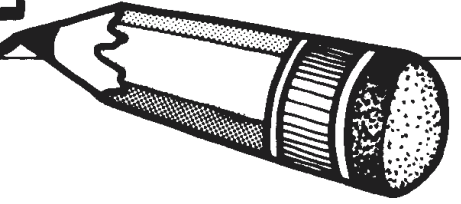


Parenting Pipeline



A newsletter for parents of kindergarten children
from the Iowa State University Extension



First Grade: Ready or Not?

Your child has nearly finished kindergarten and may be ready for first grade. This transition is a more significant shift than one between grades.

Elementary school will present new challenges. The day's activities will be more structured than they were in kindergarten yet there should still be time for spontaneous learning activities. Kindergarten has been a continuation of the learning that has been occurring for children every waking moment of their lives.

Is your child ready for first grade? Barbara Willer of the National Association for the Education of Young Children says, "School readiness is less a set of scores and child traits than a match between the school and the child."

Children are *always* changing in knowledge, skills, experiences and understanding. Readiness is not something they do or do not have. It is a process of growth and change.

Readiness addresses a child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development at a particular time. A child's level of readiness in August will be very different from what it is in December, for example. It's OK for children to be at different levels. A child's unique differences should be welcomed and accepted. A group of children will always consist of a variety of capabilities and readiness levels.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals has recommended standards for primary grades which are very similar to those outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The similar recommendations include:

- Schools should be ready for the child and not expect the child to be ready for the school. Early childhood programs must be based on the ways children learn, not on how adults prefer to teach.
- Since young children learn best through their senses by doing, learning should be the outcome of hands-on experience, especially play.
- Children should be assigned to classes as close to the research-based recommended class sizes as possible: ratios of 2 adults:20 children for 3- to 5-year-olds and 2 adults:24 children for 6- to 8-year-olds.
- Children should be assessed by observation, not tested for success or failure. Letter grades should not be used.
- Children will learn more quickly if they have actively experienced the process of learning — in other words, if they have been read to, have acted out what they have learned, have touched the objects described, have seen some of the places or people described, and so forth.

Think about the following questions and how your child is progressing. Remember, no child should be expected to accomplish all of these items perfectly before first grade.

Can your child:

- Be away from you all day without being upset?
- Pay attention to a short story when it is read and answer questions about it?
- Create things with paper, colors, scissors, markers and glue? (It is *not* important to stay in the lines!)
- Tie a knot, bow or scarf?
- Repeat simple messages?
- Remember instructions and carry out two or three tasks after being told once?
- Put a simple puzzle together?
- Draw a picture of a person which includes the head, body, arms and legs?
- Draw or copy shapes?
- Visit comfortably with people outside the family?
- Tell his/her phone number, address, birthday?
- Identify several colors?
- Try to write or copy letters and numbers?
- Admit he/she doesn't know or needs help?

Assessing Your Child

You know your child best. Your child's teacher, counselor, pediatrician or child psychologist knows about children and the school setting. Together, you can discuss and evaluate what will benefit your child.

If you are concerned about whether your child is ready for first grade, ask for additional information from the school counselor and classroom teacher. More serious concerns may be addressed by having your child evaluated. This is not a test your child will pass or fail. It is an assessment of your child's development. It simply gives you more information.

An evaluation will assess readiness skills and behavior such as language, independence, impulse control, interpersonal skills, experiential background, and physical and mental health. These items are important for finding success in school. Each child's progress should be assessed primarily through observation and recording at regular times, and reported to parents in written or oral comments.

Ask for extra support your child may need to develop skills. Some children may lag behind in kindergarten and then move ahead by second grade. Children need to be supported during each stage of their development and encouraged to grow.

Children progress at their own rates, and each child is unique. Parents and schools guide this process.

An evaluation done by school or private professionals will give you information that will help you support your child's individual needs.

Supporting Your Child

At this age there is a *very wide* range of social and academic skills as well as emotional maturity. Avoid comparing children. Susie may be ahead of most when entering kindergarten, may lag behind when entering first grade and may move ahead again when entering second grade.

The challenge for schools and parents is to provide experiences that will meet the needs of the children instead of waiting for children to meet the pre-determined standards of the curriculum. For education to have a positive, long-range impact on a child's life, parents and teachers must work as a team in the best interest of the child. A quality program recognizes that parents, schools and the child are equal parts, each having something to give and learn from the others.

Parents can best support their child by providing a rich environment beyond the classroom, by keeping in regular contact with teachers and counselors as to their child's progress, and by attending conferences and workshops that assist them in understanding and relating with their child and with the school.

Most important, parents can respect their child's unique characteristics and capabilities. Children need to feel accepted and valued for who they are. Avoid sibling or friend comparisons that judge your child. Allow your child to progress at his or her own rate, and consistently support the child's efforts.

Adapted for use in Iowa from Parenting Pipeline, North Dakota State University Extension Service, by Donna K. Donald, family life field specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

This newsletter is published for families with kindergarten children by Iowa State University Extension. For more information about parenting education, contact your local county extension office or access the Iowa State University Extension to Families website, www.extension.iastate.edu/families.

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