

# **PREPARING JOHNNY FOR KINDERGARTEN**

## **PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR PARENTS**

**Article by David Lowenstein, Ph.D.**  
**Psychologist**

The first day of school is one of the most traumatic days for children and teachers and of course parents. Can you imagine what it must feel like to be in a room with fifteen five year old boys and girls, and no assistance and no parents and not really know any of the children? Now imagine that half of those children are screaming and trying to make a break for the front door or that a lot of them are still crying since their parent left the classroom. One can also imagine how each parent has felt as they walk out the door of the classroom and realize that the academic experience is now starting and in what seems like a few years their son and daughter will be heading off to college and out of the house. Imagine the guilt that a lot of parents are feeling as they walk out the door and hear their son or daughter crying for them.

As the first day of school approaches, I will try and give each parent some practical advice as to what to expect, how to plan and what will most like happen in your child's kindergarten during the next few months.

As for as making kindergarten itself a smooth transition, parents can try any/all of the following suggestions:

1. Make some sort of countdown calendar and place it in an area of the home that your child can reach it and see it (refrigerator door) and then marking down the days until the first day of school.
2. Help your child pick out a very special lunch box and book bag and help them place their names on their personal items.
3. At least a day or two before school starts pick out a new outfit that your child can wear to school and reinforce that they look great in it and are looking so grown up.
4. It is always a good idea to take your child by the school, during the summer months, so that he can see where he will be going and they can get familiar with the surroundings.
5. If your child is already terrified of the idea and is already crying, try and find out whom his/her teacher will be and make an appointment to see the kindergarten teacher. Remember, kindergarten teachers are good at this stuff as they go through this routine every year.
6. Take your child out for donuts or something special the morning of the first day of school. It is very important to make this experience a great one for them.
7. If possible take a little time off work and stay in the classroom for the first half hour of the class. Help your son/daughter get adjusted to the other kids and remember all the other parents are going through the same stuff so if all else fails ask one of the other parents for help with this.
8. Before class begins, while everyone is signing in, introduce your child to some of the other

classmates.

9. Write a short note that can be placed in his/her lunch so that they can read it later
10. After the first day of school make some time to discuss it and celebrate that your son/daughter had a great day and that there are going to be many great days in school.

As parents we are always looking for ways to help the learning process for our children. As our child is getting ready to enter kindergarten these learning skills become even more important for their future development. There are many things that you, as a parent, can do to assist your child in beginning the learning process and making learning fun and exciting. Here are some examples of things that can help:

- Read to your child at least once a day for at least 20 - 25 minutes. While you are reading they are learning how to hold a book, that pictures match the text, that print goes left to right and it also helps with the bonding experience between you and your child.
- Fill your house with several types of reading material such as books, magazines, newspapers, etc. Put reading material at your child's eye level to inspire curiosity.
- Purchase some magnetic letters for your refrigerator door or with a magnetic cookie baking sheet so that your child can use them to explore learning letters and making names and spelling words, etc.
- Write your child's name on a special paper so it can be used as a reference when writing her/his name. Hang this special sheet of paper in a place that your child can see so that they can use it as a reference.
- When walking down the street or driving in the car, talk about the things you that all of you can see like colors, shapes, street signs, and see if they can read some of the common words in signs, etc.
- Try to make up stories together and draw or talk about the sequence of their day in reference to what happened, who they met, what they did, etc. This helps them in putting words, ideas pictures together to further explain what is going on in their worlds.
- Play games that can have your child find numbers or letters in old magazines or newspapers. A yellow marker can be used to highlight or circle the letter or word. For example, "Find all the r's and circle them, now count how many you found."
- Count Cheerios, crackers, or anything like this you serve for breakfast as you place them in a bowl or plate. This helps your child with learning to count.

- Sort M&M's or Skittles by colors which will help your child with organizing and determining differences and similarities of shapes and colors.
- Find some useful way for your child to learn other children's names. For example: Mary's name starts with the same letter as Aunt Margaret's name, can you tell me what letter Mary starts with?

So how do you know if your child is ready for kindergarten? While there is no formal standard as to what your child must do or what he/she must perform there are some things that should be expected of them. Here is a list of what most kindergarten programs expect your child to be able to perform when they enter school:

***Personal Skills:***

- Communicates so that others can understand him.
- Knows how he is going home on the first day (bus, car, or stay after school).
- Can tell you his bus number.
- Takes care of his own personal needs such as going to the bathroom, washing hands, handling a plate and silverware without assistance.
- Handles clothing without assistance – hang up coat, zip pants or jacket, button clothing.

***Social Skills:***

- Plays well with other children.
- Follows a daily routine.
- Gets along with other children in an appropriate manner.  
Shares with others.
- Picks up activities when finished working.

***Academic Skills:***

- Expresses ideas using descriptive words and complete sentences.
- Listens to a story without being interrupted.
- Concentrates on a task for ten minutes.
- Recognizes his own name in print.
- Names basic shapes: triangle, square, circle and rectangle.
- Identifies colors: red, yellow, blue, black, brown, green, orange, purple.

- Counts to ten.
- Locates print on a page and tells what it is used for.
- Recognizes numbers to 5
- Tells how two objects are alike and how two objects are different.

Remember that even though this is potentially a difficult time for children and parents, everyone finally adjusts and makes the experience enjoyable. We have all been through kindergarten and then started on our academic path. If you feel that your son or daughter is still experiencing problems and having difficulties with separation, etc., first talk with the kindergarten teacher. The teacher may be able to make some suggestions that can assist you and your child in the transition. If all else fails, find a mental health professional in your area that specializes working with children.