

What makes a child school-ready?



Every elementary school teacher knows (and child development experts confirm) that “school-readiness” involves more than just knowing your ABCs. Just as essential to academic success is a set of skills that enables children to recognize and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and control their impulses and behavior sufficiently to get along in a group of children and take advantage of group instruction. These skills, collectively, are called social-emotional skills.

Studies point to a specific cluster of social-emotional skills—called self-regulation skills—as particularly important for a variety of school successes. **Children who display strong self-regulation are better able to control their impulses, pay attention, work flexibly toward goals, and show an ability to plan and organize their actions.** A self-regulated child, for example, will be able to wait his or her turn in line without frustration, will resist blurting out answers when other children have been asked a question, and might even be observed suggesting fair solutions to a playground problem.

But . . . won't children just learn these skills when they get older? Or do we actually need to devote time specifically to developing children's social-emotional skills? Well, actually . . . no and no.



Activities

Try these Kindermusik-style activities that promote social-emotional skill development:

- * Create a game out of *stopping*. It takes a lot of self-regulation for a young child to stop what he or she is doing. Try a follow-the-leader game that goes something like this (you be the “caller”—your child will have to listen to you for cues): Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, aaaaaand STOP. (Pause for a couple seconds.) Now wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, aaaaaand STOP. (You get the idea. Boy, is it hard to stop! But boy, is it good practice.)
- * Pass an instrument around the dinner table, giving each person a turn to play it.
- * If you can gather a couple friends, try a circle dance. Choreograph movements that require children to cooperate, move in sync with a group and/or partners, and listen to and follow oral instruction.
- * Next time it's clean-up time at your house, make up a clean-up song. Then use your clean-up song any time you want to stop an activity and shift your child into clean-up mode. Using music as an indicator of routines and transitions is remarkably effective. And who knew “self-regulation” could be fun?

- * **Early childhood is the time to infuse social-emotional skills into a child's learning, not when school begins.** Children who begin school already able to interact positively with others are statistically already at a great advantage.
- * But social-emotional skills don't need their own "class time". **This kind of learning can and should be woven organically into the other experiences and content-learning children are engaging in.**

So . . . wanna know something neat?

- * **Music and music instruction have been revealed as natural means for promoting self-regulation.** Studies have linked participation in music lessons with significant increases in attention and perseverance. In fact, one study measured three- and four-year-old children enrolled in Kindermusik against those not enrolled in Kindermusik. The Kindermusik children performed consistently higher on four separate age-appropriate tasks designed specifically to measure self-regulation skills.

For years, parents have indicated that one of their top reasons for attending Kindermusik classes with their children is the social aspect of the gathering. At last (and, it seems, as always?), science has caught up with parents' intuition. The benefits of gathering with other children for Kindermusik instruction—enabling this set of essential school-readiness skills to develop and thrive—is perhaps even greater than we knew.



Find a class and enroll at www.kindermusik.com.

Ducenne, L. (2005). "The Role of Age, Music, and Parenting on Children's Compliance and Self-Regulation." Doctoral Thesis, George Mason University.

Shonkoff, J.P. & Phillips, D.A., eds. (2000). "The growth of self-regulation is a cornerstone of early childhood development that cuts across all domains of behavior." *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

