

# Aging Well: Healthier, Happier and Less Hassled

An Educational Series for Seniors and their Caregivers



## Get on Your Mark, Get Set, and GO to Kindergarten!

Parents (or grandparents) are the child's first teachers. You begin preparing your child or grandchild for school the day you bring him or her home from the hospital. Children must be taught social and emotional skills as well as physical and cognitive skills. The best place to learn these skills is at home!

Ask yourself the following questions relating to school preparation expectations:

Does my child or grandchild:

- € Play well with others?
- € Share with others?
- € Follow routines?
- € Recognize and care about others' feelings?
- € Put toys away when asked?
- € Follow directions?
- € Separate easily?



To help prepare your child or grandchild for kindergarten consider the following:

- Give the child several small chores. This teaches responsibility. Begin with gentle supervision, soon the child will complete chores independently.



- To help the child follow directions, give simple steps.
- Continuously encourage the child to share toys, snacks, games, and practice taking turns.
- Praise him when he does things right (but make it genuine and connected to the effort such as, "I can tell you really worked hard at that. I'm proud of you!").
- Provide guidance during social and emotional difficulties. Children are learning about getting along with others from YOU!

Parents and grandparents can teach their children personal skills in one or two weeks. Children beginning kindergarten should be able to do the following tasks with little or no help from adults:

- Wash and dry hands
- Use the bathroom
- Brush teeth
- Blow nose with tissue
- Button shirt
- Zip pants
- Put on and take off a coat
- Tie and/or Velcro their shoes



If your child or grandchild needs help in mastering any of these skills, consider:

- Developing a morning and bedtime tooth brushing routine.
- Let children dress themselves. Children will develop a sense of independence and a feeling of accomplishment.
- Practice with them as they put on their shoes. After many tries they will learn how to tie their shoes.
- Help them use their words to express their feelings. This will help them tell their teacher that they are sick or hurt.

Ask yourself the following questions to see if the child is physically ready for kindergarten:

- € Does my grandchild child enjoy outside play like running, jumping and climbing?
- € Can my grandchild draw and trace basic shapes like circles, triangles, squares, and ovals?
- € Can my grandchild bounce a ball?
- € Can my grandchild ride a tricycle?
- € Can my grandchild cut with scissors?

Focus on helping your child improve in the areas that she or he needs the most help. The following activities help strengthen physical development:

- Collect materials your child can use to develop motor skills necessary for learning to write. These include crayons, pencils, markers, paper, children's safety scissors, glue, paint, puzzles, and blocks.
- Create a play time that focuses on art work. Guide your child in learning to draw, cut, color, paint and paste. Demonstrate these skills, and then let your child imitate you. Praise your child and display his creations in your home!
- Develop regular times for your child to enjoy activities that will help develop coordination. These include skipping, jumping, climbing, playing ball, riding a tricycle, and using playground equipment.



As kindergarten approaches, many parents find themselves anxious about how their children will adjust. Keep calm as it is normal for both parents and children to become

anxious as the new school year approaches.

The following are hints to help prepare your child for the new environment:

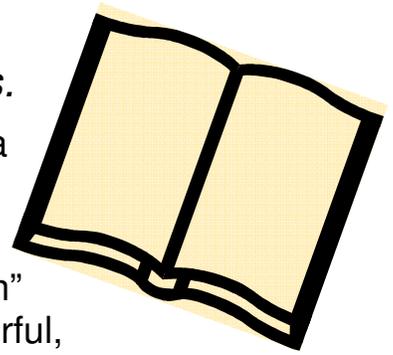


- Tell your child how excited you are about him or her starting kindergarten.
- Discuss what school will be like and what your child will be doing during the day.
- Keep these talks casual, so your child does not become overly anxious or overwhelmed.
- Visit the school with your child so he or she will be more familiar with it before the first day. This visit is also a time for you to learn your child's new routine and get answers to any questions you may have concerning your child's adjustment.
- Play a game with your child pretending that he or she is in already in school.
- Meet other preschoolers. If possible, arrange a time before the first day for your child to play with a couple of the children who will be in his or her class.

- Get into a routine. In the weeks before the first day of school, establish a routine similar to the one your child will have once school starts, including times for awakening, meals, napping, and bedtime.
  - Use children's books to prepare your child for the first day of school. Listen to and address any concerns or questions your child may have relating to this new adventure. Practice saying goodbye. Saying goodbye to one another on the first day of school can be especially difficult for children and parents. It may help to come up with a special ritual, such as a certain phrase or touch, to help your child when he or she is missing you. Be sure to tell your child goodbye before separating from him, it is not recommended that you slip out of the room when your child is distracted as this may increase his or her anxiety.
  - Give it time. All children are different; most children adjust well with a little time. It is normal for children to have mixed feelings for the first several days.
- Listen to your child's feelings and reassure him or her that it is OK to feel that way.
  - Communicate often with your child's teacher. If you think your child may be having difficulty adjusting to school, talk with the teacher about your concerns. The more you and your child's teacher communicate and work together the more likely your child is to adjust well.



Check your local library for these and similar books.



1. “The Kissing Hand” by Audrye Penn describes a touching ritual a mother raccoon shares with her child to comfort him when he misses her at school.
2. “Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten” by Joseph Slate and Ashley Wolff describes the colorful, whimsical preparations a kindergarten teacher makes for her class as well as the different ways her students get ready for the first day of kindergarten.
3. “Welcome to Kindergarten” by Ann Rockwell is a reassuring book describing how a visit to his new kindergarten helps a young boy feel more at ease for the start of school.
4. “First Day Jitters” by Julie Danneberg explores some of the anxieties children have about school, but it also helps children understand that grownups—even teachers—can be anxious, too.
5. “Wimberly Worried” by Kevin Henkes covers a wider range of things children may worry about including the first day of school.



Parents make big differences in their children’s lives and future success by helping them prepare for school. You play a critical role in your child’s growth and development because you are the first and most important teacher your child will ever have.

References:

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