

Is your child ready for kindergarten or first grade?

Can they sit still, listen, follow directions and get along with others?

While teaching 100's of preschoolers and kindergarteners over the last 14 years we have discovered one critical key to success for not only school but for the rest of their lives.

Here is the key: Your child's first day in school is **HUGE!** It will pretty much dictate how they do for the rest of their academic career! If your child is ahead of her peers she will stay ahead and love school. Kids that start off behind their peers almost never catch up and like school less.

Along with falling behind they can sometimes get inaccurately "labeled" as unable to focus, hyperactive or extremely shy. We have wonderful teachers in our elementary schools but partially because of the overwhelming academic curriculum they do not have the time or resources to teach the needed basic behavioral skills to your child. Young children really need to have these skills **BEFORE** they start kindergarten.

As a result we are seeing more kids struggle through kindergarten. We have talented hard working kindergarten teachers in our community but increasingly they are needing to just give their students the benefit of the doubt and pass them on to first grade hoping they succeed.

The missing skills we are talking about are centered around "**Self-Regulation**".

Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. It's what helps children focus their attention on learning when they might be distracted by others, upset by a problem, or excited about an upcoming event.

When humans are first born they have little control of their reaction to their emotions and feelings. When they are hungry or uncomfortable they cry. As they get older they need to be able to regulate their response and not just react to their emotions. For example when they get mad they cannot just hit others. Or, when they are playing with others they may need to share when they do not want to. They may have to focus and listen while being distracted.

These skills are not just required for success in young children. Later they help teens and adults resolve conflict, problem solve, think independently, participate and get along with others.

So how do you help your child? Just copy what we do. At our school we like to use the term "accelerating their lives". We want our students to experience things at five years old that most kids do not experience until they are in high school. A good example of this is public speaking. While our students practice speaking and performing in front of a group at an early age, many kid's first experience is that speech class in high school!

Children learn by "doing" and repetition. So here is what you can do. Intentionally look for experiences that practice self-regulating skills. Things like having to listen to instructors and coaches. Handling distractions. Placed in emotional situations like getting frustrated or making a mistake. Expose them to stress, failure and hardship regularly. Working with partners and on a team. Get them involved with making decision and making choices. Place them in situation where they have to help other and eventually in leadership positions.

Anyways I hope this helps. Like I always tell our parents *"You only get one chance to start kindergarten!"*

Yours for Rock Solid (and school ready) Kids,

Sensei