

Ten tips for a great start to kindergarten

July 28 2015, by Ayleen Barbel Fattal



Credit: Florida International University

Kindergarten is a big leap from preschool. The expectations for a child entering kindergarten are not what you or your parents may remember.

Today, tests are a regular part of the kindergarten routine; and by the time the school year is over, children who can barely write their first and

last names will be expected to write complete paragraphs.

In states that use standardized testing, children will be tested within the first nine weeks of the [school year](#) to assess their early reading and math skills. This can be very challenging for many as it requires a great deal of concentration and the ability to remember the material learned—something not expected of them in preschool.

The transition to kindergarten is also full of changes, not only for the [child](#), but for parents as well. Children will need to be more independent, responsible and organized—and parents need to be ready to let them. In kindergarten, kids are responsible for bringing their materials to and from school, eating on their own in the lunch room and navigating the school to get to their classroom daily. When parents know what to expect, they are better prepared to handle their own anxiety about these changes and in turn support their children through the process.

Florida International University psychologist Katie C. Hart provides some tips to help parents navigate the transition to kindergarten and help children have a successful first year of school.

- **Start talking with your child about their new school and the new routine of kindergarten before the school year begins.** Describe what the first day might look like. Talk about what the rules of the classroom might be. Practice school behaviors at home and praise your child for demonstrating good school behavior.
- **Practice the new school routine several times before the first day.** Practice the new wake-up time, bathroom, dressing, breakfast and car or bus routine for a week before the first day. This will help to relieve any [anxiety](#) your child may have around the transition. Be sure to visit the school (with your child if

possible) and get to know its policies and procedures.

- **Maintain good attendance throughout the school year.** Every day is important to building your child's learning base. The first nine weeks are crucial to their success in kindergarten, so it is extremely important to check-in with the teacher and monitor their progress.
- **Build strong home-and-school connections.** Get to know your child's teacher and the school community. Get involved at your child's school and keep regular communication—in good and bad times.
- **Establish daily learning and homework routines.** Know the teacher's homework expectations. Read with your child daily and practice letter names (upper and lower case), sounds and sight words. Practice drawing and writing at home as well as counting and recognizing numbers. This will help build their reading and math skills.
- **Get the right amount of sleep.** Children at this age should get 10 to 11 hours of sleep daily. This is very important for your child's overall development.
- **Maintain a balanced diet for your child and your family.** Include healthy fruits and vegetables. Your [food and physical activity choices](#) affect your health and your child's health. Poor nutrition can impair your child's readiness for school.
- **Minimize screen time and encourage active play.** Limiting the time kids spend on tablets, phones, televisions and computers is extremely important for their social, emotional and cognitive development. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one to two hours of [screen time](#) daily.
- **Consider extracurricular activities for your child.** Every child needs an area in which he or she can shine. Look into what activities your child may enjoy where he or she may feel a sense

of accomplishment like sports, dance, art or music. Structured recreational opportunities and after school programs also will help to reinforce appropriate social skills and play.

- **Remember you are your child's best and first teacher.** Have a learning coach attitude— be positive and inspiring. These early learning experiences set the tone for future learning experiences. If you want to build your child's enthusiasm toward learning and school, you need to model it and keep learning at home fun.

An expert in school readiness and the transition to school, Hart is the director of the Summer Treatment Program for Prekindergarteners—a comprehensive [school](#) readiness summer program for young children with or at-risk for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder—at FIU's Center for Children and Families. She is also the director of the Summer Reading Explorers program, a community-wide program designed to promote early literacy skills development in young children from at-risk communities.

Provided by Florida International University

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