

Non-Academic Kindergarten Skills

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As a former kindergarten teacher, I am often asked what a child needs to know to be ready for school. When parents ask this question, many expect a list of academic skills, such as letter recognition or the ability to count to twenty.

Academic skills provide a great "head-start" for kindergarten students, but often, the most important skills a child needs to be successful in kindergarten are behavioral, rather than intellectual.

Students with solid behavioral skills contribute to the overall productivity of the classroom. When a teacher has to stop and correct or manage disruptive behavior, the classroom can lose momentum and other children tend to become disengaged. Helping your child practice these important skills will have an impact on not only their education and ability to learn, but will also increase the teacher's ability to focus on facilitating learning, rather than managing behaviors.

Here are some behavior skills to begin working on with your preschooler.

1. Focus Quietly (*10-15 minutes)

Kindergarten teachers are great at keeping things fresh and moving to keep up with the shorter attention span of most 5- and 6-year-olds. However, children often are required to sit still for circle, story-time, and other seat-work.

***Activities like a story time at your local library are great practice!**

2. Take Turns

Kindergarten students will often be required to share supplies and manipulatives, and will often have to take turns on playground equipment and with classroom centers/stations.

***Help your child practice this skill with plenty of interaction with other children. During play-time, have your child and a friend play with one type of toy together (ie, Legos), so that he/she will likely have the opportunity to share. Other ideas include having your child work with a friend to complete a puzzle, playing board games, or visiting a park on a busy afternoon.**

3. Let Others Shine

Most kindergarten classrooms have over 20 students, and children need to be prepared to share time and attention with others. Children need to understand that they will not be chosen for every opportunity, be called on every time they raise their hand, get to be the special helper, etc.

***Foregoing the role of "center of attention" can be hard for many students. Let your child know that his/her worth doesn't change.**

4. Recognize Authority Figures

Kindergarten students need to be able to learn from, listen to, and respect a wide variety of adults at school. Kindergartners interact with not only their teacher, but recess aides, lunch workers, specialists, parent helpers, as well as a variety of other school employees.

***Arrange play dates with a variety of friends to help your child become comfortable around adults with different management styles. Teach your children to address adults as Mr. Smith or Miss Sarah to begin to foster an attitude of respect. Help your child understand that a parent is not the only grown-up he/she needs to listen to.**

5. Control Impulses

Students will need to be able to control their bodies in the classroom. This includes things like keeping their hands and feet to themselves, controlling the desire to make funny noises, etc.

***Some tips to help your child include downplaying the "humor" of bodily noises, teaching your child about personal space or a personal "bubble," and gentle reminders to keep their hands to themselves.**

6. Separation

MOST kindergartners will experience a degree of separation anxiety, especially during the first few days/weeks of school. However, you can help your child by reassuring him/her that you will be back to pick them up/meet them at the bus stop, etc.

***A great way to facilitate a smooth separation is to use the "quick goodbye" technique. Children do better when a mom or dad drops them off quickly. Give a quick hug and say, "I'll see you soon. Have a great day." and leave. It is harder for children when parents linger in the classroom. Your child needs to know that you trust the teacher, and that he/she is safe and okay without you.**

7. Self-Help

With twenty or more students in a classroom, it's important that most kindergartners be able to take on most self-help skills. These include things like: putting on and zipping up a coat, putting away their backpack and supplies, tying or buckling shoes, and solid bathroom skills.

***Resist the urge to help your child with every task. Promote independence and self-care by having them try to get dressed on their own, put on their own coat, and become independent of you in the bathroom. Young kids are capable of so much more than we often give them credit for.**

****Remember that this list is a general guideline. ALL children will have difficulty in one or more of these areas at some point. Know that your child's classroom teacher and school employees are equipped and ready to work with all students, regardless of their abilities.**