

School Readiness

Deciding whether your child is ready for kindergarten can be an exciting and challenging task. The term *school readiness* refers to a child being ready for school emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively.

How Is School Readiness Determined?

Schools have traditionally used age cutoffs to decide on school readiness, and most children entering kindergarten are around 5 years old. However, the cutoff dates for birthdays and age requirements vary across different states and different schools.

Many schools now have screening programs to meet with children and help parents decide if the child is ready to enter school. Some behaviors and characteristics that schools may use in deciding whether a child is ready for school include the following:

- Ability to follow structured daily routines.
- Ability to dress independently.
- Ability to play with other children.
- Ability to follow rules.

Schools want their students to be ready to participate in many types of activities in school and to have success in all areas, including socially, emotionally, and academically.



What Parents Can Do to Help Their Children Be Ready for School

Many pediatricians hear parent concerns that their child is not at the same level in a skill as a child of similar age. It is important for parents to know that each child achieves skills at different times and there is a lot of variability in children's development.

Parents do play an essential role in helping their children develop the necessary skills to be ready for school. Preschool and Headstart are important ways to help your child to be ready to start kindergarten, and most children are in one of these prekindergarten programs. There are many resources available to help: online, in communities, and through your local school system. To get you started, here are some activities parents can do to help their children be ready for school:

- Read books to and with your child.
- Expect your child to listen and follow directions.
- Turn off the television and provide toys and games that require interaction and problem solving.
- Spend time with your child, including playing, cuddling, and hugging.

- Create a routine with your child at home, and help your child stick to the routine. The routine may include regular meal times, nap times, and bedtimes.
- Help your child develop social skills through playtimes with other children. Some examples include playgroups or more formal pre-school activities.
- If you are concerned about your child's school readiness, talk with your pediatrician.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Association for the Education of Young Children:
<http://www.naeyc.org>

 To find this and other Advice for Patients articles, go to the Advice for Patients link on the *JAMA Pediatrics* website at jamapediatrics.com.

Author: Megan A. Moreno, MD, MEd, MPH

Resource: National Association for the Education of Young Children

The JAMA Pediatrics Patient Page feature is a public service of *JAMA Pediatrics*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your child's medical condition, *JAMA Pediatrics* suggests that you consult your child's physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, call 312/464-0776.