

How to Prepare Your Child with Disabilities for Kindergarten: Tips for Parents

Kindergarten is a big step in any child's life. For a child with disabilities, being ready for that step often requires some intentional preparation. By working with your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, you can plan for your child's success and make that first school experience a good one.

Use the IEP Team to Plan for Success

Planning for your child's entrance into kindergarten can begin as early as a year ahead of time. You can start the process by asking the IEP team to discuss what skills your child will need to succeed and what IEP goals would move your child in that direction. The IEP team can suggest home-based activities you can use to help your child develop kindergarten skills. It also can recommend community resources if needed.

In the spring before your child starts kindergarten, you can begin to consider specific school choices. Your IEP team can tell you more about options in your area. Many districts have "kindergarten roundup" events so families can check out programs at different schools. Other districts assign children to a kindergarten in a specific school based on geographic location. If you look at a school in the spring, remember that the children you observe are at the end of their school year and their skills will be more advanced than those of a child just beginning kindergarten.

Know the Signs of Kindergarten Readiness

Kindergarten readiness isn't about being able to read, write, do math, and know science. Teachers say that kindergarten readiness is really about having basic communication skills and a good attitude.

They recommend that children entering kindergarten have the ability to:

- communicate wants and needs
- share and take turns with others
- be an enthusiastic learner
- pay attention and sit still
- use a pencil and paintbrush
- count up to 20
- recognize the letters of the alphabet

Decide if Your Child is Ready

If you feel that your child may not be ready for kindergarten, talk with your IEP team and together you can weigh options. Remember, your child doesn't need to have every skill in order to succeed in kindergarten. In fact, kindergarten experiences such as interacting with typical peers may actually help your child build skills.

If you disagree with the IEP team about your child's abilities, you may use a variety of dispute resolution processes. These include conciliation and mediation.

Prepare Your Child for Kindergarten

Once you've decided to enroll your child in kindergarten and are working on readiness skills, you can make your child's transition easier by doing the following:

- Have your child visit the classroom and meet the teacher before the school year begins.
- Take pictures of the school and classroom and use the pictures to talk with your child about starting kindergarten.
- Arrange summer play times with other students who will be in your child's classroom.
- Read books with your child about kindergarten, such as:

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- o “David Goes to School” by David Shannon
 - o “Off to School, Baby Duck!” by Amy Hest
 - o “Vera’s First Day of School” by Vera Rosenberry
 - o “Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come” by Nancy Carlson

Related Information

“K is for Kindergarten” is a free booklet from PACER Center. Order it by calling 952-838-9000 or e-mailing mpirc@PACER.org.

“Kindergarten Readiness: Using Age or Skills in Assessing a Child’s Readiness” is from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Find it at eric.ed.gov; enter “ED490711” for the search term and select “ERIC #” for the search location.

“Readiness for Kindergarten: Parent and Teacher Beliefs” is from the National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. Find it at nces.ed.gov/pubs93/web/93257.asp.

“Still Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement” is a position statement developed by the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. Find it at www.naecs-sde.org/STILL_Unacceptable_Trends_in_Kinderg.pdf.

“Try These Tips for a Smooth Transition to Kindergarten” is an article in PACER Center’s “Early Childhood Connection,” Winter 2008. Find it at PACER.org/newsletters/ec/winter08.pdf.