

Kindergarten

Kindergarten will be the initial step in your kid's formal school career, so it's important for him to have a positive and encouraging experience, according to Rosanne Tobey, LPC, New Jersey-based therapist who specializes in individual, couples, and family therapy. Parents often wonder whether to enroll their children in kindergarten at age four or at age five. Tobey says that moms should not rush a child into kindergarten before he is ready, because it could undermine his confidence. Talk to your pediatrician if you are unsure when to enroll your child.

Top 4 Kindergarten Teacher Types to Be Wary Of, Courtesy of a Teacher's Kid/Teacher

1. **Perpetual Peter Pan:** Between "Sesame Street" and Baby Einstein, many kindergarteners come into the classroom already knowing their ABCs, so the Peter Pan teacher spends their time playing with your kids instead of educating them. While a certain amount of organized play is important to develop your youngster's socialization skills, all-day play does nothing to prepare your new student for the structured days of first grade.
2. **Queen Bee:** Ever wonder what happened to those vapid, self-centered, clique-obsessed prom queens after high school? If they couldn't let go of being the most popular girl in school, they became kindergarten teachers. The unconditional adoration from a classroom full of bright, shining faces is a powerful aphrodisiac. Unfortunately, these chicks run their classrooms like they ran their cliques. They play favorites, mock misfits, and are more focused on fulfilling their own self-esteem than nurturing your child.
3. **Disinterested Delegator:** Most schools are desperate for volunteers, but some have such fantastic parental involvement, certain kindergarten teachers find it very easy to take advantage. While they sit at their desks freeing up their weekend by lesson-planning during the school day, or worse, wasting time playing on the Internet when they should be teaching, volunteers are left alone to fumble through on their own -- and the classroom becomes nothing more than a glorified babysitting service.
4. **Military Mary Poppins:** Just because a student studies to become a middle-grade math teacher doesn't mean a position teaching that subject is available when the time comes, which results in educators stuck in classrooms they're unprepared for. Nowhere is this more evident than in the kindergarten classrooms of teachers untrained in Early Childhood Education. Frustrated with dozens of rug rats unfamiliar with school routines, these teachers opt for a hyper-disciplined, militant management style that often terrifies instead of teaches. Beware these über-strict kindergarten teachers, as they can destroy your child's first educational experience and scar him or her for life.

Schools often screen children before letting them into kindergarten programs. Tobey advises listening to the screeners' input about your child's readiness and then deciding with your gut. There is a big developmental difference between children at the age of four and children at the age of five. If you feel your child isn't ready, Tobey suggests trying a 4+ class first to help your child develop the skills to succeed in kindergarten.

What Moms Can Do for Children Starting Kindergarten

Parenting expert and psychotherapist Jill Spivack weighs in on how parents can help their children have a successful kindergarten start:

It's normal for children to have a bit of apprehension before starting a new school. Although this experience offers opportunities for enrichment, friendship, and competence, children don't always look at the beginning of a new school as positive initially.

Separation can be anxiety-provoking, and having to meet new teachers and children can feel terrifying at first.

Here are Jill's tips to help a child get adjusted to kindergarten:

1. Help your child get to know the school. If possible, visit the school before the beginning of kindergarten to meet the teacher and get oriented to the new surroundings.
2. Try to make a few playdates with other children who will be in your child's kindergarten classroom if possible. This will help your child recognize a few faces on his first days there.
3. Find out how separation is handled at your child's new school. Ask about whether you'll be able to stay for a bit when you drop your child off. If not, prepare your child for a fast transition a day or two in advance.
4. Make a book about the new school: You can use stick figures to illustrate a little story about your child's new school. If you know the name of his teacher, you can include that, as well as a short story about how he will start school and what the first day might look like.

Be sure to empathize with his potential concern about going to a new place, but be reassuring that once he spends a couple of days with his new teacher and friends, he'll start to feel more comfortable.

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