



YOUR FANTASTIC FIVE YEAR OLD

Although there are a wide variety of developmental levels achieved by different five year olds, this is the time when public, private, or home school will become a regular and significant part of your child's day, and for years to come. Many who have participated in a structured day care or preschool setting to this point may appear more socially or academically "ready" for formal schooling, but bear in mind that most children this age are active and concrete learners. Hopefully by now, any special developmental needs or lags will have been identified, and any early intervention programs appropriate to the need started. Developmental differences however, are not usually reliable criteria to assess school readiness, and most formally administered "readiness" tests are poor predictors of kindergarten success. If your child has motor skills that prevent dangerous or embarrassing encounters, has fine motor skills that enable crayon and scissors use, dressing skills, can match shapes, tell larger from smaller, copy simple figures, understand and follow simple directions as well as express needs, can orient to surroundings, retain basic rhymes and time concepts, and can attend to tasks with minimal reminders, he/she is probably "school ready". This does not mean that any skills lacking above preclude school entry, but that most should be achieved and the rest addressed before proceeding. Hyperactive, impulsive, or distractible behaviors may be part of a normal spectrum of behavior, or may require prompt assessment and intervention. In any child, a cognitively stimulating and emotionally nurturing home contributes significantly to success in school. (See end of handout for more on this). It's also time to evaluate if you as parents are "school ready!"

Motor gains that are achieved throughout the year include ability to skip, walk on tip-toe, catch a bounced ball most of the time, and balance on one foot greater than ten seconds and well as one foot hopping. Gait includes a limited arm swing now. More complex motor skills emerge, (e.g. walking sideways). Fine motor coordination enable him/her able to copy a triangle and then a diamond later in the year. He/she can or will soon cut in a straight line, draw a person with a body, spread with a dull knife, fully dress and undress, as well as improve in tooth brushing and washing.

Language at five may vary greatly – receptively 3 or 4 colors should be recognized by now, coins are identified, 10 objects can be counted in sequence and a three step command is followed correctly. Opposites are understood. Expressively, he/she knows age, can tell a simple story, define one to several simple words (dog, table, ball, shoe), knows several nursery rhymes, and can often recite full ABC's. Understanding of time concepts such as "yesterday" begins to appear; speech should be fully comprehensible. **Cognitive** concepts include understanding and participating in games with "rules", participation in making believe and dress-up play, and comparison of things. Dreams are finally recognized as unreal. "Experts" will state the "right" and "wrong" are first understood now, but in the home where moral consciousness has been a priority, these sensitivities come earlier. Gender identify is well established by now.

*Special Notes About
My Child:*

Socially, companionship of the other children and adults alike is enjoyed, separation is easily achieved for extended periods, and the ability to be “fair” (a crucial skill) develops. The ideal five year old is content, calm, stable, and enjoys both giving and receiving instructions. Realistically, many will have minor difficulties with brashness, withdrawal, gender identity (particularly one parent households – find a role model), separation, tantrums, disobedience, distractibility, destructiveness, aggressiveness, high activity, night terrors or nightmares, jealousy, and inability to remove from transitional object (thumb, blanky, etc.). For any patterns, discuss them early and often with your pediatrician and don’t be too swayed by “common” knowledge.

Discipline techniques continue to center on the positive, and incorporation of your child into family routines and responsibilities. Tidying the room, small trash can collection, dishwasher help, table setting, clean up, and personal hygiene are all areas to structure his/her environment. Ignore or downplay shocking attempts at attention (the first curse word), but do not permit patterns of behavior inconsistent with family standards. It is a good time to review the house rules, goals of discipline in all family members, and why you and your child ought to be good and kind and cooperative. It might be time to introduce concepts of community to your child in volunteer work, sacrificial giving of time and energy, and neighborliness. (Remember, they learn what you live). Your child wants to assume responsibilities – let him/her with loving guidance and structure.

Review contents of the toy chest and continue to add or subtract as necessary to keep challenge and versatility there. Continue to introduce concepts about the world in a protecting way. Guard the heart by extreme limitation of TV, video, electronic games, and other entertainments. Play good music. Educational walks, outings, shopping trips, and library visits are ideal. Continue to use tactile art forms, (clay, finger paints, etc.) and try and play with, not just supervise. Some families find that a “family night” each week dedicated to the merging needs of the children, keeps the family unit concept firm, airs grievances, affirms kinship, tightens loyalty and broadens love among the participants. All family members should participate with little distraction – it should be a longed for priority, not a rushed obligation to be cemented between business and racket ball.

A small percentage of five year olds still wet the bed at night – if a history and exam do not suggest a specific medical reason for the problem, there are several approaches to try towards achieving dryness (most of all, don’t panic). Bed wetting alarms are probably the most successful, but not all five year olds are ready. Discuss with your pediatrician any concerns.



By now you’ve learned to be creative and imaginative in getting your child to consume his/her share of vegetables, fruits, cereals, grains, dairy products and other protein sources. Portions slowly increase and along with that does caloric intake (1500-1900 kcal per day). Continue no sugared drinks! Normal growth velocity in accord with family body habitus coupled with reasonable health are good indicators of **basic calorie nutrition**. Quality of food intake is the key however. Obesity at preschool age is much harder to reverse than baby or adolescent overweight.

If this is an individual or family problem, address it early with your doctor – the whole family’s eating patterns may need adjustment or reversal. Physical activity should be promoted as much as possible to keep energy balance sound. Shut the TV off as much as possible, provide lots of outdoor energy outlets (even in cold weather). “Nutrient dense” foods are important (a lot of good stuff for relatively little calories) – broccoli is the king here. Keep fast food take out a treat, not a routine. Meal preparation is still fun for five year olds; start using mixes with directions with them; safe mixers, utensils and supervised appliance use are acceptable. Try to keep mealtime fun, expect some pickiness, food jag (desire for the same food all the time), and be a good example. Keep tooth brushing and flossing frequent, continue to teach about nutrition. Fluoride supplements may be necessary – keep regular dental checkups.

Your child should *sleep* in her/his own bed, and if possible, own room. Address night terrors and nightmares as described – only in rare circumstances should the child need access to your bed, and then only for a brief time. Keep a flashlight in the room, one night light may help. A daily nap may still be required by some children.

If necessary, vaccination completion or catch-up will be offered. Travel plans should be discussed with your pediatrician. A tuberculin skin test may be offered or suggested in special circumstances. Vision and hearing checks are routinely done at this time, as are blood pressures and perhaps urinalysis. Blood testing may be recommended. Bring to your doctor's attention any physical complaints (headaches, body aches, abdominal pains, etc.), or physical signs (changes in birthmarks, scalp problems, etc.).

Safety checks include outdoor play equipment, fences, medicinal and chemical checks, animal safety, avoidance of sharp or potentially dangerous tools and utensils, stove and appliance supervision, fire safety plan and equipment check, car and car seat safety as well as water safety. Keep the child off tractors, ATV's, riding mowers, etc. Wear bike helmets, supervise street crossing, unload and lock away firearms, keep water temperature down in water heater, have a fire escape plan (teach drop and roll technique), continue food safety. Teach your child how to respond to strangers with politeness and firmness. Your child should know address and phone number, and know safe persons to give it to. Use sunscreens and insect repellants.

This is a crucial learning and growing time for your child and your family. The words of Robert Fulghum help us at this time to bring into perspective the importance of learning and mastering these age-appropriate skills of working and playing well with others:

Most of what I really need to know about, how to live,
what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten.
Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school
mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School.
These are the things I learned –
Play fair.
Don't hit people.
Put things back where you found them.
Clean up your own mess.
Don't take things that aren't yours.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
Wash your hands before you eat.
Flush.
Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
Live a balanced life – learn some and think play and
work every day some.
Take a nap every afternoon.
When you go out in the world, watch for traffic, hold
hands, stick together.
Be aware of wonder.

From All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten – Robert Fulghum

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Revised 3/07