



## Preschool Readiness

### Is My Child Ready For Preschool?

Just because most preschools will accept children at around 3 years old doesn't mean your child is ready for preschool when she reaches that age. Is she socially, emotionally and physically ready to participate in a structured educational program with a group of children? The following will help you think about some of the important skills needed for preschool.

### Is your child independent?

Your child should also be able to take care of some basic needs, like washing her hands, eating her snack without assistance and sleeping alone. Preschools will want your child to be able to use the bathroom facility with little help.

### Has Your Child Spent Time Away From You?

If your child has been cared for by a babysitter or a relative, he'll be better prepared to separate from you when he's at preschool. Kids who are used to being apart from their parents often bounce right into preschool with hardly a backward glance. If your child hasn't had many opportunities to be away from you, you might want to schedule some - a weekend with grandma, for instance, or a day with your sister and her kids. But even if you can't work out your separation issues up front, don't worry too much; many children leave Mom or Dad for the first time to go to preschool and they do just fine. The trick is to help your child adjust in short doses. Many preschools will allow you to drop off your child for an hour or two during his first few days there; as he gets more used to his environment, you gradually work up to a full day. Some experts believe that preschool may even be more important for kids who've been at home with their parents, to help get them ready for the move to kindergarten.



### Can she work on projects on her own?

Preschool usually involves lots of arts and crafts projects that require concentration and the ability to focus on an individual task. If your child likes to draw at home or gets engrossed in puzzles and other activities on her own, she's a good candidate for preschool. But even if she's the kind of child who asks for help with everything, you can start getting her ready by setting up playtimes where she can entertain herself for a half hour or so. While you wash the dishes, encourage her to make creatures out of clay, for example. Gradually build up to longer stretches of solo play. Your goal here is to keep yourself moderately preoccupied with an activity so that she'll get on with her own without too much hand-holding from you.



## Is she ready to participate in-group activities

Many preschool activities, like "circle time," require that all the children in a class participate at the same time. These interactions give children a chance to play and learn together, but also require them to sit still, listen to stories, and sing songs. This can be very difficult for kids under 3 who are naturally active explorers and not always developmentally ready to play with other children. If your child isn't used to group activities, you can start introducing them yourself. Take her to story time at your local library, for instance, or sign her up for a class such as tumbling to help her get used to playing with other children.

## Is he used to keeping a regular schedule?

Preschools usually follow a predictable routine: circle time, play time, art activities, snack, then table time. There's a good reason for this. Children tend to feel most comfortable and in control when the same things happen at the same time each day. So if your child doesn't keep to a schedule and each day is different from the last, it can help to standardize his days a bit before he starts preschool. Start by offering meals on a regular timetable. You could also plan to visit the park each afternoon or set - and stick to - a bedtime ritual (bath, then books, and bed).

## Does he have the physical stamina for preschool?

Whether it's a two-day or three-day program, preschool keeps kids busy. There are art projects to do, games to play, and songs to learn and dance. Does your child thrive on activities like this, or does he have trouble moving from one thing to the next without getting cranky? Another thing to consider is how and when your child needs to nap. If he still needs a mid-morning snooze, it might not be time yet to go to school. You can work toward building his stamina by making sure he gets a good night's sleep. If you have some flexibility in your schedule, you might also want to start him off in a two-day program to ease him into the hustle and bustle of preschool life, and gradually increase the length of his school day as he gets more comfortable.

## Are you worried that if you don't enroll him in preschool he won't be ready for kindergarten?

Most experts agree that there are plenty of other ways for children to develop the skills necessary to be successful in kindergarten, including attending a good daycare facility or spending quality time at home with you or another loving caregiver. A study by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development found that children do best if they're cared for by someone who is genuinely concerned about their well being and development, and who makes sure they're doing a variety of age-appropriate activities. They needn't be enrolled in an organized preschool for that.

If you find that the main reasons you want to send your child to preschool are that he seems eager to learn new things and explore, he isn't getting enough stimulation at home or daycare, or he seems ready to broaden his social horizons and interact with other children, chances are it's the perfect time to start preschool.