

# Welcome to kindergarten!

BY SARAH NEWCOMB

Beginning a new school year can be exciting and stressful for parents and children alike. Entering kindergarten can be even more daunting.

Maureen Poland, whose son will start school for the first time this year, knows all about kindergarten fears. "As a stay-at-home mom, I'm most nervous about my son being under the care of a stranger for the first time," says Poland. "My son is most nervous about the unknown."

Kindergarten can be scary - with a new school, new teachers, new routines, and new expectations - but knowing what skills are expected of your child can help ease the transition and quell fears.

What do teachers really want your child to know before they enter kindergarten and how can you, as a parent, help them prepare? Four kindergarten teachers and ECEs gave us the scoop on what your budding student needs to master before entering school. But as Monique, a kindergarten teacher, reminds: "It is important to remember that children come in with all different schemas. Kindergarten is a two-year program and kids progress at all different speeds."

## PHYSICAL SKILLS

Conquering some daily physical tasks and skills can go a long way in making the move to kindergarten a smooth one, points out Erin, an ECE working in a kindergarten classroom. Instill confidence in your child by assisting them in learning a few essential skills:

Help your child learn how to zip their own jacket or button their own sweater. Although teachers are able to assist, it's preferable that your kindergartener does this on their own.

Teach your child to put their shoes on the right feet. **Teacher Tip:** No laces! Velcro is preferable.

Make sure your child is able to use the bathroom on their own, including pulling up their own pants.

Work with your child to ensure they know how to hold a pencil and crayon properly.

Encourage fine motor skills by building Lego, playing with playdough or practicing cutting and gluing at home.

**Teacher Tip:** Cook with your child! Pouring, measuring, and mixing all assist with fine motor skills.

## ACADEMIC SKILLS

While your child will grow in leaps and bounds academically during their first year of kindergarten, there are some academic skills that, if already mastered, will help them soar in the classroom. Angela, a JK/SK teacher, offers her experience, "Academically, children will enter kindergarten at a wide range of developmental levels. Some will be able to read a little bit, some will read very well, some won't be able to point out the letter A. All children will learn something new in kindergarten!"

Help your child become familiar with books. Read a new story before bed or visit your library's drop-in story time. Your child will be exposed to a lot of new reading material at school; familiarity with listening to and discussing stories is immensely beneficial.

Talk! Encouraging conversation is a great vocabulary builder for your child.

Everything in kindergarten is labeled- make sure your child can pick out their own name in both capital and lower case letters. **Teacher Tip:** Although it is great if your child can write his/her own name, it's not a necessity!

Sing your ABCs! Count out pieces of cereal! An awareness of letters and numbers will assist your child as they begin to learn in the classroom

## SOCIAL SKILLS

"Social and personal development is huge," says Mary, a kindergarten teacher. "Children need to be taught to be kind and respectful and be reminded it's important to share." How can you help your child begin to develop social skills?

Remind your child that sometimes it is important to sit quietly and listen.

Practice this while reading books or eating dinner at home.

Sharing is a difficult skill to master. Provide your child with some quality 'kid time' outside of the home- be it at a drop-in play centre or the park. **Teacher Tip:** Don't always jump in when an issue is brewing with another child, instead give your child a few minutes to try to work out a problem with another child on their own.

Clean up, clean up, everybody do your part! Encourage your child to tidy up after playtime, even if they don't do it perfectly.

## Teacher Tips:

Still nervous your little one isn't quite ready for the challenges of kindergarten? Here are some easy ways you can make kindergarten a positive experience:

- Number your child's snack so that they know which snack to eat in the morning and which snack to eat in the afternoon
- If you haven't dropped their afternoon nap yet, this is the time to do it! Most schools do not have a dedicated 'nap' time in kindergarten
- Put a change of clothes in their backpack just in case there is an accident or juice spill (**Teacher Tip:** Label everything!)
- Place a picture or tiny note (even a hand drawn heart or smiley face) to remind your child that you love them and are thinking about them.
- Allow your child to pick out his/her own backpack and lunch bag. It will help them to feel excited about school!
- If your child is nervous, visit their school a few times so that they are familiar with their surroundings.
- Be positive! Children pick up on your nervousness- make school sound as much fun as it really is!



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