

# Kindergarten readiness: Are shy kids at an academic disadvantage?

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Parents of young children hope for a successful kindergarten experience that will set their youngsters on the right path of their educational journey. Some worry about their kids not adapting to the school environment, particularly when the children are talkative and overactive. Yet, a new study by the University of Miami (UM) shows that overly shy preschool children are at greater academic risk than their chatty and boisterous peers.

The study is one of the first to follow the social and [academic progress](#) of [children](#) throughout the preschool year. The report shows that children displaying shy and withdrawn behavior early in the preschool year started out with the lowest [academic skills](#) and showed the slowest gains in academic learning skills across the year. The findings are published online, in advance of print, by the *Journal of School Psychology*.

"Everybody wants their children to be ready for kindergarten, to know their ABCs and to be able to count, but they sometimes don't understand that having social-emotional readiness is equally important," says Rebecca J. Bulotsky-Shearer, assistant professor of psychology at UM College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and principal investigator of the study.

Behavioral problems in the classroom arise when there is a gap between the child's developmental skills and the expectations of the [school environment](#), according to the study. The findings suggest that children

who are shy in the classroom have trouble engaging and learning.

"[Preschool children](#) who are very introverted tend to 'disappear within the classroom,'" says Elizabeth R. Bell, [doctoral candidate](#) in [developmental psychology](#), at UM and co-author of the study. "It appears that while these children are not causing problems in the school, they are also not engaging in classroom activities and interactions, where almost all learning occurs during this age."

The results also raise the possibility that children who are loud and disruptive may be more likely to get the teacher's attention and benefit from specific educational strategies. "There are many classroom-based interventions for children that are disruptive and acting out in the classroom," says Bulotsky-Shearer. "I think the children who show an extreme amount of shyness and are withdrawn are most at risk of getting missed."

The researcher hopes the new findings encourage the development of appropriate classroom interventions tailored to the needs of different children, as well as appropriate training and professional development for teachers, to help them identify children who need help in specific areas. "This is especially important within early childhood programs such as Head Start, serving a diverse population of low-income children and families," says Bulotsky-Shearer.

The study analyzes information from 4, 417 prekindergarten children in the Head Start Program, ages 3 to 5, from a diverse population, living in a large urban district of the northeast. Six profile types were used to describe the preschoolers: 1. Well adjusted; 2. Adjusted with mild disengagement; 3. Moderately socially and academically disengaged; 4. Disruptive with peers; 5. Extremely socially and academically disruptive; 6. Extremely socially and academically disengaged.

The teachers assessed the emotional and behavioral characteristics, as well as the academic progress of each child, at three points in time during the preschool year. The findings show that older kids and girls tended to be better adjusted to the class, exhibited less behavioral problems, and had higher levels of social literacy, language and math skills.

**More information:** The study is titled "Latent Profiles of Preschool Behavior within Learning, Peer, and Teacher Contexts: Identifying Subgroups of Children at Academic Risks across the Preschool Year."

Provided by University of Miami

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