Getting School Ready in Iowa

"I want to be ready for kindergarten. How can the kindergarten be ready for me?"

Early Childhood Iowa

Growing our Youngest Iowans

A guide for families and early care, health, and education providers caring for children who will be attending kindergarten in Iowa

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If children could tell us, here's what they might say:

"I need adults to work together to help me get kindergarten ready."

How are you already helping? Read on to see.

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Getting School Ready in Iowa

- What do children need to be ready for kindergarten?
- What can families, early care, health, and education providers, communities, and anyone who touches a child's life do to prepare children for kindergarten?
- What can schools do to get ready for children?

Children begin to learn as soon as they are born, and they keep learning every day. Although children develop at different rates, every part of development is important and contributes to learning. All areas of development are connected and influence children's success in school and life.

Children benefit when their families are involved in their learning and development. Learning is strengthened when families, early care and education providers, schools, and other community partners work together for the well being of children.

Helpful hints are provided in this guide to help you prepare a child to be a confident and successful learner. This document provides evidenced-based information and is aligned to the Iowa Early Learning Standards.

Social and Emotional Development

Children entering kindergarten should be ready to take care of themselves and work independently.

Look for me to:

- Hang my coat on a hook
- Put on and take off shoes
- Handle toileting needs
- Pick up toys and put them in appropriate places
- Follow a daily routine

Children entering kindergarten should be ready to make friends, solve problems with others, and show empathy.

Look for me to:

- Join one or more children in play
- Separate from caregiver and adjust to new settings
- Interact with familiar adults
- Begin to recognize and respond to others emotions
- Use words and phrases to state feelings, needs, and opinions
- Take turns easily and with minimal help
- Show interest in others
- Approach others positively

Children entering kindergarten should have experiences through play to become confident learners.

Look for me to:

- Be flexible and imaginative in play
- Play for a period of time
- Stay focused on a task when faced with a challenge
- Try to figure things out
- Seek and/or accept help when needed
- Apply knowledge and experiences to new situations

Building Social and Emotional Development

Helpful hints for families and early care, health, and education providers

"I need to feel excited and comfortable about starting kindergarten."

Things you can do:

- Let me know you're excited about me starting school
- Give me a chance to visit my school before I start
- Listen to my thoughts and ideas about school
- Help me pretend I'm in school

"I need to know what kindergarten will be like."

Things you can do:

- Teach me to follow directions by giving me simple steps
- Help me to learn how to share with other children, stand in line, wait my turn, and sit in a group
- Help me understand the teacher won't call on me every time I want to talk

"I need to know that school is a safe place and I can trust my teacher to care about me."

Things you can do:

- Pay attention to me and listen to my ideas
- Help me feel good about things I can do
- Praise me for my strengths
- Be patient and let me develop at my own pace
- Teach me that all my feelings are okay, but not all my actions are okay
- Show me empathy and encouragement when I am hurt, frustrated, scared, or sad

“I need to get along with others.”

Things you can do:

- Show me ways to make new friends
- Help me understand how I can be friends with all children
- Help me understand I won’t always get my way
- Teach me by example to use words when someone hurts my feelings, such as “*Please stop. That hurts my feelings*”

“I need to know how to talk and listen to others.”

Things you can do:

- Talk with me about things I find interesting
- Teach me how to know when it’s my turn to speak and when I need to listen
- Teach me to use words to describe my feelings and needs and when to use them

“I need to be excited about learning.”

Things you can do:

- Encourage me to explore with my senses to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste
- Give me fun, exciting choices
- Give me lots of time to figure things out

“I need to learn to try things and keep trying even when it seems hard.”

Things you can do:

- Give me activities that hold my interest
- Help me explore and try new activities
- Help me learn step by step
- Teach me that making mistakes is part of learning
- Show me different ways to understand my world

Language and Early Literacy Development

Children entering kindergarten should understand and use conversation and language for a variety of purposes.

Look for me to:

- Follow directions
- Start and take part in conversations
- Ask and respond to questions
- Use a growing vocabulary

Children entering kindergarten should engage in early reading experiences.

Look for me to:

- Point to pictures and words
- Recognize and name some letters, especially those in my own name
- Say and sing rhyming words
- Sing nursery rhymes
- Guess what will happen next in a story
- Show an interest in written language by asking, "What does that say?"
- Recognize print associated with restaurants, store names, logos, and stop signs
- Pretend to read stories using the book and my own words

Children entering kindergarten should engage in early writing experiences.

Look for me to:

- Use scribbles, shapes, and pictures to share my thoughts or ideas
- Begin to copy or write my own name
- Use a variety of writing tools (pencils, crayons, brushes, chalk, paper of different sizes, and colors) and materials
- Tell others about the meaning of my drawings and writing

Building Language and Early Literacy Development

Helpful hints for families and early care, health, and education providers

"I need to have many experiences and many opportunities to talk and listen."

Things you can do:

- Teach me new words
- Sing songs with me and teach me rhymes
- Show me words and symbols in my language and the sounds they make
- Encourage and give me many opportunities to talk about things I do
- Expand the words I know and use. If I say "big ball," say, "Yes, it is a giant ball"
- When we talk, ask me a question and give me time to think about it

"I need to interact with books."

Things you can do:

- Read to me every day and talk to me to help me understand the meaning
- Take me to the library
- Give me a variety of books and other materials with words and pictures (children's magazines, menus, recipes, signs)
- Limit my television time, computer time, and video games to less than one to two hours a day

"I need to engage in meaningful writing experiences."

Things you can do:

- Write down my words or stories I tell you
- Give me different tools to use to write and draw (crayons, chalk, washable markers, brushes)
- Show me ways you use writing every day (grocery list, email, pay bills, phone message)

Math Development

Children entering kindergarten should be able to identify, sort, classify, and create patterns.

Look for me to:

- Identify primary colors
- Describe simple shapes and textures
- Predict what comes next in a pattern
- Talk about how shapes fit together to form other shapes

Children entering kindergarten should understand amounts, including the use of numbers and counting.

Look for me to:

- Count objects - such as cups - when setting the table, so they match the number of chairs at the table
- Recognize and name some numerals (1-10)
- Compare different amounts using words like "more" or "less"

Children entering kindergarten should use language to talk about math.

Look for me to:

- Use words that show order such as "first, second, next, last, yesterday, tomorrow"
- Begin to copy or write my own name
- Describe people or objects using words like "big, little, short, tall, long"
- Use words that show placement such as "up, down, over, under, top, bottom, inside, outside"

Building Math Development

Helpful hints for families and early care, health, and education providers

"I need to know shapes, sizes, and colors."

Things you can do:

- Give me things to sort by shape, size, color, or texture
- Help me find and name shapes and colors all around me
- Show me how to make patterns with beads, blocks, silverware, or paper clips
- Play matching games with me

"I need to learn to count and understand that numbers have meaning."

Things you can do:

- Help me play counting games
- Challenge me to count things at home, such as counting out silverware, plates, and cups for the table
- Show me how numbers are used all around me, like on traffic signs or in the grocery store
- Model using numbers when making phone calls or paying bills

"I need to learn how to talk about math."

Things you can do:

- Provide me with opportunities to explore different things
- Ask me questions about what I see
- Encourage me to talk to you about what I'm doing
- Give me problems to solve: We have two pieces of cake and four people in our family. How can everyone have some?

Building Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

Helpful hints for families and early care, health, and education providers

"I need to be safe and feel safe."

Things you can do:

- Help me practice saying my name, address, and phone number
- Teach me about crossing the street and watching for cars
- Teach me about not talking to strangers and who is a safe person to ask for help
- Plan and practice emergency and safety procedures, such as fire disaster and tornado drills

"I need to have bathroom and other self-help skills."

Things you can do:

- Teach me the words to tell other grown-ups when I need to go to the bathroom, or when I'm feeling sick or hurt
- Help me learn to go to the bathroom and wash my hands on my own
- Teach me to dress and tie my shoes
- Encourage me to try things before I ask my teacher for help

"I need to have my basic needs met before I come to school each day."

Things you can do:

- Provide nutritious meals and snacks (vegetables, fruit, low fat milk products) and give me opportunities to help prepare nutritious foods
- Encourage me to try new foods
- Give me plenty of rest and do not put a television in my bedroom
- Take me to school with appropriate dress for the weather
- Take me to all my medical check-ups and make sure I see the doctor and the dentist before I start school
- When I am at my doctor, make sure I have all my immunizations and a lead test
- Teach me how to brush my teeth by myself

"I need to be able to use my hands and fingers to do small tasks."

Things you can do:

- Help me to pick up, hold, and use pencils, crayons, markers, paintbrushes, and scissors
- Help me make things with blocks, paper, cardboard, and tape
- Teach me to use spoons, forks, and non-sharp knives during supervised meals, snacks, and cooking activities

"I need to be able to use my arms, legs, and body to make big movements."

Things you can do:

- Encourage me to run, jump, climb, dance, and move to music
- Give me time each day to play outside with you or another adult. If I need to stay inside, help me to have an active playtime like dancing to music
- Play games with me that involve catching, kicking, and bouncing skills
- Limit my television time, computer time, and video games to less than one to two hours a day
- Provide me opportunities for dramatic play and practice creative play (dress-up, putting on a play, pretending you are at the store shopping)
- Teach me to be open to new experiences

Welcoming, Honoring, and Connecting

Helpful hints for schools, families, and community partners

"I need my school to welcome my family."

Things my school can do:

- Put up welcoming signs in the language I speak at home
- Learn about my community and culture before I arrive
- Provide my family with an understanding of what I will be learning and what is expected of me and my family
- Let my family know who to go to with ideas or questions
- Invite us to participate in the school, classroom, or parent/teacher groups
- Invite us to serve on school committees, volunteer to help teachers, and learn more about school standards and assessments

"I need to feel good about my family and culture, and to learn about other cultures."

Things you and my school can do:

- Read me books, tell me stories, and sing me songs about my culture and other cultures
- Take me to places that teach me about my culture and other cultures
- Use the language(s) I know to help me understand and learn
- Understand that school may be my first introduction to cultures and languages other than my own
- Let me know that speaking my language strengthens all my language skills

“I need my family to understand what I will be learning in school and how they can support my learning at home.”

Things you and my school can do:

- Engage in regular two-way communication
- Share things in my life that may affect how I feel and act
- Find out about any special abilities and needs I have
- Support my transition into kindergarten

“I need my community to support my learning.”

Things my community can do:

- Encourage family and child connections to community networks
- Connect my family to high quality early learning environments and opportunities
- Support the needs of my learning environments (child care, home, and school)

Ready children, ready families, ready communities, ready schools.

It takes a village to raise a child.

State and Community Resources

Statewide Resources

Area Education Agencies: www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/527/550

Child Care Resource and Referral: www.iowaccrr.org

Child Health Specialty Clinics: 1-866-219-9119
www.uihealthcare.com/depts/state/chsc/index.html

Early ACCESS: 1-888-IAKIDS1 (1-888-425-4371)
www.EarlyACCESSIowa.org

Early Childhood Iowa Parent Web site: www.parents.earlychildhoodiowa.org

hawk-i (health insurance information): 1-800-257-8563
www.hawk-i.org

Healthy Child Care Iowa: 1-800-369-2229
www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci

Healthy Families Line: 1-800-369-2229

Iowa 211: Human services information and referral
www.211iowa.org

Iowa Department of Education: www.iowa.gov/educate

Iowa Department of Human Services: www.dhs.state.ia.us

Iowa Department of Public Health: www.idph.state.ia.us

Iowa Concern: 1-800-447-1985

Iowa Parent Information Resource Center: www.iowaparents.org

Local Community Empowerment Agencies: www.empowerment.state.ia.us

Prevent Child Abuse Iowa: www.pcaiowa.org

“I need adults to work together to help me get kindergarten ready.”

To order additional copies, call the Healthy Families Line at 1-800-369-2229