

** Parents often approach me with questions about what is common and developmentally appropriate for their child's age. In collaboration with the school counselor at St. Joseph, we researched and compiled information about kindergartners. Be aware that children move through these stages at different rates, some sooner, some later. I hope this is helpful. - Denise Rousso, St Anne School Counselor*

Your Kindergartner

Common Cognitive, Social and Emotional Developmental Behaviors of Kindergartners*

Classroom

- The kindergartner's brain thrives and actually grows in response to novelty. Activities such as exploring, playing and inventing cause the brain to secrete *dopamine*, a chemical that stimulates the development of neural pathways.
- Attention span is about 5-15 minutes long. Limiting TV watching (one hour a day) will prevent over-stimulation of their neurological system. Engaging in activities that require focus and concentration instead will increase this attention span; activities such as board games and activities that require self-control (such as "Simon Says") will serve to enhance these skills.
- Needs the "o.k." from adults to transition and go to a new activity. Needs approval and is dependent on authority, "Can I...?"
- Adult modeling and role-playing provide chances to learn and practice skills.
- Likes to argue and reason; uses words like "because."
- Some become stuck in repetitive behavior (drawing rainbows or flowers) for fear of making a mistake when trying new things.

Social/Emotional

- Recognizes right from wrong, honest from dishonest, but does not recognize *intent*. Reminding them that sometimes actions from others are not on purpose helps to de-escalate anger when they are feeling wronged.
- Although children of this age may lie or take others' things, this is done out of immaturity rather than malice. In fact, lying is a sign of development because it shows that children are now able to understand that other people can believe or be convinced to believe that something is true that is not.
- Expresses anger and jealousy physically; bound cognitively to their senses – has a hard time understanding abstract concepts such as "fairness."
- Needs help from adults in using words to recognize and describe their emotions; "I can see you're angry with me right now...."
- Prefers company of 1 to 2 children at a time and may be bossy or sulky when others join in. Often excludes other children in play – "best friends" only. Takes turns and shares (sometimes).
- Needs/wants to conform and may be critical of others who don't.
- Plays with both boys and girls but prefers same sex.
- May still confuse reality and fantasy at times.
- Sometimes needs to get away and be alone.
- Can be wonderful at home, terrible at school or vice versa.

Communication Style:

- Very literal; uses words in their most basic or usual sense.
- Often does not communicate about school at home.
- Thinks out loud. "I am going to move my truck now."
- Uses swear words or "bathroom words" to get attention.
- Equivocates-can switch from "yes" to "no" or vice versa.

You're the best judge of your child's development and what is "normal" for him or her. Just when you think you've figured out your child, something changes. You may find strategies that once worked no longer have any impact on him or her. Don't worry, this is normal. If you would like more resources or information, please contact your pediatrician or you may contact Denise Rousso, St. Anne School Counselor, at 206-282-3538, ext. 115 or at drousso@stannesea.org.

My Kindergartner Doesn't Play Well With Others

By Debra Collins, Family therapist, Contributor to greatschools.com

QUESTION:

My 5-year-old son doesn't play well when he has play dates at our house. He asks to have friends over all the time, but when the kids come over, he doesn't play with them well. He asks to watch a movie or play with his dad or I or doesn't want to do what his friends are doing.

He also has trouble in a group of three boys. Two of them leave him out, and he doesn't know how to play with the group. There is a little clique already. It seems if the group isn't doing what he wants, then he is upset. I don't think I raised him to be like that. Is it an age thing, or is he just being a brat?

Most of our play dates end with my son in his room because he is in trouble for not playing well with others. I hate for that to happen. How can I help him?

ANSWER:

Without personally knowing you or your child, I can say that much of his behavior appears to be developmentally appropriate. Five-year-olds can look capable, but they are still only 5, and at this age they tend to not seek out things that are new or difficult.

It is a positive sign that your son is requesting opportunities to play with his friends. When he doesn't know how to play cooperatively, his asking you to play with him or watch a movie is a better coping strategy than fighting with the other children. You could highlight it as strength rather than focus on when he gets in conflicts. He may need more assistance from you with his peers so that he has alternative behaviors for when he isn't getting along.

Child development experts consistently report that three children at a time does not work well. There is a greater chance for two to gang up on the other. A 5-year-old often prefers to keep to himself if a situation is stressful. You might want to start with one child over at a time and provide an activity for them to do together. This might help them feel more comfortable and provide some direction.

Although you want your son to have many different play experiences, having him and a friend watch an occasional children's movie might be easier than unstructured play. Ask the friend's parents for permission to view a movie at your home that everyone is comfortable with. You can watch it with them and then talk about it together.

Prepare your son for the play date by going over what you expect of him in a nonjudgmental and supportive way. Ask him to think of ways he could solve problems with his friend, and then you can rehearse it. Make the play date manageable by starting with only an hour at first and building up to more time.

Advice from our Great Schools' experts is not a substitute for professional diagnosis or treatment from a health-care provider or learning expert familiar with your unique situation. Great Schools recommends consulting a qualified professional if you have concerns about your child's condition.

Your Kindergartner References (from front):

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