

Is this child ready for preschool? Kindergarten? How can I be sure? What can I do?

School's OPEN!

ARE THE CHILDREN READY?

Many parents and caregivers ask themselves if a child is ready for school and what they can do to help. School readiness is more complex than gender and chronological age. It's a combination of many factors. Few children are either completely ready or not ready for school: most will fall somewhere in between on a continuum of readiness.

BEYOND THE ABCs AND 123s

A child who knows his letters, colors, and numbers has a start. But succeeding in school takes so much more! Teachers and researchers agree that one essential area of school readiness is a child's emotional development. Parents are their child's first and most important teacher and can help children gain the essential emotional tools needed to succeed in school. Grandparents, childcare providers, aunts, uncles, and other

community members also play a very important role. This article highlights some strategies that can be used to support emotional growth. On the next page, there are also community resources, websites, and community projects that are working together to support children in Rochester.

PARENTING STRATEGIES THAT HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP EMOTIONALLY:

- **Label emotions.** Teach children and talk about different emotions and teach what they can do with strong emotions. For example, when a three-year-old child gets angry and throws a toy, you might say, "Oh! You are SO mad! But we do not throw toys. When you get mad you can clench your fists, take deep breaths, or go to your room and hit your pillow." Encourage use of words to describe needs, feelings, etc. Those caring for young children are important models and should use appropriate ways to work through emotions. There are also many children's books at your public library that help children identify and learn healthy ways to work through emotions. Ask the children's librarian for resources.

- **Notice and respond to the emotions of those around you.** Help children learn to identify the emotions of others and read people's messages. Point out, "Wow, when you gave Grandma a hug, you made her so happy! Did you see that smile?" Or, "That baby is making a sound that is telling me she does not want to be touched right now. Do you see the grimace on her face? Let's give her some space."
- **Maintain consistent limits and boundaries.** Children develop self-confidence, a healthy sense of boundaries, self-control, and the ability to delay gratification when they know and are expected to abide by a few simple,

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WHAT A CHILD NEEDS TO SUCCEED

- **Some degree of independence and self-direction**
- **Self-control or ability to delay gratification (even briefly)**
- **Ability to communicate needs and emotions**
- **Reasonably confident and willing to try new things**
- **Interested in school and in learning new things**



clear and consistent rules. Even when a child is briefly emotionally upset about a rule, when you stick to the rule the child will learn what to expect from the world and relax knowing things are consistent and routine.

- **Give children time.** Down time, time to put on their clothes, time to walk on their own two feet, time to read, time to talk, time to listen, time to hug, and time to relax and explore their world.
- **Get educated!** Get to know what you can expect from children at different ages and which strategies and expectations are age-appropriate. See the sidebars on this page for educational opportunities and resources in our community and on the Web.

Remember, have fun with young children and enjoy being in a child's life. Let a child know every day that there are specific things about him/her that you really like. Parents, grandparents, caregivers, friends, and family all play a critical role in a child being ready for school! Be involved and support the involvement of others.

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SCHOOL READINESS IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

While any parent, grandparent, or teacher will tell you there is no investment more important than young children, their intuition is now backed by both scientific and economic studies. Medical research has documented that **by age 5 about 75 percent of brain development is complete.** Educational research shows that children who are not fully ready to start kindergarten often quickly fall behind their peers and never catch up. Economists' data show that investing in early childhood programs has very high returns that benefit the whole community. Businesses know their workforce issues tie directly to children's school readiness and school success.

Alarming, student testing shows that up to **50% of kindergarten students arrive not fully prepared to learn.** Even the most motivated parents find that quality early childhood services are not always available, are under-funded, and staff training varies. Something needs to be done.

Three years ago, the Rochester Area Foundation launched First Steps, a community-wide effort to help children succeed by making sure they are ready for school. First Steps believes there are many ways to help children be ready to succeed starting with supporting parents and caregivers, children's most important teachers. This monthly column is one aspect of that effort.

FIRST STEPS BUSINESS ALLIANCE FORUM

Why should businesses be concerned about school readiness? Is there a business case for investment in school readiness and family life education? Bill Millet, CEO of Scope*View, will travel from North Carolina to address those questions and others at a business forum at noon, Tuesday, October 16.



If you would like to attend the forum, contact First Steps at 507-282-1027.

To obtain community resources and information for raising children who will thrive in school:

- Attend PAIR classes. Find more information at <http://www.rochester.k12.mn.us/>
- Go to your public library! Library event information can be found at rochesterpubliclibrary.org/kids
- When your child turns 3, complete an early childhood "check-in." Call 285-8585 for more information.
- Advocate for work-life seminars in your work place.

Access online resources

- <http://www.rochesterfamilies.com>
- Child Care Resource and Referral at <http://www.c2r2.org/>
- <http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us>
- www.workingfamilyresourcecenter.org
- www.zerotothree.org
- www.firststeps.us
- www.bornlearning.org
- <http://education.umn.edu/ceed/publications/questionsaboutkids/>
- www.civitas.org
- www.pbs.com/caregivers

Rochester Women
AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE

Rochester Women magazine is a founding member of the First Steps Business Alliance and is the sponsor of these two pages.

First Steps Business Alliance
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