



Starting Kindergarten

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Beginning elementary school is a huge milestone for you and your child. And summer is a perfect time to practice the social skills needed for your child to transition into kindergarten smoothly. He will be more successful if he practices some self-management skills as well as ways to cope with frustration because difficult circumstances inevitably arise at school. The kindergarten teacher will also want him to communicate what he needs with words rather than actions, and he will be expected to take turns and share space and materials with other children.

There are several ways you can encourage school readiness at home. First and foremost, of course, is modeling. Children learn through modeling after adult behavior. Every time, you express your own feelings appropriately, you are modeling for your child. You also do this every time you listen carefully to him without interrupting and when you stay calm when you are coping with your own frustrations. As his parent, you also teach him respect for authority by not allowing him to speak to you or others with disrespect.

A child learn best when he feels confident in his ability to manage his behavior and his emotions. Whenever you allow him to do things independently, you are telling your son that you trust that he can do it. When you notice out loud the efforts he makes to do things on his own, you are reinforcing positive behavior. "You did a great job of picking up your toys without my telling you!" "You got ready all by yourself. I'm very happy about that."

Children learn best by modeling and through consistent practice. Build into everyday routines over the summer some of the skills he will need to succeed in kindergarten. For example, ask your child to follow your one and two-step directions to accomplish chores. When he does, praise him for listening to you and doing what you asked. He will be expected to follow teacher's directions when he gets to school so you help him practice these skills in a natural way by incorporating them into your every day agenda.

Offer him frequent opportunities to socialize with groups of children. These social times offer him the opportunity to practice such skills as using his words, sharing, and compromise. When you are present, you can praise appropriate social behavior. When you are not, your son is learning how to play independently which is excellent preparation for the transition to school. In addition, quiet times at home allow your child to self-manage. He learns to entertain himself and use his own imagination to have fun.

If you feel that your modeling and practice efforts are not enough, you may want to consider a more formal social skills training program like Stepping Stones. In this program, you and your child both learn necessary skills for school. A kindergarten readiness group therapist breaks down the skills into manageable parts that are learned in group and then practiced at home.

Most importantly, get your child excited about kindergarten. Let him know what a friendly place school is and how well he is going to do there. Even if you have reservations about this transition, "never let him see you sweat." He will take the cue from you that things are going to be OK, and that you know he can do it. Express your confidence in his ability to be successful in school!