

Social Skills

When preparing for Kindergarten, most people know the importance of literacy skills-learning numbers, letters, sounds, being able to write names ect. But just as important, if not more so, are our social and emotional skills. Here are the top 5 social skills for Kindergarten readiness.

1. Be able to take turns, share, and work cooperatively with other children. Kindergarteners will spend a lot of time sharing materials and working in groups or pairs with their classmates. It is essential that they be able to do this without fighting, arguments, tears or fuss.

Practice: Help your child develop this skill by playing "what comes next?". Start a story, and then take turns building it up together. For example, you can start the story by saying, "Once upon a time, there was a little girl." The next person may add, "The little girl lived in the forest." The following person might say, "One day a dragon knocked on her cottage door", and so on until you reach the end of the story, or run out of time. There are times when the game does not go smoothly, because no one person is in control of the story. You have to be flexible, wait your turn, and work together. This is not always easy for children, which is why it is a great game to play.

2. Verbally communicate needs and feelings in an appropriate manner. One of the hardest parts of communicating with young children is their inability to control their emotions and express themselves. Much of the day can be taken up with tears and children who are unable to express what is wrong, so that a situation can be handled. In the preschool setting, we have a little more time to deal with these types of issues than they do in a kindergarten classroom. It is essential that children learn to express themselves verbally, assert themselves and treat others with respect.

Practice: Discuss feelings and let children express themselves on a daily basis. Give your child ample opportunity to practice their communication skills and express their feelings verbally. Ask them lots of questions about their day, what they liked and didn't like, what they'd like to do ect. This is especially important if you have a shy child at home-talk talk! If they are afraid to express themselves, they may be afraid to even ask to use the bathroom when they get to school. Your child needs to be comfortable with expressing themselves and voicing their basic needs.

3. Understand the difference between right and wrong, act accordingly, and be aware of the feelings of others. Being able to act in a non-disruptive manner, treat peers with respect, and exhibit empathy for others are a huge part of Kindergarten.

Practice: Role Playing is a great way to reinforce right and wrong, and appropriate behavior. Offer your child pretend scenarios and let them "act out" how they should react. For example, you might invite them to play with puppets or dolls or even dress up. Then provide scenarios such as: 2 dolls playing happily with a toy and a 3rd doll comes and takes the toy away. Ask- "what should the 2 dolls who lost their toy do?". Discuss whether the 3rd doll should have taken the toy away and what would have been a better course of action (ask to play, wait their turn ect.) Take the opportunity to discuss not just the appropriate behaviors/ actions, but the feelings involved as well. Developing a sense of empathy for other children is a crucial part of social development.

4. Follow directions, understand rules, and respect authority. This one is huge! Your child must be able to listen to, and respect their teacher, and follow simple directions in the classroom.

Practice: Play games like: Mother May I, Simon Says, Follow the Leader, and Red Light Green Light. Children should be made aware of the directions for playing the game and play accordingly. Don't always let them go first or win every time. As parents and teachers, we tend to try to make things easy for our little ones, but at school they will be faced with not always being first, not being able to act on their every whim and desire, or being the winner of every game. It's best to prep them and help them to act in an acceptable manner versus acting out when things don't go as desired.

5. Adapt to transitions in a positive manner. A day in Kindergarten is busy-there is so much to do and fit in! Children must be able to go with the flow, and make transitions easily. They must be able to line up at the end of recess without the Teacher having to go and seek them out, or calling them multiple times. They should be able to move from whole group work to individual work. They should be able to smoothly transition from unpacking in the morning to getting ready to work. This is difficult for many children, especially if they have a very free routine at home.

Practice: Try to have an established routine at home. In the weeks before school starts, play school and practice how a school day might run. This can be as simple as you like, but be sure to incorporate some transitions. Set up a circle time and read a book together, followed by a craft time at the table. Once your activity is over, have a clean up time. Maybe incorporate a snack time, and then outdoor play or vice versa. Be sure to let your child open all of their food items independently-there won't be someone at lunch to open all of their food for them! The key here is getting children comfortable with change, and helping them adjust to necessary transitions.

Kindergarten is a fun time for most children. It involves lots of opportunity for social emotional development. Understanding the boundaries of the school setting, being able to work cooperatively, and being aware of and respecting the feelings of others are important social-emotional skills needed for kindergarten. Working on these skills before they get there, is a great way to prepare your child to start school.