

Assessing School Readiness

As a pre-school teacher, you are trained to assess a child's readiness for school. But for parents who instinctively feel their child is not ready for school, or who need guidelines to work by, the following information may make a timely contribution to your newsletter.

Who is best at assessing school readiness?

Recent studies and research from Melbourne University indicate strongly that a kindergarten teacher or childcare worker who has had a child in their program for at least a year, is, in conjunction with the parent, the best professional to assess appropriately whether a child is ready to cope with, and meet the demands of, school.

How and when do we assess?

Assessment does not just begin around October of the year preceding school. It is a continual process which involves observations and documentation about the child's development over at least a year or more. This also involves regular discussion between parents and professionals. Aspects of development that are most crucial are social, emotional cognitive.

How is the final decision made?

Parents make the final decision as to whether they will send their child to school. However it is hoped that an informed decision will be made in consultation with the child's caregiver.

The social, emotional and cognitive developmental factors that are to be taken into consideration are:

Social

- able to play alongside others
- relates to adults
- awareness of others
- familiar with group situations

Emotional

- self help skills
- self expression
- expressing needs
- separation from parent

Cognitive

- knowing name
- attending and following through with task
- able to make small choices/ decisions

What may happen if a child attends school before they are ready.

Longitudinal studies indicate that if a child commences school before they are socially/ emotionally ready, they will exhibit peer and learning problems that become exacerbated during puberty.

There is more likelihood that children will need to repeat a year at school which is much more socially/emotionally difficult than having an additional year in an early childhood program.

Children are often so stressed trying to keep up socially with peers and following basic instructions that they miss the "teachable" learning moments in the classroom and fall behind in their understanding and skills.

Children find commencing and attending school so stressful that their attitudes about school and learning are often negative and become habits in subsequent years. This often leads to early dropping out of school in mid secondary years.

If children find the school experience negative, their self-esteem and levels of confidence are significantly marred, leading to less risk-taking and increased reluctance to "give things a go".

As a valuable handout for parents, *A Page for Parents* follows with some guidelines on what parents can do to help prepare their child for school, and on how they can choose a school for their child to meet the needs of the child and the family. No permission is required to photocopy and distribute.