

## **BUILDING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN CHILDREN**

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While many of the four million American children heading off to kindergarten these past few weeks may be well versed in their ABCs and 123s, many do not know how to take turns or communicate well with other children or adults. However, being emotionally and socially ready to start school is as important as learning the alphabet. Parents can play a major role in teaching children the social and emotional skills needed for school, such as cooperation, independence, motivation, ability to listen to instruction, attentiveness, confidence, and the ability to concentrate on and persist at tasks.

Children who are socially and emotionally ready for kindergarten are friendly, curious, eager to learn, communicative, and exhibit good control of their feelings and emotions. They are not angry, aggressive, withdrawn, or hostile. A new report, issued by the Child Mental Health Foundation and Agencies Network, an umbrella group of public and private child advocacy organizations, points out that children who are not socially and emotionally ready for school are at high risk for performing poorly in school.

Parents can safely turn their attention to cultivating their children's emotional and social skills without feeling that they are taking away from preparing them for school. If a child does not know how to interact with other kids or has difficulty communicating, the transition to kindergarten will be bumpy. But parents can teach children to be confident, independent, motivated, and cooperative by playing games with them, attending neighborhood playgroups, and/or enrolling children in preschool.

The foundation for emotional and social readiness is a caring, persistent relationship with a parent or primary caregiver during the child's first year of life. Family environment and parental energy is as -- if not more -- important than drilling children in their ABCs in terms of how a child will perform in school.

Many teachers say that behavioral and emotional problems among children are causing major problems in the classroom. If kids do not have social skills, it is very difficult for a teacher to do anything but manage behavior.

School buses and cars are taking young children to kindergarten, and this is the beginning of their formal. Here they come, ready or not, and unfortunately a lot of them really are not ready. Some of our children are remarkable artists and mathematicians. Those are areas we are doing particularly well in, but the rest of the story is that it is the social and emotional skills that really prepare a child to be ready for school.