



## Should Your Child Start Kindergarten?

Many parents fail to realize the extremely important decision that they are about to make with regard to starting their 4, 5, or 6 year old in Kindergarten. It is possible to start a child to school if their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday falls prior to the deadline, which is usually set sometime in September. However, very few parents know that they can elect to not send their child to Kindergarten until the following year. There are two important facts to consider. The first is intelligence and the second is maturity. Maturity is the most important issue to consider when trying to reach a decision for your child. Frequently, most children are bright enough and able to start Kindergarten based on their knowledge and other factors that relate to intelligence. However, many children are immature and unable to sit still for a prolonged period of time in order to be taught, so that they may learn. It is this lack of maturity and excessive activity that leads to problems both with their peer group and with their teachers in the school setting. If the child is somewhat lacking in his ability with reading, writing or arithmetic, he may be tutored until he achieves age appropriate skills. However, we all well know maturity comes with both time and age and cannot be tutored or forced. Since it is rare for a child to be retained in a grade once they start, they move ahead on schedule --- ready or not!



The hazard of starting an immature 5 year old before they are ready compounds itself 10 years later when an immature 15 year old enters high school. There are numerous temptations with regard to sex, drugs, and alcohol in today's junior and senior high schools. It is preferable to have a mature student in this peer group who doesn't feel the need to prove themselves to others. Most parents would prefer to see their children as leaders and not followers. The pressures that all of us experience in our daily lives are something that none of us would wish on a very young child. If your child will be a young '5' among 5 year olds, then they will also be a young '5' among 6 year olds. A child's class becomes their peer group whether they are the youngest or oldest in the class.

Our training teaches us that girls manage this adjustment better than boys for both physical and emotional reasons. At the junior high and high school level, the girls mature before the boys. While it may not be so physically obvious at age 5, it certainly is a consideration that it is often overlooked. There is an additional factor with regard to the boys since many of them will find it important to be able to compete physically at a high school level. There are both boys and men playing high school sports. There are those who are shaving and those who have not seen their first hair. This difference in the onset of puberty is considerable, as any coach will tell you. This of course is in addition to the social disadvantage that boys experience in junior high and high school when the girls begin to physically mature sometimes one or two years before them.

As a parent, learn as much as possible about the school your child will attend. How many children will be assigned to each classroom? More than 25 will make it difficult for even an experienced teacher. Will your child attend all day or half days? A 5 year old and frequently a 6 year old cannot stay focused for an entire day and even a half day can be exhausting at this age.



It is reasonable to argue that a child who has spent several years in preschool may be bored by spending yet another year in a preschool setting and finally being placed in a Kindergarten that only repeats what they have already learned. The answer to this problem is that preschoolers should hopefully be placed in a setting where they are able to socialize and improve their communication skills without being expected to learn a great deal. We would much prefer the term 'pre-play' to 'preschool.'

There is no reason to apply pressure to a young five year old to succeed in a situation that they find overwhelming. First impressions are lasting impressions. Your child should enjoy their first experience in a Kindergarten setting and feel that they are doing well and improve their self-esteem along with their intellect. This will help them to learn to love learning!

An alternative for those parents who are still undecided could include starting a child in a private Kindergarten setting and from there they may make the decision at the end of the year to start the child in a regular public school Kindergarten or a first grade setting. The cost of a private education certainly adds to the financial burden of most families, but you can be assured that you will have no end to your problems if you start your child prematurely in Kindergarten. In helping you to reach this decision, you should certainly seek guidance from the preschool teachers who have known your child as well as from friends, neighbors, relatives, and certainly your own opinion as to whether or not you feel your child is ready to start school. If you feel that you have extenuating circumstances that would require specialized testing of your child, let your preschool or pediatrician know and they can help you set it up. Unfortunately, the testing that is often done in order to determine school readiness relies too heavily on the intelligence part of the child's readiness and not enough on maturity. If your child is a fidgety child and unable to sit still, follow directions, take assignments and do what the group is doing, then you should strongly consider waiting to start school.

In summary, if you should err on the side of starting your child to school too early or starting your child too late, starting late may give your child the slight advantage of increased maturity. There are few disadvantages to this approach. On the other hand, much of our time is spent with parents discussing the difficulties their children are having in the school setting with immature and overactive behavior.

Please don't make this decision in haste. **It may be the most important decision you will make in your child's life.** Let children be children while they are young – they have a lifetime to be grownup.



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