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Countdown to Kindergarten Tip: What Skills Do Teachers Expect Kindergarteners to Have?

You might think it's most important for children to enter kindergarten knowing their ABCs, numbers, shapes, and colors so they can keep up with the curriculum. While teachers would love for children to come in with some letter and number recognition, there are equally important readiness skills that set the stage for your child's learning.

Enthusiasm Toward Learning – Does your child approach learning enthusiastically? Is she eager to explore and discover? Does she ask questions, take initiative, and persist when tasks are difficult? As you drive or walk along in the park, point out your child's surroundings – the different trees or the various birds at the feeder. Demonstrate how things work. The more kids notice, the more curious they'll become.

Solid Oral-Language Skills – One of the best predictors of later reading success is a well-developed oral vocabulary. Build language skills by taking your child to new places and giving him words and descriptions for what he is seeing. At the zoo, explain, "There's a tiger. See how he has stripes and looks different from the lion." When children are learning to read and they come to words that they don't know, they can make better guesses if that word is in their vocabulary.

The Ability to Listen – Kindergarten students must be able to concentrate on what the teacher is saying, listen carefully for directions, and tune in to the sounds in letters and words. Reading to your child can help develop attention skills necessary in a kindergarten classroom. When reading, ask kids to clap or stomp when they hear a rhyming word, or ask questions like, "Why do you think that happened?" and "What do you think will happen next?"

The Desire to Be Independent – Though it may be quicker for you to do things for your child, encourage her to develop self-help skills. Teachers expect children to: Get coats on and off and hang them up, follow simple two-step instructions such as "take off your boots and put on your sneakers," go to the bathroom and wash their hands, blow their nose and cover their mouth when they cough, fasten and unfasten simple buttons and snaps, and eat neatly and pour into a cup.

The Ability to Play Well with Others – Kindergarteners should be able to share, take turns, compromise, problem solve, and express their feelings in words. If you and your child are building with blocks and he reaches for one you're using, encourage him to ask, "May I have the block?" Then model sharing by saying "I'm glad to share my block with you."

Strong Fine-Motor Skills – Your child's hands must be strong enough to master coloring, cutting, pasting, and holding a pencil – fine-motor tasks that kids use every day in kindergarten. Kids can develop the small muscles in their palms and fingers by activities like drawing and cutting with scissors.

Basic Letter and Number Recognition – Kindergarten teachers hope incoming students can recognize most letters by sight, count to 10, identify numbers 1 to 5, and know some shapes and colors. Show kids how letters are all around us. Say, "that spells K-Mart. Let's spell it together." Point out objects that contain the letters in your child's name.

Source – www.scholastic.com

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S.C. First Steps to School Readiness is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Along with partners EdVenture Children's Museum and Voices for South Carolina's Children, First Steps designed the Countdown to Kindergarten program to leverage local resources to help prepare S.C.'s most at-risk children into kindergarten, to target early parent involvement and increase community awareness of the importance of school readiness. Nearly 1,200 children and their families across the state will participate in this year's Countdown program. Countdown teachers conduct a series of eight visits to each participating family's home to prepare the child for starting school and open the relationship with the child's family.