowercase letters, if possible
- Count to 10
- Classify objects according to their size, shape, and quantity
- Speak using complete sentences
- Recognize some common sight words, like “cat, hi, on, stop”
- Identify rhyming words
- Repeat full name, address, phone number, and birthday
- Play independently or focus on one activity with a friend for up to ten minutes
- Manage bathroom needs (varies)
- Dress himself
- Follow directions
- Listen to a story without interrupting
- Separate from parents easily

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS LAGGING

If your child is behind on any of these milestones, act now. Data from states where pre-kindergarten classes are funded suggests that children attending pre-school activities were less likely to repeat a grade (any grade), dropped out of school at lower rates (any grade) and were less likely to be in special education. This, and other studies, suggest that early childhood academic development is a critical factor in long term educational success.

Some families will take a “wait and see” approach to kindergarten and opt to repeat the grade if their child does not make adequate progress. However, the data on grade retention is not consistent. While there





have been some findings of successful outcomes from grade retention, other studies (Jimerson, 1999; Anderson, Jimerson & Whipple, 2002) have found lower graduations rates, higher drop out rates, decrease scores on standardized testing and increased mental health issues in students retained regardless of age.

All of the data on student readiness consistently demonstrates one thing:

parent involvement

+

early enrichment

=

best outcome

on long-term educational functioning. If your child seems behind on academic skills, don't wait! Pre-schools, home literacy projects and tutoring are always available for your child. Summer is a great time to get your child the extra help needed to face kindergarten prepared with strong foundation skills.

If you suspect any learning disabilities, language, motor or social-emotional concerns, please discuss these with your pediatrician or a trained professional.





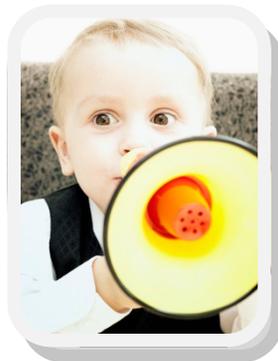
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR KINDERGARTEN

Deanna Swallow, M.A., CCC-SLP

Parents often express concerns about their child’s “readiness” to enter kindergarten. The process can be overwhelming. We want to make the best decision possible for our child, which is a challenge when everyone seems to differ in opinion. So who is right, and how do we know when our child is truly ready? It’s important to remember that there is no magic formula for determining the perfect entry point for a child to begin kindergarten. There are, however, several general milestones that will indicate your child’s readiness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

Communication skills are crucial to successfully navigating the classroom- from following directions, to understanding spoken information, to building peer relationships. While children develop speech and language skills in a relatively consistent sequence, every child develops at their own rate. Here are a few general speech, language and play milestones to indicate that your child may be ready to begin kindergarten:



PRE-KINDERGARTEN SPEECH & LANGUAGE MILESTONES

Listening: The classroom is filled with opportunities to listen and understand spoken language. For example, teachers give verbal directions that require children to understand linguistic concepts and sequence steps. As new information is presented, children are required to “tune-in” to the person speaking, and attend to the spoken information. Here are a few “listening milestones” to look for as your child approaches kindergarten age:

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE MILESTONES

- Follows 2-step directions in the correct sequence
- Understands spatial concepts such as in/on/under or in front / behind
- Answer yes/no and wh- questions (who, what, where, when, how)
- Listens and participates in short conversations
- Listens to and understands age-appropriate stories





Speaking: As children approach school-age, verbal communication becomes increasingly important to academic, emotional and social success. The classroom is filled with opportunities to use spoken language, as children build peer relationships, ask questions, relate personal experiences, share their ideas, and express emotion. As your child approaches kindergarten age, here are a few key “expressive language milestones” to look for:

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE MILESTONES

- Speech is becoming easy for others to understand
- Initiates conversation and engages in longer dialogues
- Expresses emotions and feelings
- Uses various verb tenses (e.g. running, ran)
- Uses 4-7 word sentences
- Can talk about an event or retell a short story
- Asks a variety of questions

QUICK COMMUNICATION TIPS TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR KINDERGARTEN

- Play with your child. Engage your child in imaginative play activities, such as a pretend picnic or playing with dolls.
- Converse with your child frequently. Narrate when is happening in your environment, and talk about events in the past and future. You might discuss what is going to happen that day (e.g. “Today we are going to the park”), or look at pictures from a recent family outing (e.g. “Yesterday we went to the zoo... what did we see?”)
- Read to your child. Research has well-documented the benefits of reading to children at a young age. Talk about the pictures on each page, and encourage your child as they ask questions or attempt to re-tell the story in their own words.
- Sing with your child. Enjoy silly rhymes and hand motions that go along with each song.





KINDERGARTEN READINESS: SOCIAL SKILLS

Marnie Ehrenberg, MA, LPC

Most likely, you have already heard from your child's preschool teachers that kindergarten is a whole new world. Your child's day will slowly incorporate more and more academic material. The primary focus of daily activity will likely shift from the development of play skills, to the application of play skills. It is strongly encouraged that your preschooler take on this new challenge equipped with a solid foundation of social and emotional skills.

Take a look at the following list of basic social skills that children develop in preschool. If your child is not demonstrating these skills consistently or is under-developed in any of these areas, therapies such as social skills groups can bring them up to speed.

SOCIAL SKILLS YOUR PRESCHOOLER WILL NEED IN KINDERGARTEN

- Ability to share and take turns (with adult assistance or independently).
- Ability to communicate verbally with peers in play, i.e. "Do you want to play house?", and use words to describe their feelings "I'm angry". Also including the use of words to initiate sharing and turn-taking, i.e. "Can I please have a turn?"
- Ability to problem-solve simple social conflicts (with adult assistance or independently), i.e. when two children want the same toy, and you ask your preschooler, "what can you do?", do they respond with possible solutions or follow ideas given to them?
- Demonstrating emotional self-control i.e., expressing emotions appropriately (with adult assistance or independently) instead of experiencing tantrums when upset.
- Demonstrating basic empathy and emotional awareness. If their friend begins to frown or cry, do they recognize that they are sad?
- Demonstrating compassion for others. Do they offer to help when their friends are sad?



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FINE & VISUAL MOTOR SKILLS

Hilary Lee MPH, MS, OTR/L

Fine and visual motor skill development is an important part of preparing for kindergarten. These skills are emphasized during the kindergarten year, as this is a time when handwriting skills develop. During kindergarten, your child will start with writing letters, then move to writing words, and finally begin to write sentences. This can be a difficult year for children who do not have adequate fine and visual motor skills to provide the foundation for success with writing and other fine motor tasks. Around the time a child enters kindergarten, which is typically but not always around the age of 5, the following skills should be mastered to provide a good foundation for kindergarten success. A child entering kindergarten should be able to:

FINE & VISUAL MOTOR SKILL CHECKLIST

- Write letters of his or her name and most uppercase letters of the alphabet
- Utilize a dynamic tripod pencil grasp
- Have an established hand dominance
- Throw a tennis ball overhand and underhand at least 10 feet forward
- Button and unbutton a 1-inch diameter button
- Draw shapes accurately including: crossed lines, circle, square, triangle
- Copy block designs with 6 blocks from memory
- Orient and use scissors appropriately to cut out simple shapes (including a circle and a square) on a thick line
- Fold paper in half with edges within 1/8 of an inch of one another
- Color in between the lines of simple shapes of 1-inch size
- Dress and undress independently, with the exception of tying shoe
- Use a fork and spoon independently with out spilling
- Toilet independently

If you feel your child may be having difficulties acquiring or performing these skills, or you have questions regarding your child's fine motor and visual motor development, please make an appointment with an occupational therapist to discuss your questions and concerns. The earlier you seek help, the more successful your child will be.

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KINDERGARTEN GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

Bridget Zarling, PT, DPT and Rachel Trost, M.S, OTR/L

Getting ready for kindergarten is an exciting time! From picking out school supplies to selecting new gym shoes, kids and parents have great anticipation of the year ahead. There are some gross motor milestones that we want children to achieve before they step onto the yellow school bus en-route to their first day of school. Below is a checklist of some gross motor milestones to expect in a typically developing five year-old.

FIVE YEAR-OLD MILESTONES:

- Balance on one foot for 5-10 seconds
- Walk across a balance beam
- Walks up and down stairs with one foot on each step independently
- Catches both large and small balls
- Throws tennis ball overhand
- Hops on 1 foot
- Runs efficiently – both arms flexed and moving opposite of each other
- Gallop and may skip

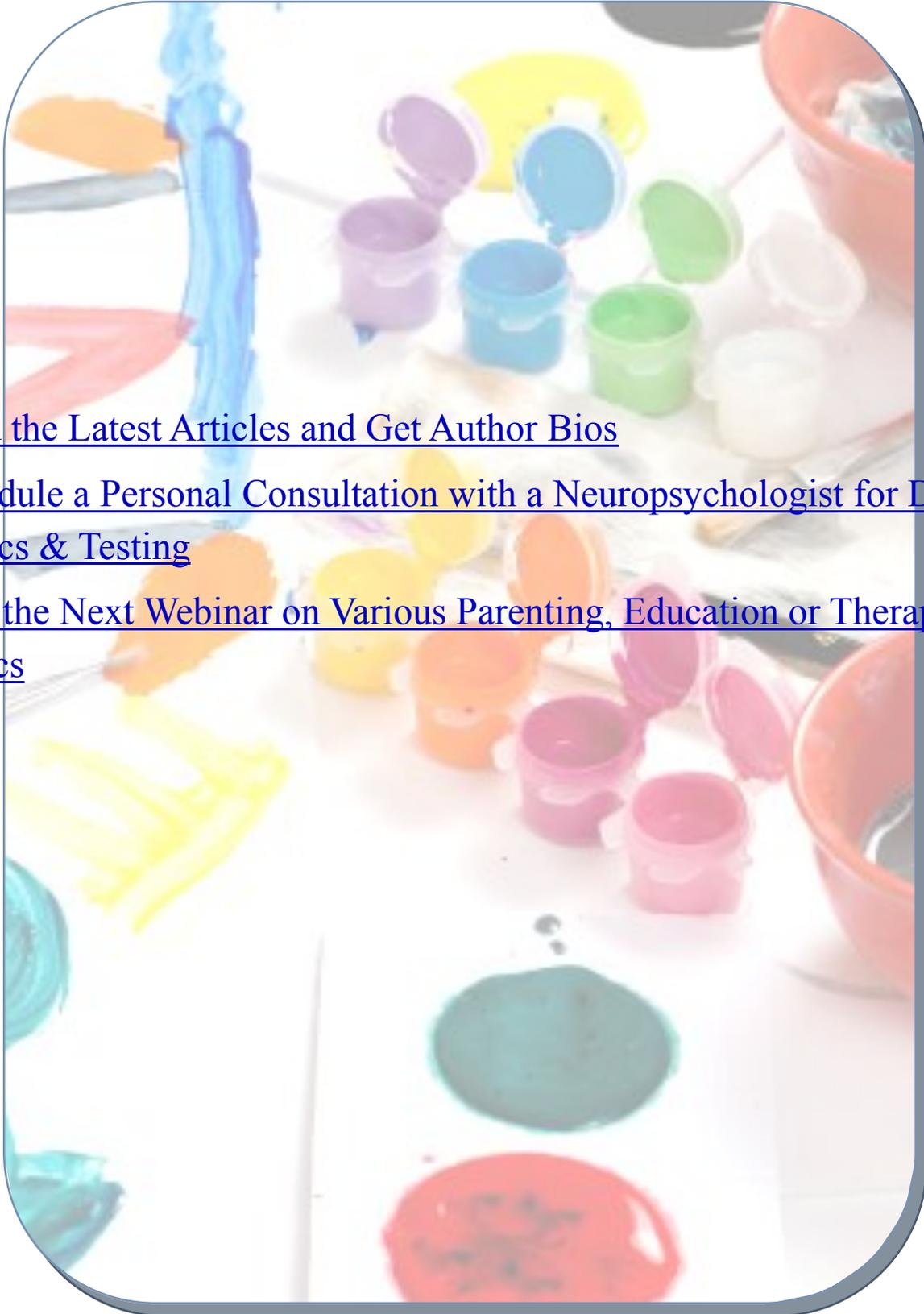
GROSS MOTOR RED FLAGS:

- W-sitting
- Tip-toe walking
- No desire to climb on playground equipment
- Fear of playground equipment
- Not performing any of the above milestones





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- [Read the Latest Articles and Get Author Bios](#)
- [Schedule a Personal Consultation with a Neuropsychologist for Diagnostics & Testing](#)
- [Find the Next Webinar on Various Parenting, Education or Therapy Topics](#)

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