



A Military Child Education Coalition® Initiative

Tips for Kindergarten Parents

From: <https://www.schoolfamily.com/>

Becoming involved in your child's education pays off in many ways. Parent involvement strengthens schools and shows children that you value learning. Research shows that students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to earn higher grades, score better on standardized tests, and attend college. What's more, you'll benefit directly by taking an active role. You'll meet other parents and quickly learn the ins and outs of your child's school. Read on for some ways to become active and make a difference in your child's education.

Start now. Introduce yourself to your child's teacher. You don't have to wait until parent-teacher conferences to get to know your kindergarten's teacher. Sometime during the first week or so of school, find a moment to say a quick hello. Or send a handwritten note or a personal email. Ask the teacher whether there is anything she needs. Find out how the teacher prefers to be contacted. This will set a positive tone for the year.

Help out in the classroom. Most kindergarten teachers welcome help from enthusiastic parents. What you do in the classroom will depend on what the teacher needs. It may include preparing materials for lessons and art projects, reading to students, or making copies of worksheets. If you're unable to commit to a regular schedule, let your child's teacher know that you still would like to help out with special projects.

Become a room parent. Many kindergarten teachers assign one or two parents to plan class parties and other special activities and to coordinate communication between the teacher and the parents. Being a room parent is generally a yearlong assignment, so make sure you can commit to it. It's a great way to get to know the teacher!

Volunteer from home. If you can't make it into the classroom during the day, let the teacher know you'd like to help out in other ways. You could make phone calls to other parents in the evening, help prepare materials for lessons, and more. Bringing your volunteer ethic home shows your child that school is important. It will also help strengthen your connection with the teacher.

Be a special guest. Visit your child's classroom to share something special about yourself, such as your occupation, your cultural background, or an interesting hobby. Your child will be proud to let everyone know you're her parent!

Learn about your child's school. Read the school handbook to learn about school policies. Stay informed by reading school and parent-teacher group newsletters. If the school has a website, check it regularly for updates and information.

Reach out to other parents. Look for opportunities to get to know the parents of your child's classmates. Volunteer to chaperone field trips. Attend class parties and assemblies. Don't be shy about introducing yourself, and be sure to exchange phone numbers and email addresses. The other parents will be an invaluable support system during the first year of school and beyond.

Attend school events. Make it a point to go to assemblies, open houses, art shows, and other school wide events, even ones your child isn't directly involved with. School events are a great place to meet staff members and other parents, and going together will help your child feel more at home in his new school.

Talk with your child about school. When your child comes home from school, ask specific questions to draw her out. Instead of saying "How was your day?" ask "What was the best thing that happened today at school?" and "Tell me one new thing that you learned today in kindergarten."

Show him that school matters. Praise your child's efforts. Show him how wonderful his schoolwork is by posting artwork and school papers on the refrigerator for everyone to see. Communicate the idea, in both words and actions, that school is important.

Join the PTO or PTA. Your school parent group is a terrific way to learn about your child's school. You'll forge lasting connections with the parents you meet, and you'll have a role in making your child's school a fun and exciting place to learn.

For More Information: PARENTS@MILITARYCHILD.ORG





Twelve Tips for a Terrific Kindergarten Experience

*By Adam Eisenson**

Even if you've armed your child with love and support, and even if you've both been looking forward to this milestone for a long time, walking away from her on the first day of kindergarten is bound to be a heart-wrenching experience for each of you.

To ease this transition toward independence for my children and yours, I've spoken to parents, other teachers, school administrators, and pediatricians to compile these tips:

1. Wait Until Your Child Is Ready.

Kindergarten is the gateway year for children, the time when their feelings and future opinions of school begin to take form. Although most schools have specific age requirements and strict cutoff dates, not all kids are ready for kindergarten as soon as they're eligible.

Unless your child has the social, emotional, and academic maturity needed to flourish, waiting another year may put her at the top of her class for years to come. Be honest with yourself. If you have even the slightest doubt about your child's readiness, speak with a teacher or the principal at the school. They can help you make this extremely important decision.

2. Meet the Teacher.

You've checked babysitter's references, interrogated daycare providers, checked credentials at the nursery school, and spent sleepless nights hoping your "don't talk to strangers" lessons have taken hold. So don't put your child in the hands of a teacher you've never met

Many schools are open during the summer, and arrangements can be made to visit the school with your child before classes begin. Teachers are usually available the week before school starts, so I recommend you shoot for that. Although extremely busy getting ready for the new term, most teachers will happily take a moment to introduce themselves and to invite the family in to see the classroom.

Then over the course of the school year, make it a point to develop a relationship with your child's teacher. Attend your child's open house, and if at all possible, participate in class activities from time to time.

3. Stick to a Routine.

Kindergarteners benefit from consistent routines and structure. What seems mundane to adults is often comforting to children. Kids from homes with little or no structure are frequently flustered by it at school, where:

- School starts at the same time each day.
- Announcements are made at the same time each day.
- Children have lunch at the same time each day.

Most teachers even teach their core subjects at the same time each day. To help your child get the most out of his classroom experiences, set up these four routines:

- A regular bedtime.
- A time to do homework.
- A time to read.
- A regular wake-up schedule that leaves plenty of time to comfortably prepare for the day, without rush or stress.

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Obviously, there'll be times when the pattern will be broken (a late night out, playdates, a chaotic morning, etc.). But it'll be better for your child if those were the exceptions, not the rule.

4. Protect the "Big Sleep"

From the day your child was born, you've probably battled at bedtime. You've snuggled, bribed, and maybe even driven your car in circles...anything to get your child to sleep!

Most doctors agree that a kindergartener requires at least 10-12 hours of shut-eye a night. They also agree that it's better to have a long solid evening rest than a long afternoon nap followed by a six-hour evening sleep.

Even if you absolutely cannot get your child to sleep by 8 p.m., you can make sure that activity has ended and "resting" has begun. No one benefits from sleep deprivation: not you, not your child's teacher, and certainly not your child.

5. Serve Brain Food.

Good nutrition is vital to a good education. Children who don't absorb enough nutrients don't perform at their best. Ideally, you should feed your child a nutritious breakfast before school and pack her a healthful lunch. Also ideally, your child should eat what you pack. But school is not an ideal world.

Many students get breakfast, as well as lunch, at school. But if you think the school will make sure your child is eating properly, you're wrong. It's amazing how much food is wasted at school, and how much junk food is eaten! One day, in a school of about 650 students, a class weighed the wasted food and discovered that 114 pounds of food with vital nutrients and six gallons of milk had been tossed.

Eight hours is a long stretch for a growing child if he's fueled only by junk food and soda pop. If your child eats at school, join him one day for breakfast or lunch. You might be amazed by what you learn.

6. Respect the Importance of Homework

Homework is a tool that even kindergarten teachers use to reinforce that day's lesson, and also to teach good work habits, responsibility, accountability, and liability. You can help most by having a set time and a quiet place for your child to complete her work, and by being available to assist in case she's having difficulties with an assignment. Making sure the work is completed by your child and returned by the due date, will get her on the right track for life.

If your son tells you that he left his homework at school, suggest he call a friend...or let him face the consequences. When he's "too tired," and doesn't finish an assignment, it might be tempting to do the work yourself. **Don't!** Homework helps children learn to manage their time. Routinely completing their own assignments gives kids a sense of accomplishment.

Kindergarten, like all grades, has a set curriculum that teachers must follow. Ask for a copy of the curriculum, so you'll be able to keep track of how your child is doing with the subject matter. On the other hand ...

7. Remember that Harvard Is a Long Way Off.

Yes, school needs to be taken seriously. But we're talking about kindergarten here, folks, not law school! Pressure comes to all of us soon enough. Don't introduce it to your 5-year-old. Being a kid is a hard enough job already.

Children are intuitive and know when they've disappointed their parents. Not living up to a perceived expectation to be "the best and the brightest" can be a terrible blow to a child's feeling of self-worth. Don't pressure your child to do more than he can.

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Every child is different and learns differently. Keep giving your positive reinforcement when she tries her hardest. If you have any concerns about her progress, discuss them with the teacher.

8. Find a Comfortable Balance.

Ours is an overscheduled, frenzied society. Some children are so busy, the family minivan has become kitchen, desk, and changing room. Yet until they graduate, the number one job for students is school. Children who know that their parents will let their homework slide for soccer, ballet, gymnastics, Scouts, or Tai Kwan Do, don't take school as seriously as they should. Encourage your kindergartner to concentrate on school, first.

If that's going well, let him sign up for one scheduled afterschool activity, maybe two. That's more than enough for a 5-year-old. (As he matures, if his grades are good, you can let him take on more activities.) Leave time in the week for impromptu playdates, family activities, and just relaxing. School is hard work. Your child will benefit from some down time every day.

9. Work with the Teacher on Discipline.

By the time she starts kindergarten, your daughter should know she must be respectful to teachers and classmates. Still, occasional misbehavior is to be expected and anticipated. When it occurs, today's teachers have limited recourse. They can talk to the child, assign extra homework, keep her in during recess, send her to the office, or call home.

Teachers don't look forward to calling parents to say that little Joey hit someone or threw a toy. If you get such a call, don't immediately blame the messenger! Listen carefully, ask questions, and make sure you understand the issue. If appropriate, discipline your child to reinforce the teacher's authority. Even kindergarteners can understand that actions have consequences.

10. Avoid the "White Rabbit Syndrome".

Despite always checking his watch, the white rabbit in Alice in Wonderland was always late. And despite his furious rushing about, he never had time to get everything done, let alone sit down and relax. Today's parents are very busy. It's hard to find the time for all the things we need to do in a day, let alone the things we want to do. But, now that your child is starting school, and even though it's REALLY HARD, try to make time for each of your children, every day. Do homework, read, sing, play, or even watch TV (their shows, not yours) with them. As you wash their hair or peel potatoes, talk to them about school life, theirs and yours. While folding laundry, practice skills they've learned in school, like counting, colors, sorting, and so on. Chores might take a little longer, but they won't be dull.

11. Insulate Your Child from Your Problems.

Many children live with one parent, and whether we like it or not, families are very complicated these days. Whatever your situation, let your child and her education be the family priority.

12. And One to Grow on...

Your child needs your support, but so does her teacher! We're losing a lot of great teachers because they don't get the respect and support they deserve - NOT because of the low pay. There was never a lot of money in teaching!

The teacher and others who work at the school want to help your child grow and learn, but they can't do it without you. So get to know the people who are responsible for your child when she's at school. Let them know that you would appreciate learning about your daughter's progress, that you want to help your child have a great kindergarten year, and that you'll do whatever you can to help.



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Questions Parents May Want To Ask Schools

1. What is the attendance policy?
2. Who (and how) do I contact if my child is going to be absent?
3. How do I contact my child's teacher (e-mail, phone, text)?
4. Where can I get a copy of the school calendar?
5. What is the bell schedule?
6. Are there any extracurricular activities?
7. What is the grading policy?
8. Are there "exceptional student" programs available for my child?
9. Most schools have websites with lots of information, including the school handbook. If the school doesn't run a website, ask for the handbook, how to obtain newsletters and a schedule of events.

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Questions to Ask Your Child About School

From: <http://www.pbs.org>

It's always a good idea to set a habit of having a chat with your child about how their day went at school. Try to ask open ended questions so you can get them talking. Here are some sample questions you may want to consider to get the discussion started:

Ask kids about what interests them:

“What did you do that was fun today?”

“What did you like best today?”

“What books are you reading? Can you tell me about it/them?”

“How did the science experiment turn out?”

Ask about specific people and events in your child's life:

“What concept gave you the most difficulty on the math test?”

“What did Mr. Zeiner talk about today?”

“Who'd you sit next to on the bus?”

“Did Mrs. Davis call on you today?”

“How are you and Charlie doing?”

“How do you and your friends like the substitute teacher?”

Ask kids about what bugs them. Everybody likes to complain, so if your child is in a bad mood, ask what's wrong. You might find that within a few minutes, your child is telling you what she likes. You might ask:

“You seem out of sorts today. Tell me what upset you.”

“Did something happen in school today that made you angry?”

“Do you think there might be a better way to handle the problem next time?”

Make comments about schoolwork. You can look over your child's work or the teacher's weekly class note, and ask:

“Wow, what a cool picture of a squirrel. I like the bushy tail. What does he use it for?”

“Can you explain photosynthesis to me?”

“What is a whole number, anyway?”

“What did you learn about the Civil War today?”

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Kindergarten Readiness Checklist by Peggy Gisler, Ed.S and Marge Eberts, Ed.S

While there's no perfect formula that determines when children are truly ready for kindergarten, you can use this checklist to see how well your child is doing in acquiring the skills found on most kindergarten checklists. Check the skills your child has mastered. Then recheck every month to see what additional skills your child can accomplish easily. Young children change so fast -- if they can't do something this week, they may be able to do it a few weeks later.

- Listen to stories without interrupting
- Recognize rhyming sounds
- Pay attention for short periods of time to adult-directed tasks
- Understand actions have both causes and effects
- Show understanding of general times of day
- Cut with scissors
- Trace basic shapes
- Begin to share with others
- Start to follow rules
- Be able to recognize authority
- Manage bathroom needs
- Button shirts, pants, coats, and zip up zippers
- Begin to control oneself
- Separate from parents without being upset
- Speak understandably
- Talk in complete sentences of five to six words
- Look at pictures and then tell stories
- Identify rhyming words
- Identify the beginning sound of some words
- Identify some alphabet letters
- Recognize some common sight words like "stop"
- Sort similar objects by color, size, and shape
- Recognize groups of one, two, three, four, and five objects
- Count to ten
- Bounce a ball

If your child has acquired most of the skills on this checklist and will be at least four years old at the start of the summer before he or she starts kindergarten, he or she is probably ready for kindergarten. What teachers want to see on the first day of school are children who are healthy, mature, capable and eager to learn.

Read more on Family Education:

<http://school.familyeducation.com/kindergarten/school-readiness/38491.html#ixzz1WfSi88SK>

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Preparing My Child for School

Ready-for-School Checklist

The following checklist, although not exhaustive, can help to guide you as you prepare your child for school. It's best to look at the items on the list as goals toward which to aim. They should be accomplished, as much as possible, through everyday routines or by enjoyable activities that you've planned with your child. If your child lags behind in some areas, don't worry! Remember that children grow and develop at different rates.

Good Health and Physical Well-Being

My child:

- Eats a balanced diet
- Gets plenty of rest
- Receives regular medical and dental care
- Has had all the necessary immunizations
- Runs, jumps, plays outdoors and does other activities that help develop his large muscles and provide exercise
- Works puzzles, scribbles, colors, paints and does other activities that help develop her small muscles

Social and Emotional Preparation

My child:

- Is learning to explore and try new things
- Is learning to work well alone and to do many tasks for himself
- Has many opportunities to be with other children and is learning to cooperate with them
- Is curious and is motivated to learn
- Is learning to finish tasks
- Is learning to use self-control
- Can follow simple instructions
- Helps with family chores

Language and General Knowledge

My child:

- Has many opportunities to talk and listen
- Is read to every day
- Has access to books and other reading materials
- Is learning about print and books
- Has electronic media usage monitored by an adult
- Is encouraged to ask questions
- Is encouraged to solve problems
- Has opportunities to notice similarities and differences
- Is encouraged to sort and classify things
- Is learning to write her name and address
- Is learning to count and plays counting games
- Is learning to identify and name shapes and colors
- Has opportunities to draw, listen to and make music and to dance
- Has opportunities to get first-hand experiences to do things in the world-to see and touch objects, hear new sounds, smell and taste foods and watch things move

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Additional Resources

Videos from Kindergarten Readiness webinar:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coPxmsxsXCo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SLp7Gogoeg>

Links from Kindergarten Readiness webinar:

https://www.education.com/magazine/article/Kindergarten_math/

<https://bluestarfam.org/resources/family-life/blue-star-museums/>

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/travel/a31784720/best-virtual-tours/>

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/reading-language/reading-milestones/kindergartner-language-development-milestones/kindergartner-reading/>

http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/dc58b5_d326158a93dd4161921b86760266150a.pdf

<https://www.sleep.org/articles/how-much-sleep-children/>

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/>

Books referenced in Kindergarten Readiness webinar:

The Kissing Hand; The Berenstain Bears Go to School; First Day Jitters; Sam and Gram and the First Day of School; When you go to Kindergarten

Additional webinars relevant to this topic can be found at www.militarychild.org/webinars:

The Magic of the Family Meal

Parental Involvement

Parent Teacher Conferences

Time Management for Kids

Homework Motivation Strategies

For More Information: PARENTS@MILITARYCHILD.ORG

