

Preparing your Child with Disabilities for Kindergarten

PREPARING YOUR CHILD WITH DISABILITIES FOR KINDERGARTEN

Preparation is important for all children who are going to kindergarten. Preparing for your child with disabilities requires some additional thought and consideration.

Preparation begins with the IEP (Individualized Education Program)

Many children with disabilities will have received services from the public school system before kindergarten. The public school system may have provided services in a regular early childhood program, special education early childhood program, the child's home, or in a private setting. If so, your child already has an IEP and has been working on goals to prepare him/her for kindergarten. As your child gets ready to enter kindergarten, you may want to request an IEP meeting to discuss your child's needs prior to the beginning of the kindergarten school year.

Other children with disabilities may not be involved with the public school system until they are ready to enter kindergarten. If this is true of your child with a disability, or you suspect your child will be identified as having a disability when s/he are in kindergarten, you should call your school and request an evaluation for your child. This will help ensure that your child will be able to receive appropriate services when kindergarten begins.

How do I know if my child is ready?

Children must be five years old on or before *September 1* to start kindergarten in Georgia.

Many children entering kindergarten are not able to read, write or do math. Kindergarten teachers will tell you that it is more important that children be able to follow directions, share and know how to take turns, pay attention and get along with others. These skills and a good attitude will help make it easier for a child to learn in a kindergarten class.

Many children with disabilities will have some of these skills. Others may still be developing them. You can use the following list to help identify some of your child's strengths and the areas in which s/he may need extra help.

- 1) Can my child listen to and follow instructions?
- 2) Is s/he able to put on his coat and go to the bathroom by himself?
- 3) Can s/he recite the alphabet and count to 20?
- 4) Can s/he hold a pencil? Cut with scissors?
- 5) Does s/he show an interest in books?
- 6) Is s/he receptive to learning new things?
- 7) Does s/he share and know how to take turns?

It's okay if you can't answer "yes" to all of these questions. Your child will have opportunities to learn these and many other skills throughout his/her time in kindergarten.

Another tool you can use to look at your child's growth and development before s/he starts kindergarten is the **Georgia Pre-K Content Standards**. These standards were developed to guide instruction in all Pre-K (4 year old) classrooms, and they are aligned with Georgia's Performance Standards for grades K - 12. The standards cover seven areas: Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Creative Expression, Social and Emotional Development, and Physical Development. To read these standards, see:

http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/Content_Standards.pdf

Before your child starts kindergarten:

Share information with your child's new teacher about:

- What s/he likes and dislikes, such as listening to stories, drawing and coloring, playing alone or with other children
- What your child does well and what things are harder for your child
- Your child's early learning experiences, including whether or not s/he was enrolled in a preschool or other pre-

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- K program and how your child learns best
- Special supports or services that your child previously received.

What should I do to help my child adjust to kindergarten?

- Visit the new school and spend time with the teacher.
- Explore the classroom, see the cafeteria, and visit the playground.
- Talk about the bus ride or other transportation to and from school. If your child will ride the bus, practice walking to the bus stop.
- Use pictures and/or stories to familiarize your child with the new classroom, school, and teacher.
- Check out children's books or videos from your local library about starting kindergarten.
- Reassure your child. Let your child know that you care about his/her feelings, by saying such things as, "It's okay to feel sad, angry, scared, excited, etc."
- Let your child make choices about school clothes, food, and school supplies. This can help him/ her feel more confident and in control. This also increases his/ her independence skills.

Once your child begins kindergarten:

- Your child may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially, but teachers should be trained to help with adjustment.
- If your child cries at drop off, remain calm and positive. Do not linger but rather reassure your child that s/he will be okay and that you will be back soon.
- Share information about how you think your child is adjusting to school. Ask the teacher to do the same through email or another form of communication.
- Develop a relationship with your child's teacher and other students by volunteering in the classroom.
- Check your child's backpack daily for notes and fliers. These include important information and communication from the school.
- Schedule a follow-up IEP meeting half-way thru the school year, or sooner if needed, to evaluate how well the plan is working.

Where to go for more information:

Parent to Parent of Georgia
770 451-5484 or 800-229-2038
www.p2pga.org

Georgia Department of Education, Division for Special Education Services and Supports
404 656-3963 or 800-311-3627 and ask to be transferred to Special Education
http://www.gadoe.org/ci_exceptional.aspx

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
Pre-K Content Standards
http://www.dec.al.gov/documents/attachments/Content_Standards.pdf

Georgia Department of Education
Performance Standards
https://www.georgiastandards.org/standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/GPS_by_Grade_Level_K-8.aspx

Additional resources: Contact the **Special Education Director** for your school system.