



Welcome Words for your 4^{1/2}- 5 Year Old

SCHOOL READINESS

Though schools use a child's chronological age for admission to kindergarten, teachers know it's developmental age that really matters. Some studies suggest that the child who is fully 5 before school begins in August— 5 1/2 for a boy—is most likely to be ready for the challenges of kindergarten.

Even if your child will turn 5 well before Aug. 31—the cut-off for kindergarten—ask his preschool teacher or childcare provider to help you assess his developmental readiness. Once you're convinced that kindergarten is right for your child, here are some suggestions to help ease his transition:

- Visit before opening day. Show him his classroom, the bathrooms, cafeteria, playground, gym and any other parts of the building he'll use.
- Attend the open house so your child can meet his teachers. If you can, take a picture of him with his teachers that he can take home and keep in his room.
- Unless the teacher objects, let him take a favorite possession with him on the first day.
- If he'll ride the bus, some parents suggest driving him the first morning but letting him take the bus home.
- Find out ahead of time from the teacher what is expected of parents on the first day. Some schools encourage parents to spend time in the classroom; others prefer that the teacher meet students at the door of the building.

Be positive about school, but don't go overboard. This time is often a tougher transition for parents than for children. Most parents feel a mixture of pride, relief, excitement and sadness as they watch their child enter school. This is perfectly normal.

Many children experience some rough moments as they adjust to kindergarten. They may include:

- Crying and difficulty separating from parents.
- Not wanting to go to school.
- Wild running, temper tantrums and over-fatigue at home.

If these problems persist for more than two weeks, your child may not be developmentally ready for kindergarten. Talk with his teacher and/or his doctor for suggestions about how to help him adjust.



Here and Now at Five

As he approaches his fifth birthday, your child is moving into a period of relative calm and contentment. After the out-of-bounds, try-anything-anywhere behavior of 4 comes an age of pulling in: your child seems to quietly enjoy his 5-year-old maturity.

Most likely he will feel on good terms with the world, especially if he's familiar with his surroundings. Knowing his neighborhood, where he plays, where he shops with you, and where he goes to childcare or preschool adds to his confidence.

Because you are at the center of his universe, he is happy to spend time at home with you, maybe even seeming to become a homebody. Often, playing house is a favorite activity.

He loves to hear about what he used to do "when he was a baby" and may enjoy talking baby-talk with a new sibling. But overall he probably seems serious and thoughtful. Though this isn't usually a fearful age, your child may be afraid of the elements -- thunder, hard rain and the dark, and may be woken during the night by scary dreams, usually about wild animals or strangers.

Your 5 year old's sense of time is NOW, and he may be very interested in calendars and clocks. He's also focused on HERE -- an activity may hold his attention for a surprisingly long time. What a difference from the wild, out-of-bounds child he was just a year ago!



Setting Limits: Less is More

When it comes to setting limits for preschoolers, choose your words carefully. In general, the fewer words the better. Your child is older and more verbal, but he still needs firm and consistent *action* when he tests limits. Remember to:

- Make eye contact.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Eliminate unnecessary questions, such as "Aren't you ready for a bed now?" Instead, tell him, "Now it's time to brush your teeth and read a story."
- Use a tone of voice that is kind but firm. Rather than "Maybe you should put your toys away," say, "In five minutes, the timer will go off. You will then need to clean up before your bath."
- Substitute a behavior that's allowed for one that's not. "You can't cut the plant, but you can cut some pictures out of this catalog."
- Be clear about the consequences of misbehavior, then follow through promptly: "Hitting is not allowed, it hurts people. If you hit, you will go to timeout." Give brief reasons for rules when possible, don't assume he knows why things are or are not allowed.



Remember that timeout can help your child get back in control. A four-minute timeout in his own room, where he has a variety of toys or books, can help him settle down and refocus his energy. And don't forget, whatever your child's age, to catch his good behavior. Describe what he's doing right -- "I see how you've picked up your crayons and put them away. Thanks." -- and you'll be amazed at the results!

What About After School?

With the relief of getting your child successfully off to school, it's easy to underestimate the challenges of finding after-school care, and care for teacher workdays and holidays.

There are a number of possibilities: an after-school program at your child's elementary school; a program at a recreation department, the Y, a church, or a child care center; or you might choose a baby sitter who comes to your home, or the homelike setting of a family child-care provider.

As you consider programs, keep in mind that this is a long day for a 5-year-old. Try to find an after-school program that offers:

- A specific, nurturing counselor who will be interested in hearing about your child's day.
- Consistent routines to follow. A snack and a chance to settle in with children the same age is important.
- The chance for free-play outdoors.
- Materials similar to those in a preschool or kindergarten class -- blocks, dolls, puppets, art materials, books, puzzles, and Legos.
- A break from the structure of the school day. Your child has had academic activities all day, but you don't want a baby-sitting service where kids are bored.
- Look for the same features when choosing care for holidays and school breaks, whether the program is in a child-care provider's home or at a camp.

For a list of programs and providers, call Child Care Services Association at 403-6950 or visit www.childcareservices.org.

Bedwetting

Among preschoolers, nighttime dryness often lags behind daytime toileting control. Bedwetting two or three times a week is not unusual among 4 1/2 year olds, and by age 5 has often completely stopped.

The cause may be a small bladder, or that your child's body, in some other way, is not mature enough for nighttime control. Still, bed-wetting can be frustrating for both of you. Until after your child's fifth birthday:

- Don't limit how much he drinks or wake him up to use the bathroom during the night. This probably won't be much help.
- Do let him know that bedwetting isn't his fault. He isn't doing this on purpose. Simply clean up after an accident, and head back to sleep.
- Tell him that as he gets older the problem will probably go away. Remind him that this happens to other children his age.
- Give gentle reminders to use the toilet before bedtime and when he wakes up.
- If there's a family history of bedwetting, let him know that as well. This may help him (and you) relax.
- Use a waterproof sheet or pad to protect his mattress and let him wear training pants to bed.
- If your child has stayed dry through the night for as long as six months, then begins wetting the bed, there may be a physical or emotional problem. Contact his doctor if he's having daytime accidents as well, dribbles urine much of the time, or complains of burning or other pain while urinating.

When bed wetting more than three times a week continues past age 5, which is more common in boys than girls, it is called nighttime enuresis. Continue to offer sympathy and talk with your child's doctor about ways to help him gain better control.