

10 THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE YOUR CHILD STARTS KINDERGARTEN (THAT HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH ACADEMICS)

This is an excerpt from an article written by a Harvard graduate and stay-at-home mom to four girls who blogs under the name *Harvard Homemaker*. You can find her blog at www.harvardhomemaker.com.

To read the article in full (where you'll find pictures and links to various items referenced), please go to <http://www.harvardhomemaker.com/10-things-to-think-about-before-your-child-starts-kindergarten>

Is your child starting kindergarten soon? As a mother who has now sent three children off to kindergarten (with one more to go), I know that can be an emotional period of transition for the whole family. You may be wondering if there is anything you can do to help your child be more prepared for that experience. Oftentimes we worry mostly about the academic side of things when our child is starting kindergarten: Will she know as much as her peers? Is she behind? Is she ahead? What *should* she know on that first day of school?! But I've come to realize that we don't need to lose any sleep about this. Trust that your child will be just fine. If you are anxious about everything, it will probably lead to your child being anxious, too, and the last thing you want to do is make the first days even more stressful for your child. You want your child to start off on the right foot, feeling excited!

Below I have compiled a list of things you may want to consider as your child prepares to start kindergarten—and not one has anything to do with reaching a certain academic standard. Most are simple, practical tips about things that I think are really most important. I hope this list makes you and your child feel more prepared and more confident on that very special first day of school so you can truly enjoy the moment. Kindergarten will be your child's introduction to school (which they will be attending for years to come!), so you definitely want that first year to be the most positive experience possible!

1. Can They Take Care of Themselves and Their Clothes?

If your child goes to the bathroom at school, can she button her pants up again? When it's time for recess, can your son zip his jacket? What if your daughter's shoes come untied—can she tie them again without help? (No worries—not many kids can tie their own shoes at the start of kindergarten; perhaps you want to stick with shoes with Velcro straps until shoe-tying is mastered at home. For us, first grade was the time when tying your own shoes was really encouraged.) Of course teachers help your children with these kinds of things (especially early in the year), but there are a lot of kids in a classroom—wouldn't it be wonderful if your child felt confident about doing these things solo? And the teacher would surely love the help, too!

I'm also a big believer in encouraging your kids to get dressed by themselves each day. It can be hard at first to get past the crazy outfits, but eventually it becomes quite entertaining. ☺ Your mornings will go more smoothly, too, when you back off. There is no power struggle over what to wear, and your child learns to be more independent. Everybody wins!

2. Encourage Being Responsible for Their Own Things

When you go somewhere with your kids, do you always pack everything up and then carry it yourself? It might be helpful for your soon-to-be kindergartener if you started passing off some of those duties. Becoming more responsible in this way can really help your child transition more easily into kindergarten. No teacher is going to carry 20 backpacks to the carpool line. Each child will be responsible for packing up his/her bag at the end of the day, and each child will be expected to carry his/her own things. So why not start encouraging that skill at home so it simply feels like more of the same in a school environment?

I also think it's great to set up routines at home, too, once the school year starts. In our house, our kids grab their own lunchboxes and pack up their bags every morning. And then when they come home after school, it's not my job to go fishing for their lunchboxes. They need to unpack their bags and bring their lunchboxes to the kitchen for me. These things quickly become habits if you encourage the behavior right out of the gate.

3. Lunchtime: Can They Open Everything?

You may pack your child's lunch with the utmost love and care, but can he/she even open everything when it comes time to eat it?! Start practicing so when school begins, your child won't come home with their lunch half-eaten because they were too embarrassed to ask for help! We parents often take these small skills for granted, but they can really instill so much confidence in a child.

4. Naptime: Phase it Out if Possible

If your child is still a napper, it might help to start phasing that out before kindergarten begins—especially if your child will be attending all-day kindergarten. Yes, most kindergarten classes do have naptime at school for at least the first half of the year (and even if your child hasn't taken a nap in years, don't be surprised if he/she falls asleep at school! They are physically and emotionally exhausted!). But the kids don't nap for a very long time at school, and you probably don't want your child to be dependent on that little bit of sleep each day.

5. Getting Along Without Their Favorite Comfort Toy or Blanket

My girls have all been attached to a blanket, so we established a tradition where they bid farewell to it on their 5th birthday. This ensures that it won't be a problem when kindergarten starts. It's become like a rite of passing. ☺ (They also "graduate" to making their own bed each day and get the green light for pierced ears for showing that they're so grown up!) Your child isn't going to be able to have that blanket or comfort toy at school, so if you're worried that your child might be overly attached to something (like mine were!), perhaps you want to address that before school begins.

6. Limit After-School Activities Early in the School Year

It's going to take everything in your child's power to be "on" all day at school. Odds are, you will have a very tired, emotional child at the end of the day—certainly by Friday. Every Friday night for the first few months, our new kindergarteners were always a complete disaster. So just go ahead and expect that, and be pleasantly surprised if your child is the exception! Because your child will be pouring everything into adjusting to this new routine, try to limit your child's after-school activities at first. The weekends are a different story, but just keep in mind that a long day of school followed by even more activity on a regular basis could be too much for your little person early in the year.

7. Talk About It... But Not Too Much!

We really tried to pump our kids up for kindergarten—telling them about all the exciting things they'd be doing! But each child is different, and I realized that one of my girls wasn't responding well to our pep talks. Our talks were actually making her more and more nervous. I still think it's good to discuss what's to come so your child is better prepared, but try to read your child's reactions. Maybe you'll need to reassure her that everything is going to be okay, and other kids will have questions, too. ☺

8. Label EVERYTHING!

Things will definitely get lost, so LABEL EVERYTHING to up the chances of things coming back to you (and to help your child's teacher as well)! To find links to some great personalized labels I swear by (some can even go through the dishwasher and washing machine/dryer!), please refer to my online post (web address is listed at the top of this article).

9. Create Traditions for the First Day of School

Starting school can be very stressful for a new kindergartener (and the parents!), but it's also very exciting. It's a whole new adventure, and you want to treat it as such! With that, why not start some first-day-of-school traditions? In our house, we bake the same cookies each year to celebrate. My kids also have school keepsake books, and they fill in the new page and draw a picture or write themselves a letter to tuck into the book. It will be so fun for them to flip back through the complete book when they graduate from high school! (These are the best books!! There's even a pocket for each grade to store report cards, pictures, awards, etc. You can find a link to the books we have in my online post).

10. Take Pictures and Enjoy the Moment!

Finally, don't forget to take a picture every year on the first day of school!!! (You could also take one on the last day of school for comparison.) As shown in the full post over at my blog, our daughters simply hold up their fingers to indicate what grade they're starting that day. We also have them stand in the same place so it helps to gauge their growth—our girls stand by our front door every year. Whatever you choose to do, just be sure to snap some kind of picture! It can be a hectic morning, but you'll be so glad to have those photos down the road to help remember those first days of school every year. Soak up the special moments—time flies!

Best of luck to you and your new kindergartener! ~ Christy from www.harvardhomemaker.com or please find me at www.facebook.com/HHomemaker, www.pinterest.com/HarvardHomemake, or @harvardhomemaker on Instagram