



Back-to-School Readiness Checklist

Everyday skills that help children participate in the school day.

Starting school involves more than knowing letters, numbers, and colors. Children also use self-care, motor, social, and regulation skills, as well as routine skills, throughout the school day.

Use this checklist to notice your child's strengths, identify areas that may need practice, and prepare for a smoother transition into school.

Self-Care Skills

My child is beginning to:

- ☐ Use the toilet with the level of support expected at school
- ☐ Communicate when they need to use the bathroom
- ☐ Manage clothing before and after toileting
- ☐ Wash and dry their hands
- ☐ Put on and remove a coat or jacket
- ☐ Put on and remove shoes
- ☐ Manage simple fasteners, such as snaps, zippers, or buttons
- ☐ Open common lunch and snack containers
- ☐ Drink from a cup, straw, or water bottle
- ☐ Eat using appropriate utensils
- ☐ Recognize and care for personal belongings

Fine-Motor Skills

My child is beginning to:

- ☐ Use crayons, pencils, markers, or chalk
- ☐ Make controlled marks on paper
- ☐ Use both hands together during play and school tasks
- ☐ Manipulate small objects, such as beads, blocks, and puzzle pieces
- ☐ Use scissors with supervision
- ☐ Open glue sticks and other classroom materials
- ☐ Turn pages one at a time
- ☐ Build with blocks or construction toys
- ☐ Complete simple lacing, peg, or matching activities
- ☐ Participate in hand-strengthening activities such as Play-Doh, tongs, or clothespins



Visual-Motor Skills

My child is beginning to:

- ☐ Complete age-appropriate puzzles
- ☐ Match colors, shapes, pictures, or objects
- ☐ Copy simple lines and shapes
- ☐ Color within a general area
- ☐ Build from a simple model
- ☐ Place objects into the correct spaces
- ☐ Follow a visual path or maze
- ☐ Find an item within a group of objects
- ☐ Notice similarities and differences
- ☐ Coordinate what they see with how their hands move

Social and Participation Skills

My child is beginning to:

- ☐ Separate from a caregiver with support
- ☐ Participate near or with other children
- ☐ Take turns during simple games and activities
- ☐ Share materials with adult support
- ☐ Ask for help when needed
- ☐ Communicate basic wants and needs
- ☐ Follow simple classroom directions
- ☐ Participate in a short group activity
- ☐ Transition between activities with support
- ☐ Understand basic personal-space expectations
- ☐ Begin to handle small changes in play or routines



Regulation and Sensory Skills

My child is beginning to:

- ☐ Recover after becoming upset with adult support
- ☐ Communicate when something feels uncomfortable
- ☐ Participate in a variety of movement activities
- ☐ Tolerate common classroom sounds and activity levels
- ☐ Sit or remain in a designated area for a short activity
- ☐ Transition away from a preferred activity
- ☐ Use calming supports such as movement, deep pressure, breathing, or a quiet space
- ☐ Participate in messy or hands-on activities at a comfortable level
- ☐ Adjust to changes with preparation and support
- ☐ Recognize when they need a break

School-Day Routines

My child is beginning to:

- ☐ Wake up and get ready around the expected school time
- ☐ Follow a simple morning routine
- ☐ Complete familiar tasks in a predictable order
- ☐ Use a picture or written schedule
- ☐ Pack and carry a backpack
- ☐ Keep school items in a consistent location
- ☐ Follow one- and two-step directions
- ☐ Clean up after an activity
- ☐ Transition from home to school
- ☐ Follow an after-school routine
- ☐ Participate in a consistent bedtime routine



Parent Tips for Building Readiness

- Begin practicing school routines before the first day.
- Work on one or two skills at a time.
- Use pictures, checklists, timers, or first-then language.
- Allow extra time while your child learns a new skill.
- Offer limited choices to reduce overwhelm.
- Practice opening lunch containers at home.
- Choose clothing and pack school items the night before.
- Create a consistent place for backpacks, shoes, and lunchboxes.
- Include movement and quiet time after school.
- Praise effort, problem-solving, and growing independence.
- Remember that readiness looks different for every child.

When to Ask an Occupational Therapist

Consider speaking with your child's teacher, healthcare provider, or occupational therapist when challenges regularly interfere with your child's ability to participate in home, school, or community routines.

An occupational therapy consultation may be helpful when a child:

- ☐ Has significant difficulty with dressing, toileting, feeding, or other self-care tasks
- ☐ Avoids or struggles with crayons, scissors, utensils, or classroom tools
- ☐ Has difficulty coordinating both hands
- ☐ Frequently bumps into objects, falls, or appears unusually cautious with movement
- ☐ Becomes overwhelmed by sounds, textures, crowds, clothing, or messy play
- ☐ Has intense or prolonged reactions to everyday transitions
- ☐ Has difficulty participating in classroom routines despite consistent support
- ☐ Struggles to sit, attend, or engage long enough to participate
- ☐ Has difficulty opening lunch containers or managing belongings
- ☐ Is showing a loss of previously developed skills
- ☐ Experiences challenges that cause stress for the child or family

This checklist is intended to support observation and preparation. It is not a developmental screening, diagnostic tool, or requirement for starting school. Children develop skills at different rates and may use different supports to participate successfully.