

School Readiness

What is school readiness?



School readiness refers to whether a child is ready to make an easy and successful transition into school. The term 'preschool readiness' might be used in the same manner in reference to beginning preschool (Kindergarten). School readiness can be actively facilitated with a little forward planning to ensure that children regularly participate in activities that develops the appropriate skills required to help optimal learning when they start school. While many people think of academics (e.g. writing their name, counting to 10, knowing the colors) as the important school readiness skills, school readiness actually refers to a much broader range of skills. In addition to some academic basics, school readiness skills also include self care (independent toileting and opening lunch boxes), attention and concentration, physical skills (e.g. having the endurance to sit upright for an entire school day), emotional regulation, language skills and play and social skills.

Why are school readiness skills important?

The development of school readiness skills allows school teachers to expand and further develop a child's skills in the specific areas of social interaction, play, language, emotional development, physical skills, literacy and fine motor skills. Without these basic skills already established upon entry to school, children can very quickly find themselves playing 'catch up' compared to their peers that are advancing more quickly. Students that begin school with the build block (or foundation) skills in place advance quickly as opposed to those that start school only to *then* begin the slow process of developing school readiness.

What are the building blocks necessary to develop school readiness?

- **Self Regulation:** The ability to obtain, maintain and change emotion, behaviour, attention and activity level appropriate for a task or situation.
- **Sensory processing:** Accurate processing of sensory stimulation in the environment as well as in one's own body that influences attention and learning that effects how you sit, hold a pencil and listen to the teacher.
- **Receptive language (understanding):** Comprehension of spoken language (e.g. the teachers instructions).
- **Expressive language (using language):** Producing speech or language that can be understood by others (e.g. talking to friends).
- **Articulation:** The ability to clearly pronounce individual sounds in words.
- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills (e.g. What do I need to pack to take to school?).
- **Emotional development/regulation:** The ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions and regulate emotions (for a child's own responses to challenges).
- **Social skills:** Determined by the ability to engage in reciprocal interaction with others (either verbally or non-verbally), to compromise with others and to be able to recognise and follow social norms.
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined result (e.g. a cut and paste task or a simple maths worksheet).

How can you tell if my child has problems with school readiness?

If a child has difficulties with school readiness they might:

- Get easily frustrated when expectations are placed upon them.
- Struggle to follow instructions in daily activities.
- Rely on parents to do self care tasks, such as dressing.
- Not be toilet trained (day time).
- Struggle to attend to tasks as long as their peers (length varies according to tasks)
- Be socially immature (e.g. unable to share, be unable to shift with changing rules of a game in play).
- Have poor receptive and/or expressive language skills.
- Have difficulty understanding consequences of their behaviours.
- Not be interested in looking at books and/or doing sit down activities.
- Not interact well with their peers (either in or out of the classroom).
- Have limited play skills (and cant change their play to incorporate new play items or people).
- Be resistant to new activities and/or being guided about how to develop new skills.
- Be resistant to input from others in order to learn.

What other problems can occur when a child has difficulties with school readiness?

When a child has school readiness difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Self regulation:** The ability to obtain, maintain and change one's emotion, behaviour, attention and activity level appropriate for a task or situation in a socially acceptable manner.
- **Receptive language (understanding):** Comprehension of language.
- **Expressive language (using language):** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate

wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.

- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.
- **Emotional development/regulation:** The ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions and to regulate emotions.
- **Social skills:** Determined by the ability to engage in reciprocal interaction with others (either verbally or non-verbally), to compromise with others, and be able to recognize and follow social norms.
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined result.
- **Self care skills:** such as dressing and toileting independently.
- **Gross motor skills:** Whole body physical skills using the core strength muscles of the trunk, arms, legs such as running, skipping, jumping and ball skills.
- **Fine motor skills:** Finger and hand skills such as writing, cutting, opening lunch boxes, tying shoelaces.

What can be done to improve school readiness skills?

In the lead up to school start, the following activities can be helpful:

- **Parenting expectations:** Increase expectations of the child around self care tasks such as dressing, toileting, eating, and getting ready to leave the house. Provide only verbal rather than physical 'help' to complete the tasks where possible.
- **Social skills:** Encourage the child to develop relationships with other (unfamiliar) children of a similar age, and arrange suitable 'play dates' for social interaction practice where the adults actively facilitate this play practice.
- **Books:** Expose the child to books to prepare them for literacy so they learn to sit through the entirety of a book.
- **Early preparation:** Start preparing the child for school at the age of 4 by talking about expectations at school, appropriate behaviour, and regularly engaging in 'sit down' activities.
- **Collaboration:** Work with the child's preschool teacher to identify any signs of deficit or slow development so that these areas can be targeted

before the child starts school.

- **Visual strategies:** Use visuals (such as picture schedules) to help the child understand the routine of their day both at home and at preschool (kindergarten). You could even make visuals for school in advance (note: many commercial books serve as a rough visual schedule as a starting point). Transition visits are a good time to ask the teacher what the rough schedule is likely to be, and ideally to take some relevant photos at the same time.
- **Outings:** Prepare the child for school excursions by going to places such as the library, the zoo, the shopping centre and help the child to understand appropriate behaviour in these environments. Visits to the school play ground, toilet block and classroom door on the weekends or during school holidays before school start may also be helpful to familiarize the child with the new setting.
- **Fine motor skill development:** This is an area that will be a large part of the activities undertaken at school, so developing these skills will enable the child to participate in activities much more easily and willingly. This really means practice cutting, colouring, drawing, and writing their name.

What activities can help improve school readiness skills?

There are many simple activities that parents and teachers can do to help prepare a child for school.

Suggested [School Readiness Preparation Tasks and Activities](#) are outlined in this helpful table.

Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with school readiness in my child?

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with school readiness difficulties is important as:

- You only get one chance at making an easy and successful school entry -

throw everything you have at it in order to create a positive 'love school' attitude in the early days that will see you through any tough times that follow. If in doubt, act early to preserve self esteem!

- Completing both routine as well as attempting unfamiliar tasks (which school will regularly demand) are likely to feel very challenging, thus denting self-esteem and restricting participation. Practicing this in the comfort of home first will help develop comfort when challenged in the school setting.
- To identify the specific areas of skill breakdown so that these can be specifically targeted ideally *before* school entry to remove any hurdles to an easy and successful school entry.
- To discover fun, innovative ways to help the child to develop an understanding of the skill areas required for school success.
- School transition may be difficult if the child is reluctant to follow instructions (e.g. classroom instructions, academic task requirements) so again practice in advance can help smooth the transition.
- Social isolation can impact not only the child, but also the parents if the child does not make new friends at school. So social skill development is paramount as at the very least most parents want their child to be happy which is largely influenced by the social connections at school.

If left untreated what can difficulties with school readiness lead to?

When children have difficulties with school readiness, they might also have difficulty with:

- Dislike of school, learning and sometimes even the teacher who is the bearer of the school demands.
- Accessing the curriculum being instructed because the building block (foundation) skills are not yet developed sufficiently to allow task performance.
- Peer rejection and social isolation where children feel overwhelmed or socially uncomfortable.
- Following instructions from others in a position of authority at school (e.g. teachers).

- Poor academic outcomes as the child may be in a negative state that is not conducive to learning.
- Not only might the child become stressed and anxious as they realise their limitations, but also their parents and teachers.

What type of therapy is recommended for school readiness difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with school readiness, it is recommended they consult an Occupational Therapist and/or a Speech Therapist to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

