

# Is your child ready for Preschool?

## At a Glance:

- Preschool readiness is more than a checklist of skills.
- Independence and concentration help preschoolers learn.
- Being able to communicate is a key skill for preschoolers.

Preschool helps children develop critical social skills and improve their ability to follow instructions, which will be helpful in kindergarten and beyond.

Because very young children develop at such different rates, there isn't a checklist of must have skills kids need to start preschool. But there are some areas you can look at to see if your child is ready for group learning.

The following areas for a handy acronym: here's how to tell if your child has the “PIECES” of preschool readiness in place

## **P: Potty Trained**

Not all preschools require toilet training for children entering school, especially if they are 3 years old or younger or have special needs.

However, most programs for 4-year-olds and pre-K will expect kids to be out of diapers. But don't worry if your child still needs help washing up or has an accident, which is not uncommon and is supported at this level.

## **I: Independent**

Kids aged 3 and 4 aren't expected to do everything or solve problems independently, but a little independence is key.

By the time your child enters preschool, they could be expected to play games or do projects with other kids for a short period without needing constant redirection from an adult. It's also important that they can feed themselves, including opening food packaging and finding their way around the classroom once they know it well.

Many preschool programs have activity time during which students are asked to pick a Learning Center, such as a drawing or a building block area, and interact with it for a short period. Preschoolers are expected to be independent enough to select an activity center without the teacher's help.

## **E: Expressive:**

To be ready for preschool, kids need to be able to express themselves in a way that an unfamiliar adult can understand. That doesn't mean your child needs to speak in complete sentences; it's just that they have an appropriate way of getting their feelings and needs across, whether with words or gestures. If you have questions about your child's speaking skills, it's best to discuss them with your pediatrician.

Expressive kids can understand what other people are saying. Your child may be unable to follow directions with many steps, but understanding basic words and directional phrases like "sit down" and "follow me" is essential. Preschoolers are also expected to realize that other kids have feelings and needs.

## **C: Concentration**

Concentration looks very different in a preschooler than in older kids, and this ability varies from child to child.

Most preschool-ready kids can pay attention to a short picture book being read out loud. Activities are typically limited to 10 - 20 minutes in a preschool classroom, and preschoolers are expected to concentrate on an activity for this time.

Preschoolers should follow directions most of the time and focus on tasks without distraction. However, a little distraction is typical, especially if this is the first time your child has spent every day around a group of other kids.

## **E: Emotionally Ready**

Emotionally, there are a few things to consider when considering whether your child is ready for preschool. The first is the ability to say goodbye to a parent or caregiver without too much anxiety. It's typical to be a little nervous, but if your child cries and cannot redirect or self-soothe, they might not be ready for a full-day preschool program.

Many children will cry when you say goodbye on the first day or throughout the first week. There are ways you can help your child develop coping skills at home.

An emotionally ready child is more eager to attend school and wants to make friends. They might not have the skills to make friends yet, but wanting to make friends is a good start.

## **S: Stamina**

Preschool requires a lot of physical and mental energy. Kids who are not used to following a routine and being actively engaged may have a harder time adjusting to preschool.

Putting all the “PIECES” together can help determine whether your child is ready for preschool. If some aren’t in place, you can practice some at home.

If you’re still concerned that your child isn’t able to do many of these things or isn’t meeting their developmental milestones, it’s a good idea to speak with your doctor. Together, you can decide on the next steps, including a referral for an early intervention evaluation to look at their skills.

### **Key Takeaway**

- **Most preschoolers are still working on readiness skills when they start preschool.**

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