

Five Ways to Prepare Five-Year-Olds (and Fours!) for Kindergarten

1 Protect your child's health — Be sure to schedule a physical examination and the necessary immunizations required for kindergarten. Set an early bedtime and serve well-balanced meals to provide the energy your child needs for a busy day at school.

2 Encourage independence (in small steps!) — Teach your child to get dressed, fasten buttons and zip, use the bathroom, wash hands, open containers (ex: milk or juice boxes/ketchup packets), and clear their place at the table. Children who can take care of some of their own needs will feel more comfortable at school. They'll also be ready to use their small muscles for drawing, writing, and cutting in kindergarten.

3 Make time to play — Children learn valuable social skills when they play with one another at home, in the neighborhood, at the park, and in pre-K or child care settings. They learn to communicate, share space and materials, and solve problems — three skills they'll need in kindergarten.

4 Read — Sharing books with children helps you bond as a family, and also teaches important language and literacy skills. Choose a few books about kindergarten (see book list inside) and encourage your child to share his or her feelings about going to a new school. Show your child that you feel positive about the move to kindergarten, and your child will probably feel confident too.

5 Visit the new school — There is no substitute for the real thing! Plan to visit your child's new school before the big day arrives. Talk about what you see there, and practice some kindergarten routines (ex: carrying a lunch tray, waiting at the bus stop or walking a new way to school).

