

A Look at School Readiness

As we begin the registration process for the 2009/2010 school year, many parents of children approaching kindergarten age are wondering if their child is ready to start kindergarten. Parents don't want to send their children on if they are not "ready" yet they don't want to keep their child in preschool if they are ready for this next step. Unfortunately there is no easy answer to the readiness dilemma. Kindergarten readiness is a hot and debated topic.

Years ago, the emphasis in kindergarten was to meet the individual child where they were in their growth and development. A child was not expected to be at a certain level of development and/or to have certain skills, kindergarten classrooms recognized that young children come in at various developmental levels. Today, the program is established and a child is expected to fit into the program, thus the emphasis on readiness.

Experts differ as to the criteria for readiness. In the book, Kindergarten It Isn't What it Used To Be by Susan K. Golant & Mitch Golant, the authors list two separate "lists" of readiness criteria. This one focuses on academic skills:

- Ability to recite the alphabet and recognize and write random upper and lower case letters
- Ability to identify the first sound of a word or tell when words rhyme
- Ability to write one's name
- Ability to count to 20 and recognize numerals
- Ability to recite the days of the week, months of the year and one's own birthday
- Ability to draw a person with recognizable features
- Ability to name and draw simple shapes
-

Academics are often what we think of when we think of school readiness. Many experts encourage parents to look beyond the academics, to look at certain basic building blocks of learning that are essential yet not as easily measured as the academic criteria:

- Interest in the world around them
- Curiosity about what's new and different
- Identification and communication of feelings and ideas
- Spontaneity in facing life's challenges
- Flexible thinking and receptivity to new concepts
- Memory of the past and the ability to apply it to new situations
- Ability to retain new information
- Attention span to sustain a complex project
- Positive self esteem
- The ability to make and keep friends
- The ability to control impulses and delay gratification

Parents should note that criteria on both lists are based on maturational issues. In other words, reaching these criteria is individual to each child's growth and development. Each child has an "inner clock" that governs when they will reach the criteria, like the skill of

walking. Some children walk at 9 months, others 14 months, some children are early bloomers while others' take their time. Neither pace is better or worse and there's not much anyone can do to change the pace anyway.

In "Readiness for Kindergarten" by Erna Furman, a list of criteria is given which includes the child's ability to:

- Deal with new situations
- Take care of his/her bodily needs
- Form an appropriate relationship with his/her teacher
- Form relationships with classmates
- Play
- Exert internal control
- Recognize, verbalize and tolerate feelings

It is difficult to provide a hard and fast list of criteria or test to evaluate a child's readiness for kindergarten. I would encourage you to look at your individual child's development as a whole, consider their social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth. Combined the above lists have criteria which should be considered, none of the above list are complete enough to stand alone. Observe the kindergarten class in your neighborhood, talk with the school to gain insight of their expectations for your child.

Finally, Lois Robbert in The Kindergarten Dilemma shares the following insights on the general expectations of children entering kindergarten:

Social Skills

- Making friends with children their own age
- Getting along with other people; cooperating, sharing, giving and taking.
- Experiencing what it means to belong to a group.

Physical Skills

- Strengthening large motor skills and body coordination
- Developing perceptual motor abilities in preparation for reading and writing

Emotional Skills

- Separating from the family
- Acquiring a sense of self, apart from being a child in the family
- Developing a positive self-concept
- Developing independence

Classroom Skills

- Learning how to solve problems
- Developing skills for self-help
- Beginning to make sense of the world
- Experiencing the joys of books, blocks, play, music and rhythms

Acquiring the Simple Rules of School Behavior

- Listening when the teacher talks
- Paying attention and not bothering other children
- Answering the teacher's questions
- Finishing assigned work
- Following classroom routines

- Learning to express themselves so they might ask teachers to help them
- Listening so they can respond to others and follow directions

Intellectual Skills

- Beginning recognition of numbers and letters
- Appreciation of book reading
- Ability to form concepts, ideas and increase vocabulary
- Ability to group objects and understand size relationships

If you have questions regarding your child's readiness for kindergarten and/or how you can help enrich your child's development in the above areas, check with your child's teacher. She will be able to provide you with insights as to your child's participation in class and observations she may have of your child's growth and development. Our Preschool will be having two Kindergarten Informational evenings; the first evening is scheduled Tuesday, March 10 6:30- 8:00pm, the second is Thursday, May 30 6:30-8:00pm. Child Care will be available for these evenings.