



PRESENTS

Building Blocks for Kindergarten



SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN FOR SUCCESS

Adapted for use in Orange County with permission from the Cradle to Career Initiative; a collective of the City of Santa Monica, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, Santa Monica College, and community partners.

PREPARING FOR KINDERGARTEN



Starting kindergarten is an exciting adventure for children and their families.

It's a new beginning for learning, making friends, building confidence, and gaining independence.

It's also totally normal for both children and parents to be nervous and excited about starting kindergarten as well.

Children may wonder about what it will be like to go to the “big kids” school.

- Will I make friends?
- Who will help me tie my shoes? Who will be my teacher?

Parents often have questions, too.

- What happens if my child is teased on the playground?
- What if my child doesn't understand the teacher?
- Will I like my child's teacher?

It's important that children are excited and proud to start school. We want them to walk through the classroom door on their first day confident and ready to take their place in the classroom.

This guide introduces tips and information for parents and caregivers to help your child get ready for their Kindergarten school experience.

First 5 Orange County is also grateful to FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, FIRST 5 San Mateo County, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation for their original development of these materials.

WHEN CAN MY CHILD START KINDERGARTEN?

Your child is eligible for kindergarten if he/she turns five (5) on or before September 1 of the school year.

It is the responsibility of schools to be ready to meet the individual needs of every age eligible child. However, some parents still wonder if their child is ready. To help you decide what is right for your child:

- Read this guide! Consider how your child is doing in the Building Blocks of Kindergarten Readiness found in this book.
- Talk to your family doctor or your child's current preschool teacher.
- Visit the kindergarten where your child will be attending - watch what the children are doing and imagine your child in that classroom.
- Talk to parents who have kindergartners or children in elementary school and trust your instincts.

There is not just one thing, nor a list of skills, that makes a child ready for school. In fact, there are many options and much research about what it means to be ready. It is important to understand your child's strengths and build a balance of skills to help your child succeed in kindergarten and for lifelong learning. Our community is dedicated to helping every family support their child's success in school.



TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN (TK)

is a universally available, free program for age-eligible four-year-old children (to be available at no-cost to all four-year-old children by the 2025-26 school year). TK is considered the first year of a two-year kindergarten program and provides a bridge between preschool and kindergarten giving children more time to develop socially and be ready developmentally to be successful in kindergarten. Parents may choose to enroll their children in a TK program or any other preschool or pre-kindergarten program for which the family is eligible including, but not limited to, the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, or local tuition (fee for service) based programs depending on what is available in your community. It is recommended that you contact your local school district to learn more about programs being offered at your local schools.

BUILDING BLOCKS TO KINDERGARTEN READINESS

What does it mean to be ready for kindergarten?

At age five, no two children are alike, but they all have lots of energy and they love to learn. Some focus on running and climbing at the playground. Others might have physical challenges that make running and climbing difficult. Some like to draw pictures, play with blocks, or sing songs. Others might find it hard to hold a pencil or listen to music.

Every child is unique in their own way. Most children will be strong in some skills, and struggle with others.



BUILDING BLOCKS OF SUCCESS

There are four key areas that lead to a child's success in kindergarten:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Self-Care, Physical Well-Being and Motor
- Skills Language Development
- Early Learning

Parents can be ready to support their children during this time by:

- Preparing for new routines
- Planning for their role in supporting their child, teacher and school
- Being positive and enthusiastic about starting kindergarten

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sharing and Caring!

When children have confidence in their own abilities to work and play in a group, they are more successful in school.

Learning social and emotional skills is one of the most important building blocks and critical to healthy development. These skills include helping your child understand how to express their needs and emotions, and being able to manage his or her behavior, even when frustrated. Your child should also be working on moving smoothly between activities - like playing outside then transitioning to activities that require focused attention. Teachers often call this self-regulation or executive function.

It is important to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities to help your child meet challenges. Helping your child learn how to stay focused on a task, delay what they want and slow down their impulses to consider choices for his or her actions is important for his or her success in school, work, and life.

Children are not born to self-regulate. It is a skill that is taught and modeled. It should not be confused with teaching your child obedience or compliance.

I'M READY WHEN...

- I talk to adults and ask for help.
- I take turns, share and help others.
- I try new activities and ask questions.
- I stay focused and pay attention for 10–15 minutes at a time.
- I follow one and two-step directions.
- I work and play both independently and in a group.
- I use imagination games to practice resolving conflicts or to prepare for new activities.
- I have coping strategies for when I am frustrated, or angry or sad.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Social and Emotional Development

- Set a good example for your child. They will imitate you. If you speak with an “inside voice,” your child learns to speak with one too.
- Help your child find ways to calm down when frustrated, such as deep breathing and relaxing his or her shoulders.
- Use positive statements to help your child know when he or she is on track.
- Set routines and be predictable. Children have an easier time cooperating when they know what to expect.
- Teach your child that all feelings are “okay,” but not all actions are okay. For example, it is okay to be upset, but not to hit.
- Help your child to feel proud of his or her efforts and accomplishments.
- Help your child talk about his or her feelings and to imagine what others are feeling.
- Help your child learn from mistakes. When things go wrong, help them think about what to do better next time.
- Make time for play. Play with your child and set aside time for your child to play with friends.
- Set limits for your child. Your child will feel safer and more self-confident

SELF CARE, PHYSICAL WELLBEING, AND MOTOR SKILLS

Fuel for School!

A good night's sleep will help your child grow and be ready to pay attention during the day. A five-year-old should get between 10-12 hours of sleep every night.

Your child is ready to learn in the classroom when he or she can take care of personal needs, like going to the bathroom, washing hands, and taking off and putting on a coat.

Now is also a great time to reinforce healthy eating habits. Your child needs to have energy and to be alert for school. Focus on healthy choices for breakfast, lunch, and snacks.

Make time for active play and exercise. Exercise will help your child cope with the new structure and expectations of school.



I'M READY WHEN...

- I am healthy and my immunizations are up to date.
- I have good oral health and I have visited the dentist.
- I can use crayons, pencils, and paint brushes.
- I can button, zip, and tie or velcro shoes.
- I can kick balls, hop on one foot and climb a ladder at the park.
- I can use the toilet, eat, wash hands, and blow my nose by myself.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Self Care, Physical Wellbeing and Motor Skills

- Involve your child in making healthy choices. Provide healthy meals and snacks in child size proportions including whole grains, protein, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
- Make time for your child to play 30–60 minutes every day. Go outside, walk a straight line, climb on a jungle gym, toss a ball.
- Set a consistent schedule that includes early bedtime.
- Turn off the TV, computer, iPad, smart phone and talk with your child.
- Visit your child's doctor and dentist at least once a year.

California requires health check-ups

Before you can register your child for school you will need to show that your child has had a health examination for school entry:

- Recent dental check-up.
- Recent health check-up.
- Required immunizations include Polio, DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus), MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella), Hepatitis B and Chicken Pox.



LIMITING MEDIA AND SCREEN TIME

Your child's best learning experience is from play and interactions that take place in the real world with parents, caregivers, and friends.

But we also live in a world of technology. Young children grow up with screens, from TVs to cell phones, and they see parents and family members using electronics, so they are naturally drawn to them.

There is clear evidence that too much screen time is detrimental to children's learning. Background TV and media can interfere with children developing good sleep habits. Spending too much time in front of the television is linked to obesity in children.

If you choose to let your child watch TV and/or play with electronic devices, limit the screen time to 1-2 hours or less daily. Research shows that when parents make watching TV or using electronic devices an interactive, shared experience, it can be a tool for learning and the potential negative effects can be reduced.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Limiting Media & Screen Time

- Be a role model for your child. Put down the cellphone or close the computer and engage in conversations over meals or storytelling at bedtimes. Children learn from what they see.
- Don't worry if your child says, "I'm bored!" For children, being bored often leads to creativity. It is hard and may take a while, but they will find ways to entertain themselves.
- Set limits on screen time to be sure that your child has had plenty of time exploring the real world with family and friends.
- Avoid having the TV on in the background. Turn the TV off when no one is watching, let your child see you turn off the TV.
- Participate and make TV or computer use interactive, talking with your child about what he or she is seeing.
- Avoid using screens as part of your child's bedtime routine.
- Be sure that the program or game you select is designed to promote learning appropriate to your child's age. It should engage your child's mind and body.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Use your Words!

Language skills are thinking skills.

The more children hear words and practice using them, the better they will be at learning in school.

In kindergarten, teachers will use words to describe things, to think about math (e.g., bigger, smaller, add together, subtract from) and to learn about ideas like telling time and following rules in the classroom.

Family conversations during dinner, telling stories about your day, playing imagination games with friends, and reading books are all great ways to build language skills.



I'M READY WHEN...

- I hear and understand the meaning of words, stories, and songs.
- I use words to talk about thoughts, wants and needs.
- I speak clearly enough so that other people understand.
- I use complete sentences and connect ideas together to make longer sentences.
- I can say or sing nursery rhymes and familiar songs.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Language Development

- Talk to your child as often as possible. Use the time during daily activities to engage your child in conversation. For example, talk about the textures of the clothes in the laundry or the colors of the vegetables at the grocery store.
- Get a library card and visit the library weekly so you will have lots of books to choose from. While reading, help your child make connections between the story and pictures.
- Make reading part of the daily routine. Sing, play and find 10–15 minutes every day to sit down, read and talk about a book.
- Be a language role model for your child. Talk with your child about many different ideas so they learn new words.
- Ask your child questions that make them describe things, events, or feelings.
- Play listening games. Hide a small object and then give your child directions on how to find it.
- Play storytelling games with your child and encourage your child to tell you stories.
- Listen carefully when your child is talking. Ask questions and show you care about what he/ she is saying.
- Try to speak clearly so your child can hear how the words are meant

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The ability to speak more than one language will help your child throughout life. As your child learns more English, encourage their growth in your home language as well.

Home language helps children to value the connection to their culture, which then contributes to a strong sense of identity and self-esteem. Positive self-esteem and a strong sense of identity help children have more positive learning experiences in school and throughout life.

Use the parent tips from the Language Building Blocks on page 14 to help your child build skills in the language you use at home. In any language, more words are better. Children will learn new languages quickly especially if they already have strong speaking and listening skills in his or her home language.



Find a language buddy/Be a language buddy

- Try to find your child a “buddy” who speaks your home language and English – this may be an older child or a friend. It can be especially helpful if your child can learn some of the English words used in common playground games, such as jumping rope or playing tag.
- If your child is a strong English speaker, encourage him or her to be a Language Buddy for a child who is just learning.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Building Bridges for Dual Language Learners

- Learning a new language in kindergarten can be fun but it can also be tiring. Allow your child time each day to relax, and to think and talk in your home language.
- Find out what your child will be doing in the classroom. If they are going to be talking about animals, you can read stories, or talk about animals at home in your language.
- Don't be surprised if your child mixes and matches words from the two languages. It is part of the learning process.
- Speak frequently in your home language. Children learn by hearing both languages.
- Encourage your child to feel proud of your home language and culture. Chances are there will be other children in their class who are also learning English as a second language.

EARLY LEARNING

ABCs and 123s!

Kindergarten is a year of much growth and development.

In preschool, your child is learning every day through play and a variety of interesting activities. You may be curious about what early learning looks like in kindergarten.

During the kindergarten school year, children will be well on their way to reading and starting to write their own sentences. Kindergarten teachers understand each child has their own strengths. By providing multiple learning activities, all children learn to read, write, add, and subtract by end of the school year.

You can help your child be ready to become a student by playing games. It is easy and fun to use games to learn about letters, numbers, colors, shapes, and solving problems.



I'M READY WHEN...

- I know the letters of the alphabet and can write my first name.
- I count 10 objects correctly (e.g., putting 10 blocks in the basket.)
- I know rhyming words - Pat, hat, cat, bat.
- I know how to use a book - Where to start, which way to turn pages.
- I know colors and shapes (e.g., Red, yellow, blue... a circle, square, triangle.)



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Early Learning

- Children learn through play. Look for ways to learn while playing games together.
- Point out letters and numbers in everyday places like cereal boxes, store signs and books.
- Look for shapes. The windows are rectangles, tracing a penny makes a circle.
- Help your child learn how to sort, match, and compare. You can talk about colors, textures, and sizes.
- Sing songs and play rhyming games. Nursery rhymes are a valuable way to explore math skills, learn new vocabulary and improve memorization.
- Teach your child to count at home and when shopping. How many places at the table? How many steps to the bedroom? Find five red apples, six yellow onions.
- Count the items in the shopping cart. Ask: Can we go to the checkout for less than eight items, or do we have more than that?
- Offer your child lots of encouragement. Children who are self-confident learn to read and write more easily.
- Keep pencils, crayons, and paper where children can get to them easily.

BUILDING BLOCKS – SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Remember that helping your child prepare for school is just the beginning of the adventure! Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. You play a key role in the success of your child at school.

Education is a partnership between parents, teachers, and the child. There are many ways you can help your child.



TIPS FOR PARENTS AT HOME

- Ask your child questions about his or her day that will encourage more than a yes or no answer. What did you talk about during circle time today? Who did you play with at recess? What was the most fun thing that happened today?
- Structure family routines to support homework. Talk to your child's teacher about homework assignments if your child spends more than 10–15 minutes a day completing the work, or if it is causing a lot of stress and frustration.
- Read aloud with your child each day.
- Read notes from teachers, complete all paperwork required of you and return promptly to the school.
- Enforce the rules of the classroom and school. If there is a rule you don't understand, ask the teacher about it.
- Don't forget the important fuel for school: healthy food, early bedtimes, and plenty of playtime.

TIPS FOR PARENTS AT SCHOOL

- Introduce yourself to your child's teacher and check in often. Ask the teacher how your child is doing and how you can help.
- If your child has special needs or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), request a meeting to address the new setting. Sharing what you know about your child with the school and teacher will get the new school year off to a terrific start.



TIPS FOR PARENTS AT SCHOOL (continued)

- Talk to your child's teacher about ways you can share your home culture at school.
- Get to know the other children in your child's class and their parents.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences. The school can provide you with an interpreter if you prefer to speak in your home language.



TIPS FOR YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY AT SCHOOL

- Label inside your child's backpack with your contact information and emergency information.
- For his or her safety, make sure your child knows the following basic information: First and last name.
- Full names of parents.
- Who will be picking him or her up after school.
- Whether he or she has any food allergies and what food restrictions are required.
- To walk away and find an adult he or she knows if approached by strangers.
- How to find the classroom, bathroom, and the school office.



IS MY CHILD READY?

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone.

Children develop at different rates. A delay in any kindergarten readiness skill doesn't mean your child is not ready for kindergarten. These kindergarten readiness skills are a benchmark for helping your child be better prepared for a successful school beginning.

- Make a list of things your child is best at, then make a list of the areas where you think your child needs to improve.
- If your child attends preschool, speak with your child's teacher.
- There may be simple things that you can work on at home to help.
- Ask for suggestions.

In addition, trust your instincts.

- Parents are usually the first to suspect that a child is struggling. If you feel like your child's development is very different from other children the same age, discuss your list of concerns with your child's doctor.
- You can also contact your local school district and request a developmental assessment of your child any time after his or her third birthday.



TALK TO YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FOLLOWING*

- Temper tantrums that seem very frequent, intense and/or long.
- Difficulty remembering sequences such as numbers, alphabet or days of the week.
- Difficulty with normal changes in routine or when moving from play time to quiet time.
- Difficulty pronouncing simple words. People outside your family have difficulty understanding your child.
- Acting withdrawn or lacks interest in engaging with peers or day-to-day activities.
- Difficulty holding a crayon or pencil or copying basic shapes.
- Difficulty staying focused when playing with peers, games or other activities.
- Difficulty with body coordination such as jumping or balancing on one foot.
- Trouble hearing, responding to others voices or understanding when others are talking.
- A very small vocabulary.
- Overly aggressive behavior.

** Remember, children develop at different rates and many children have some of these behaviors. Watch to see if your worries about your child's behavior happen all the time or if there are specific situations where they are more likely to occur. If you are concerned about your child's development, discuss it with your doctor.*

COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN

September

- Begin talking with your child about going to kindergarten.
 - Discuss school readiness goals with your child's preschool teacher.
 - Start to practice new skills at home through play and conversation.
-

October - January

- Talk about your child's development and any screening results with your preschool child's teacher or doctor.
 - Find out about local public and private elementary schools. Some public and many private schools offer tours in the fall/winter and require applications.
-

January - February

- Find out about and attend kindergarten information events. Kindergarten and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Round-up events occur in every school district.
-

March - June

- Visit the local library often and share books about going to kindergarten with your child.
 - Start to support your child's independence in self-care skills (going to the bathroom, washing hands, taking off and putting on coats, etc.).
 - Register for school! Check with your child's home school for registration information.
 - Take your child to the doctor and dentist.
-

June - August

- Check out free events at the local library, like story time. Sign up for the summer reading program.
 - Talk to your child about what a typical school day will look like at school.
 - Set a bedtime routine.
 - Practice routines that help get your child to school on time such as going to bed early and getting up early.
-

August - September

WELCOME TO KINDERGARTEN!

THINGS EVERY CHILD IN OUR COMMUNITY SHOULD EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO KINDERGARTEN

1. First 5 Orange County Kid Builders

Kid Builders is an easy way to help your child grow in six areas: their mind, words, body, relationships, safety and health. All are important for your child to be healthy and read to succeed in school and in life! Learning and growing is fun with activities and information from Kid Builders.

If you are looking for easy ways to help your child develop their skills, try out a Kid Builder activity at first5oc.org/kid-builders.

2. Visit a local Learning Link

Help your child learn and grow through play at a Learning Link! Learning Link is a drop-in program for children – infants to 5 years old – and their parent or caregiver. Learning Links are a great place for children to meet other children, and for caregivers to learn new ways to play with their child with the help of a qualified preschool teacher.

For more information about a Learning Link near you, including addresses and hours, click on the map at first5oc.org/resources/learning-link.

3. Get a Library Card

Visit your neighborhood public library – attend the group reading times and puppet shows, but more importantly, check out books to read together!

4. Pack a picnic and play at a local park

Bring along containers of different sizes and shapes to build sand shapes. Let your imagination take over!

5. Tour a local Museum

Ask open-ended questions:

What do you see? What does this remind you of? What story do you think the painting is telling? How do these colors (drawings, sculpture, dolls etc.) make you feel?



Orange County's Early Development Index

The Early Development Index measures how our youngest children are developing in five key areas:

- physical health
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive development
- communications skills and general knowledge

First 5 Orange County partners with the county's 25 school districts to gather the EDI data, and with the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities families to analyze it. Our goal is to better understand how our communities are supporting children in getting them ready for school and life. The EDI data is helping policy makers, community-based organizations, educators, school districts, and child advocates to highlight the success of programs and policies in place, uncover pockets of need, and collaborate to ensure necessary support reaches all children.

The EDI data is also being used as a springboard to engage families in conversations about their desired outcomes for their children and communities.

To learn more visit first5oc.org/resources/edi/