

WHY AND HOW SHOULD LEARNING FOR PRESCHOOLERS CONTINUE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Developmental Milestones & Skills for 5-year-olds

At a Glance

- Kindergartners can typically hop, skip, jump, and dance.
- They often talk in long sentences — and all the time.
- Kindergartners usually start understanding right and wrong and notice how other kids act.

Starting kindergarten is a major milestone for 5-year-olds and their families. It's a big year for learning to do new things and for gaining skills. You may wonder how their skills measure up to those of other kids in the class.

Check out these developmental milestones to get a sense of which skills are typical for 5-year-olds.

Physical milestones

Kids are very active at this age. You may even have trouble keeping up as they begin to run, hop, skip, and jump without tripping over their own feet. As kids near the end of kindergarten, most are able to do things like this:

Gross motor skills

- Walk on their tiptoes and heel-to-toe, like on a balance beam
- Jump rope and pump their legs to swing alone
- Stand and hop on each foot

- Catch a ball the size of a softball
- Start to move in more coordinated ways, doing things like swimming, dribbling a basketball, or dancing

Fine motor skills

- Use one hand more than the other (sometimes called “hand dominance”)
- Hold a pencil using a tripod grip (two fingers and a thumb)
- Cut out basic shapes with scissors; may be able to cut a straight line
- Use a fork, spoon, and knife easily
- Be able to wipe and wash after using the bathroom

Cognitive milestones

Kindergartners think in fun and creative ways. They also start to learn facts and begin to grasp some basic academic concepts. Many kids can recognize some words by sight, like *the* and *me*, and they begin sounding out three-letter words, like *hat*. By the end of kindergarten, many kids can also do things like:

- Recognize and name colors and basic shapes
- Know the letters of the alphabet and letter sounds
- Recite their name, address, and phone number
- Understand basic concepts about print (like knowing which way the pages go and that words are read left to right and top to bottom)
- Know that stories have a beginning, middle, and end
- Count groups of objects up to 10 and recite numbers to 20
- Stick with an activity for 15 minutes and finish a short project
- Make plans about how to play, what to build, or what to draw

Language milestones:

By the time kids are approaching age 6, many of them talk a mile a minute. They're able to understand and can use thousands of words — usually in sentences five to eight words long. Most 5-year-olds have the language skills to:

- Use words to argue and try to reason with people (*because* is a commonly used word)
- Use most plurals and pronouns
- Tell stories, jokes, and riddles, and may understand simple puns
- Talk about opposites and compare things (“That black cat is smaller than the white one.”)
- Talk about things that are going to happen and things that have already happened (using tense and time correctly)
- Follow simple multi-step directions

Social and emotional milestones:

This school year, kids don't just make friends and express their feelings. They also start understanding complicated things like right and wrong. Many 5-year-olds also:

- Want to act like their friends and seek their approval
- Become jealous of other people spending time with “their” friends
- Follow the rules most of the time and may criticize kids who don't follow the rules
- Enjoy showing off; they'll sing, dance, or be silly to get attention
- Want approval and to be taken seriously
- May have tantrums or get angry if they think they're not being listened to
- Start to understand why it's helpful to share and get along with other kids

Remember that all kids develop at their own pace. But if a 5-year-old hasn't met most of these milestones, it's a good idea for parents and caregivers to talk to a health care provider and the teacher to sort out what's going on.

Reading Skills

- Match each letter to the sound it represents
- Identify the beginning, middle, and ending sounds in spoken words like *dog* or *sit*
- Say new words by changing the beginning sound, like changing *rat* to *sat*
- Start matching words they hear to words they see on the page
- Sound out simple words
- Start to recognize some words by sight without having to sound them out
- Ask and answer who, what, where, when, why, and how questions about a story
- Retell a story in order, using words or pictures
- Predict what happens next in a story
- Start reading or asking to be read books for information and for fun
- Use story language during playtime or conversation (like “I can fly!” the dragon said. “I can fly!”)

Writing Skills

- Hold pencil correctly and form letters accurately
- Know the sounds letters make and spell words based on how they sound
- Spell some common words that aren’t spelled the way they sound (often called sight words)
- Use different endings for the same word, like *walks*, *walking*, and *walked*
- In kindergarten, label pictures with a few words and begin to write simple sentences with correct grammar
- By the end of first or second grade, write a page or more about personal experiences and what they’re learning in school
- May start using different types of writing, like narratives and opinion papers (“Why I liked this book”)

Math Skills

- Add by counting the fingers on one hand — 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 — and starting with 6 on the second hand
- Identify the larger of two numbers and recognize numerals up to 20
- Copy or draw symmetrical shapes
- Start using very basic maps to find a “hidden treasure”
- Begin to understand basic time concepts, like morning or days of the week
- Follow multi-step directions that use words like *first* and *next*
- Understand the meaning of words like *unlikely* or *possible*

Remember that all kids develop at their own pace. But if a 5-year-old hasn't met most of these milestones, it's a good idea for parents and caregivers to talk to a health care provider and the teacher to sort out what's going on.

Reference:

Morin, A., n.d. *Understood - For learning and thinking differences*.

[online] Understood.org. Available at:

<<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/signs-symptoms/developmental-milestones/skill-development-from-birth-to-age-5>> [Accessed 23 April 2021].