



# Stepping Out



## Transition to Kindergarten



A private non-profit organization serving  
San Francisco since 1889



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# Stepping Out

A resource guide for  
parents of children  
transitioning from  
preschool to kindergarten



A private non-profit agency committed to strengthening San Francisco families



**Go**ing to kindergarten is a major event in the lives of children and their families. Although many children attend some form of preschool or childcare before kindergarten, the beginning of elementary school is a milestone. It marks an important connection between the inner family life and the outer social world. How that change is handled is as important to your child as the choice of school itself. Whatever your reasons or choices, selecting a kindergarten and sending your child off to it is a **VERY BIG DEAL** and worthy of a lot of time, thought and attention.



Chances are, you probably went to the school closest to home and grew up with school chums as playmates in the neighborhood. For most San



Francisco school children today, this is not the case and it is not uncommon for your child's school to be across town. There is some flexibility within the district and it's important to pursue what you'd like for your children because it may well be possible to get it. For some parents, having their children in school near their work is more convenient and realistic.

**How can you help your child succeed in school?**  
**Get involved.**

The single most effective thing you as a parent can do to increase your child's chances of school success is to become involved in the school personally, in any capacity you can. There is no stronger predictor of a child's academic experience in school than parental involvement. It makes sense that if a child feels that school is a friendly and comfortable extension of home life where his/her parents feel comfortable and are involved, he/she will also feel more relaxed and trusting in this environment and tend to excel more within it.

Since most parents work and are busy, it may be difficult for them to get involved in their children's school. Nevertheless, it's always worth an effort to try and find some small way to make a meaningful contribution to your children's school. Increasingly, employers are allowing workers time for such involvement. For example, maybe there is some flex or family leave time arrangement you can make with company support; vacation days can also be used for field trips. Speak with teachers about ways you might contribute from work or from home in the evening. Whatever your talents, skills and connections, there's a way they can be used in your child's school. More and more the school district and independent schools, as well, look to parents for input and feedback about curricula and programming issues. Parental involvement in your children's school needn't be limited to field trips, candy sales and raffles. There are Parent Advisory Committees and political action groups, too.

**Did you hate school?**

Many parents may have had negative experiences in school. They associate school with feeling badly. For these parents, it may be helpful to approach your child's educational experience with an open mind and a willingness to work with the schools. Trying to negotiate within the school system can often feel frustrating and even infuriating at times (phone numbers change, procedures and policies are unclear and the wrong information may be given). Nevertheless, we encourage you to check out the possibilities for yourselves and your children. Some school sites are now open on weekends to provide family services, classes and recreation. Schools want to be more friendly and there is a place for you to air your views and get support if you look hard enough and persist.



### **Learning Styles/Multiple Intelligences**

Schools are very different today than they were when most parents, even young parents, began kindergarten. In recent years, educators have learned a lot more about how children learn and are adapting school curricula to the growing understanding that not all children learn in the same way. Research and experience reveal that we draw on a number of different ways of processing information and learning about ourselves and the world around us.

- Some people perceive most strongly through their eyes.
- Others learn better through listening and talking.
- Others learn through moving, touching and hands-on exploration

### **Do You Think Your Child Has Special Needs?**

Most important, communicate with teachers and site administrators about your child and your concerns. Fewer children are being considered eligible for special services these days. More of a child's special needs will have to be attended to within a regular classroom. If you think your child has special needs, contact the Special Education Department of the San Francisco Unified School District (see resource).

Unless your child was assessed in preschool as needing certain specific educational supports in addition to the regular classroom, you will have to enroll your child first in a regular kindergarten before changes can be made. (You can, however, do a few things to make this period easier for children you strongly suspect will need extra school attention. For example, you might consider a school that you know has good on-site supports of the type you think you might need. Contact the school to find out if these comprehensive services and resources you've identified are currently being provided.)

### **Is your child ready for kindergarten?**

Not every child is ready for kindergarten just because he/she is 5 years old. As kindergarten becomes more academic and demanding, many families are considering keeping their children at home or in preschool an extra year. However, it is important to balance the decision about starting kindergarten late with an overall understanding of some of the social influences. Most children tend to socialize in their own age groups and may be singled out if they appear different. For example, a very tall student held back from kindergarten will be even more visibly different among younger children.



Being and feeling too different from one's peers can be difficult and can affect academic performance.

There is no perfect equation to determine kindergarten readiness and any of the decisions made can be changed. In addition to your best parental instincts, input from professionals and trusted friends can help make this important decision.

### **How do you choose the right kindergarten?**

- (1) Check out the assigned school, because if you like the school, it's the easiest way to get placed in a school. Be sure to check it out in person! Nobody else knows your child and your family as well as you do. Not everyone is looking for the same thing in a school. Just because a friend or cousin didn't think one school was right for his/her children, doesn't mean that it is not a good school for your child. The most important part of choosing a school is considering who your child is and what she/he needs from a school.
- (2) Determine the readiness of your child for the demands of kindergarten. Consult with the preschool teacher to consider progress in language development, attention span, motor, emotional and social development. Pay attention to the child's attitude towards school, peers and other adults. Besides the expected apprehension that all children feel toward new changes, assess the responses to new challenges and transitions.
- (3) Define the child's needs and those of your family regarding the following aspects of the school: *philosophy, hours of operation, location/transportation, size, adjunctive services, cultural sensitivity, structure, curriculum*

### **Preparation with children transitioning should take into account some social and emotional factors:**

#### **Social**

Kindergarten teachers look for functioning in a cooperative learning environment:

- can child be with a group - get along, share;
- can child bond with other adults;
- conflict resolution - respect for others, verbalization of needs, physical/aggressive behavior (not accepted even in self-defense).

**How can you support your child?**

A child's best chance for success in kindergarten comes when transition is supported by: *nurturing - expressing love, reassurance of presence, showing affection, positive expectations, validation of feelings*

**Observing behavioral changes**

Entering into kindergarten is a developmental milestone for all children. Like any major change, the transition can be very stressful for the following reasons:

- change in routine
- the pressure of being with new people
- encountering a new environment
- leaving behind friends and teachers
- anticipating new rules and regulations
- experiencing a combination of anxiety/excitement

Children may also experience some of the following normal responses to entering into the unknown:

Regression in learning self-help skills:

- toilet training
- sleep habits
- speech
- eating patterns

Emotional setbacks:

- increased crying
- irritability
- low frustration tolerance
- shorter than usual attention span
- a greater need for comfort, attention, reassurance

Physical complaints:

- stomach ache
- headache
- muscle ache
- diarrhea
- vomiting
- asthma - exaggerated
- eczema - flare-ups



### Developmental Stages

Ages and stages of the Child: The following characteristics have been identified by experts at a Gesell Institute of Child Development. It is important to understand that these stages are a general guideline and that there will be many individual differences between children.



### Two Year Old

Two-year olds can be very delightful. Even though they are often demanding and stubborn, they can wait a little bit. The following is a list of characteristics that a parent may observe in the two-year old:

- independent and dependent
- rigid about way things are done
- often negative, says "no" a lot
- can be very stubborn
- not very flexible
- understands the word "mine," but doesn't share easily
- often eats very little and picky about what he/she eats
- likes to have everything in its place
- is learning new words and skills
- beginning to be interested in "friends," however play is generally parallel
- is interested in what belongs to whom: "this is mommy's"
- may display extremes - shy vs. bold



### Three Year Old

At three years most children appear more cooperative, secure and more calm than before. This calm may turn into storm as the child reaches the insecurity and disequilibrium of the three-and-a-half year old. The following list are characteristics found in the three year old children:

- increased motor ability
- can share more easily
- uses words “we”, “let’s” and “me too”
- enjoys other children
- experiments with new words, loves to talk
- stuttering may appear
- emotional extremes
- vivid imagination (imaginary companions)
- battle of control - power struggles
- routines may become troublesome (mealtime, bedtime, etc.)
- better behaved with anyone other than primary caretakers
- very warm, loving and friendly at good times
- whining
- feeds self with little spilling
- loves silly rhyming

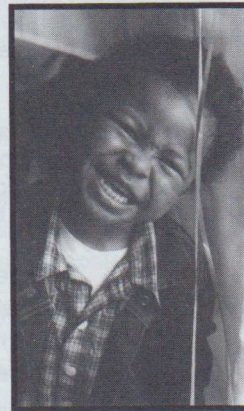
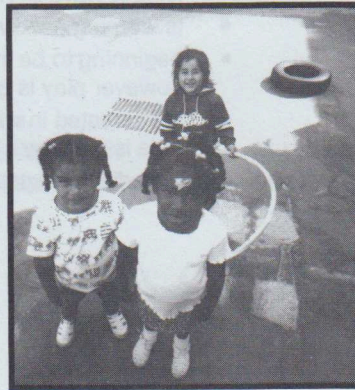


Photo by Kevan L. Carter



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