

Preschool

School Readiness

Preschool years are known to be the early childhood years, between the ages of three to six. During the end of this early childhood development, the child and his/her parents/caregivers will begin the transition into kindergarten. Kindergarten entry is the beginning of a child's formal education and a very important developmental milestone. Unfortunately, a national survey of kindergarten teachers reported that 35% of their students were not ready to "participate successfully in school".

Many factors contribute to a child's readiness for school. In the past, readiness of a child to attend school referred to the child's level of cognitive functioning and focused specifically on whether or not the child had sufficiently mastered certain foundational academic skills. Although mastery of academics is important, the National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) expanded the scope of the child's readiness to five domains because readiness is no longer defined by whether he or she has mastered specific skills; rather, it is viewed as a complex network of development that spans physical, cognitive, social, and community functioning. Below are the five domains:

1. **Physical well-being and motor development** – this domain varies in all children depending upon their health status, growth, physical abilities and disabilities. Although normal physical development increases the child's ability to pay attention and participate in school, impaired physical development does not prevent them from entering school. However, educational programs and services may need to be considered. Impairments in physical well-being include genetic or congenital disorders, delayed motor development, impaired language skills, chronic medical conditions and poor sleep hygiene. Pediatric healthcare providers assist in assessing these impairments using regular development screenings, vision and hearing screens, and screens for socioemotional risk factors and other medical conditions. Thus, regular well check-ups are necessary to maintain adequate monitoring.
2. **Social and emotional development** – this domain includes the child's self-concept and interpersonal skills. It involves their ability to separate from family and caregivers, make friends and get along with peers, participate in group activities, follow rules and regulations, and self-regulate behavior, emotions, and attention. Research shows that social and emotional development during early childhood is strongly connected to later academic success.
3. **Child's approach to learning** – this domain refers to the strategies that a child adopts to acquire, use, and demonstrate skill or knowledge. Children learn through a combination of predispositions and learning styles.
4. **Language development** – this domain includes verbal skills such as listening, speech and vocabulary. Language and speech need to be sufficient for communication and learning, however, most kindergarten teachers report that delayed language is the most

common reason for lack of readiness among students. Thus, it is known that early exposure to books and reading is highly beneficial.

5. **Cognition and general knowledge** – this domain includes abilities necessary for learning sound-letter associations, spatial relations, and number concepts (i.e. knows to count from 1-10). In the past, cognitive ability was the primary indicator of school readiness and while it is considered to be the most common sign, the five domains all together promise more success.

According to a new American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) policy statement, helping children develop the physical, social-emotional, cognitive and language skills needed to learn should begin at birth. In addition, according to P. Gail Williams, MD, FAAP, lead author of the AAP statement, “Children's caregivers are their first teachers, and pediatricians can help families provide a safe, stable, nurturing and stimulating learning environment.” Together, we can decrease school retention and promote the necessary skills for our children to be successful in school.

Resources:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Ready-for-School.aspx>

School Readiness: Helping Communities Get Children Ready for School and Schools Ready for Children, Emig C, Moore A, Scarup, HJ (Eds), Child Trends 2001.

www.childtrends.org/files/schoolreadiness.pdf (Accessed on October 06, 2011).

Imaginations/Fears/Anxieties

Becoming more of an individualist, the preschool child is beginning to make his own simple choices from green or blue socks to having a tea party inside or playing outside. They also begin a new sense of right and wrong, however, unpredictability still reigns. Awareness of their environment and trying to control it will also influence their behavior. Thus, increasing the emotional effect of their imaginations, fears and anxieties.

All children have fears at some point in their lives. Most childhood fears are normal, temporary, and eventually outgrown. Some, however, may be a symptom or beginning signs of an anxiety disorder. The object of the child's fears change with the complexity of their cognitive development. For example, what scares a 3-year old will likely not scare a 6-year old. Studies show that preschoolers have an average of four fears, most are afraid of imaginary creatures like ghosts and witches, animals and the natural environment like the dark or thunderstorms. They grasp the concept of object permanence (understanding that objects continue to exist even when they cannot be observed) but as “magical” thinkers they sometimes question what happens when can no longer see something. These fears are normal and will eventually be outgrown but if they

are not confronted, they can persist and cause serious distress, may destroy family functioning or interfere with the child's development. When the child's fears interfere with functioning, they may meet the DSM-5 criteria for an anxiety disorder and a visit to their primary care provider is necessary.

Managing fears is an important aspect in dealing with such emotional disturbance. The goal of management is to help the child learn positive ways to cope with and surpass the fear. This learned skill can help them not just during their preschool years but all through life. Fears can normally be managed through reassurance, education, experience and/or exploration through play (i.e. games involving fighting monsters or ghosts). Most importantly, the child's fears should be acknowledged, but not belittled or exaggerated. Parents and caregivers need to understand that most fears in the preschool years are normal and mostly developed because of their limited ability to understand the intricacy of the world in which they live in.

Resources:

Hagan JF, Shaw JS, Duncan PM, eds. 2008. *Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children and Adolescents*, Third Edition. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

Augustyn, M. MD (2015). Overview of fears and phobias in children and adolescents. https://www.uptodate.com/contents/overview-of-fears-and-phobias-in-children-and-adolescents?source=search_result&search=fears%20and%20phobia%20preschool&selectedTitle=1~150