



# Is my 3 or 4-year-old ready for Pre-Kindergarten?

**Readiness for Pre-K** has more to do with where your child is developmentally than academically. Is he socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively ready to participate in a daily, structured, educational program with a group of other children?

Though it's tempting to look for a quick answer to this question, such as by checking skills off a list, that method isn't foolproof. The best way to decide is to spend time thinking about your child and to talk to other people who know him well, such as your partner, your child's doctor, and your child's caregiver.

The following questions provided by Patricia Henderson Shimm, associate director of the Barnard College Center for Toddler Development in New York and co-author of *Parenting Your Toddler*, will help you think about the most important factors for Pre-K readiness.

## Is your child fairly independent?

Pre-K requires children to have certain basic skills. Your child should also be able to take care of some other basic needs, like washing his hands, eating his lunch without assistance, and dressing or undressing himself. Cleaning up after herself is another sign of independence.

### A word about toilet training . . .

While it is not required, toilet training before Pre-K is strongly encouraged. In fact, now is the time to concentrate your training efforts so the transition into Pre-K is smoother for your child. Learning to use the toilet independently is a major milestone for all children, and at Brownwood ISD we understand that each child may reach that milestone differently. Our educators partner with families to ensure that all children feel supported both at home and at school throughout the process of toilet training. Visit [www.brownwoodisd.org/PK-KG](http://www.brownwoodisd.org/PK-KG) for links to various toilet training programs.

As a family member, here's how you can help support your child's independence with toileting, whether at home or at school:

- Dress them in clothing that is easy to remove independently for toileting. Elastic waistbands are recommended, but overalls and belts are strongly discouraged.
- Have children consistently practice pulling their own pants up and down.
- Encourage children to wipe themselves.
- Always have an extra set of clean clothes or two, including underwear and socks, in your child's backpack. Parents must provide all supplies necessary for keeping your child clean and dry while in the care of BISD.
- Enthusiastically praise your child for all efforts and successes! Never blame or shame a child for having a toileting accident.
- Be patient and consistent! He WILL get it eventually!

## Has he spent time away from you?

If your child has been cared for by a babysitter or a relative, he'll be better prepared to separate from you when he's at Pre-K. Kids who are used to being apart from their parents often bounce right into school with hardly a backward glance. If your child hasn't had many opportunities to be away from you, you might want to schedule some – a weekend with grandma, for instance, or a day with your sister and her kids. But even if you can't work out your separation anxiety up front, don't worry too much. Many children leave Mom or Dad for the first time to go to school and they do just fine.

## **Can he work on projects on his own?**

Pre-K usually involves lots of arts and crafts projects that require concentration and the ability to focus on an individual task. If your child likes to draw at home or gets engrossed in puzzles and other activities on his own, he's a good candidate for school!

But even if he's the kind of child who asks for help with everything, you can start getting him ready by setting up playtimes where he can entertain himself for a half hour or so. While you wash the dishes or fold laundry, encourage him to make creatures out of clay, for example.

Gradually build up to longer stretches of solo play. Your goal here is to keep yourself moderately preoccupied with an activity so that your child can complete the project on his own without too much hand-holding from you.

## **Is he ready to participate in group activities?**

Many Pre-K activities, like "circle time," require that all the children in a class participate at the same time. These interactions give children a chance to play and learn together, but also require them to sit still, listen to stories, and sing songs. This can be very difficult for kids who are naturally active explorers and not always developmentally ready to play with other children.

If your child isn't used to group activities, you can start introducing them yourself. Take him to story time at your local library, for instance, or sign him up for a class such as tumbling to help him get used to playing with other children.

## **Is he used to keeping a regular schedule?**

Early school programs usually follow a predictable routine: circle time, play time, snack, playground, then lunch. There's a good reason for this. Children tend to feel most comfortable and in control when the same things happen at the same time each day.

So if your child doesn't keep to a schedule and each day is different from the last, it can help to standardize his days a bit before he starts Pre-K or Kindergarten. Start by offering meals on a regular timetable. You could also plan to visit the park each afternoon or set – and stick to – a bedtime ritual (bath, then books, and bed).

## **Does he have the physical stamina for preschool?**

Brownwood ISD's full-day program for Pre-K keeps kids busy. There are art projects to do, field trips to take, and playgrounds to explore. Does your child thrive on activities like this, or does he have trouble moving from one thing to the next without getting cranky?

Another thing to consider is how and when your child needs to nap. Pre-K students at Brownwood ISD do not nap at school. If your little one can keep going all day like a wind-up toy, he's set. If he still needs a mid-day snooze, it might not be time yet to go to school.

You can work toward building his stamina by making sure he gets a good night's sleep – an important goal for every school-age child!

## **Why do you want to send your 3-year-old to Pre-K?**

Think carefully about what your goals are for sending your child to Pre-K. Do you just need time for yourself or daycare for your child? There may be other options if it seems he isn't ready yet for the rigors of school.

Are you worried that if you don't enroll him in Pre-K he won't be ready for Kindergarten? Most experts agree that there are plenty of other ways for children to develop the skills necessary to be successful in Kindergarten. A study by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development found that children do best if they're cared for by someone who is genuinely concerned about their well-being and development, and who makes sure they're doing a variety of age-appropriate activities.

If you find that the main reasons you want to send your child to preschool are that he seems eager to learn new things and explore, he isn't getting enough stimulation at home or daycare, or he seems ready to broaden his social horizons and interact with other children, chances are it's the perfect time to start school.