

How to Prepare Your Child with Disabilities for Kindergarten: Tips for Parents

Kindergarten is a big step in any child's life. For a child with disabilities, being ready for that step often requires some intentional preparation. Working with your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team helps you plan for your child's success and make their first school experience a good one.

Use the IEP team to plan for success

Planning for your child's entrance into kindergarten can begin as early as a year ahead of time. You can start the process by asking the IEP team to discuss what skills your child will need to succeed and what IEP goals will help your child prepare. The IEP team can suggest home-based activities you can use to help your child develop kindergarten skills.

If your child has a disability in the area of fine motor or communication skills, you will want to be sure to discuss with the IEP team what assistive technology your child might need in kindergarten. If your child is already using assistive technology, make sure that it is available to them in kindergarten.

If you disagree with the IEP team about your child's abilities, there are dispute resolution processes in place. Call the MSPTI for more information.

You can begin to consider specific school choices the spring before your child starts kindergarten. Your IEP team can tell you more about options in your district. Other districts assign children to a kindergarten in a specific school based on geographic location. If you look at a school in the spring, remember that the children you observe are at the end of their school year, and their skills will be more advanced than those of a child just beginning kindergarten.

Know the signs of kindergarten readiness

Kindergarten readiness isn't about being able to read, write, do math, and know science. Teachers say that kindergarten readiness is really about having basic communication skills and a good attitude. For many children entering kindergarten, the IEP contains goals and objectives that reflect these kindergarten readiness skills.

It is recommended that children entering kindergarten are able to:

- Communicate wants and needs
- Share and take turns with others
- Sit quietly and listen for up to 10 minutes
- Use some type of writing instrument

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- Rote count (1-2-3-4...) up to 20
- Count a set of objects (4 crayons) with good one to one correspondence
- Recognize the uppercase letters of the alphabet
- Recognize their written name

Your child doesn't need to have mastered every skill in order to be ready for kindergarten. In fact, it is the school's responsibility to be ready for your child. That can mean having all necessary equipment or assistive technology available, having the appropriate accommodations and modifications made to schedules or curriculum, and the needed supports and services in place.

Prepare your child for kindergarten

Once you've decided to enroll your child in kindergarten and are working on readiness skills, these steps can make your child's transition easier:

- Have your child visit the classroom and meet the teacher before the school year begins
- Take pictures of the school and classroom, and use the pictures to talk with your child about starting kindergarten
- If possible, allow your child time to play at the school playground
- Arrange summer play times with other students who will be in your child's classroom
- Read books with your child about kindergarten, such as:
 - *David Goes to School* by David Shannon
 - *Off to School, Baby Duck!* by Amy Hest
 - *Vera's First Day of School* by Vera Rosenberry
 - *Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come* by Nancy Carlson
 - *First Day Jitters* by Julie Danneberg