

## **Late Dates: When Should my Child Start Kindergarten?**

The decision about when to start a child in kindergarten has been made increasingly difficult in past years because different schools have different “cut-off” dates for school entry, ranging from June 1<sup>st</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup> (that is, the child must turn 5 by the cut-off date in the year he starts kindergarten). And with more children attending schools with earlier application deadlines, parents may have to consider their child’s readiness many months before their child would enter kindergarten.

Since some parents think that it is better for a child to be one of the oldest in the class rather than one of the youngest, some kinds, especially boys, are often “held back.” For that reason, the age range in some kindergarten classes can be as broad as sixteen or even eighteen months. This age range can make it hard for children at any point on the spectrum, depending on the expectations of the teachers and the school.

In order to make the best decision for your child, talk to the principal at the elementary school to find out the typical age of incoming kindergarteners. There may be a cluster of “young fives,” or it may be that your child would be one of very few summer-born children. Your child’s age in comparison to the average age in the class is probably more important than his actual birth date.

It’s also a good idea to observe the kindergarten program itself and get a sense through observation and talking to the teacher about the school’s expectations for this group. Some kindergartens are designed to be a transition time for children from the playful and less structured world of preschool to the more formal world of “real school.” In some kindergarten classes, for example, children have many opportunities to move about and to engage in different activities. Another kindergarten class might expect the children to spend more time at tables or desks doing activities that require the ability to sit still and concentrate on fine-motor activities. Your child’s development level as well as his temperament would influence whether he would do well in the more “advanced” kindergarten setting.

Your memories of kindergarten may not be the best guide to what kindergarten looks like now. In California public schools, today’s kindergarten curriculum is similar to the first grade curriculum of the 1960s. Some private schools, the curriculum can be even more advanced.

Parents should think about certain “yellow lights” (proceed with caution) in making the decision to start kindergarten.

### **Yellow Lights**

- Your child will turn 5 after September 1 (for public school) or June 1 (private school).
- Your child is a first-born child. The oldest child in the family may be more adult-oriented and have fewer skills in negotiating with peers.
- Your child has been slow in fine-motor development. If he has trouble with cutting with scissors, holding a pencil or crayon, or other activities requiring small motor skills, some of the kindergarten activities will be harder for him.
- If your child has been slow in learning to express herself verbally, she may need more time to mature. A 4-year-old’s speech should be understandable by all adults. If it is not, ask your health care provider for help in getting a speech evaluation.

If your child’s preschool teacher expresses concern, listen carefully. Teachers are usually aware of expectations in local schools.

None of these “yellow lights” by itself should be a deciding factor, but if your child has several, it’s a good reason to observe the new school and to confer with your preschool teacher.