

10 Things About Kindergarten You Need to Know Now

Entering kindergarten can be an exciting and stressful time for both parents and children. Feelings of sadness, concerns about your child's readiness and fear of the unknown can make this transition difficult. However, this time is a great learning opportunity for parents and kids alike as you embark upon this new adventure together.

"In today's world the demands that modern day living place upon the family unit often push thoughtful consideration of the young child's beginning educational experiences onto the back burner," says Liz Blek, MS and President of the National Kindergarten Alliance. "Parents and kindergarten teachers need to get to know each child so as to correctly assess needs, abilities, interests, and learning style in order to provide the optimum learning environment."



Here are ten tips to help you, your child and your teacher get to know each other better and make the journey into kindergarten a little bit smoother for everyone involved.

1. Before You Begin

- About a month before school starts, adjust your daily routine to fit the school day schedule. Have your child get up earlier, eat lunch later and spend some time doing fun projects or activities together that will help get him in learning mode, ready for school.
- Read some books about kindergarten with your child. *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*, *Will I Have a Friend?* and *The Kissing Hand* are just a few great books to help your child get ready (ask your librarian for suggestions as well). Use these books as a springboard for discussion about your child's fears and excitement about school.

2. Readiness Concerns

- Children come into kindergarten with a wide variety (and various levels) of skills and knowledge. Don't stress too much about where your child is. Be confident he'll gain the skills he needs in the coming year.
- If you want help your child with some of the basic skills he'll need, spend some time helping him write his name and doing fun activities together to help him learn his letters, numbers, colors and shapes.

3. Transition Techniques

- If you're feeling anxious or sad about your child going to school, try to not to let on in front of him. He'll be much more comfortable if he feels you are comfortable when you drop him off at school.
- Don't linger at the first day of class. Come in and see the classroom, help your child find something to do, give a quick hug and kiss and tell him to have a great day. Even if your child is crying, he will adjust better after you have left, and kindergarten teachers are used to dealing with first day tears at the beginning of the school year.

4. Teacher Communication 101

- If you have a question or concern, don't approach the teacher during the craziness of the drop off time in the morning. Send in a note or leave a phone message mentioning your reason for contacting her and let her know that you would like to meet with her to discuss it.
- Read all the notes and newsletters that come home from your child's teacher and the school as soon as you get them. Keep a folder with important information about upcoming events, dates and notices so that all of that info is easily accessible. That way, if you have a question, you can start there.

5. Clarifying Questions

- Want to talk to your child about what he's been doing in school? To help ask questions your child can answer, ask the teacher for a copy of the daily and weekly schedule, and keep up with the teacher's newsletters about what's being taught. That way, you can ask questions that are specific and straight-forward. For example, "What did you make in art class today?" or "What did you learn about frogs today?"

6. Ready, Set, Read!

- One of the most exciting parts about kindergarten is the new adventure of learning to read. The most important "homework" you can do to help prepare your child for this crucial, life-long skill is to read with him for 20-30 minutes every day. You can read books, do fun reading activities together, and even simply practice reading the words that surround you (on cereal boxes, at the grocery store, on street signs etc).

7. Social Situations

- If your child is having difficulty with another child in the class, talk it over with the teacher before confronting another parent. She knows both children and understands their classroom dynamic and may have a solution.
- If your child talks about playing with another child, invite him over for a play date. If possible, include the parent so you can get to know them as well.

8. Invest with Involvement

- If possible, volunteer to help in the classroom. You can also ask the teacher if there's anything you can do at home to help out. Attend field trips and other special school events whenever you can. When you're involved at school, you're showing your child and his teacher that his education is important to you!

9. Conferences and Evaluations

- Come to conferences with questions you've written down ahead of time. If the teacher has specific concerns, ask for suggestions of things you can do at home to help your child with problem areas.
- Don't fret about grades in kindergarten. Use grades and evaluations as guides for feedback on which areas to work on at home. But don't let them stress you out!

10. Learning is Fun!

- What's most important about this crucial transition into formal education is the understanding that school and learning are fun and exciting. Don't sweat the small stuff and make things unnecessarily stressful. Tap into your child's natural curiosity and excitement about learning new things and the year is sure to be a success.

Most children do very well during the adjustment to kindergarten. Approach the year with enthusiasm and excitement and your child is likely to follow your lead. It won't be long before you realize the transition to kindergarten is as easy as ABC!