

Me, Me, Me, My Family, and Now—My School!

***Important things to know about —
Your child in Kindergarten***

- What to expect from your child at ages 5-6.
- The big changes that occur halfway through the year (see characteristics on page 2).
- What you can do to help your child enjoy school, succeed, and look forward to first grade: Love, love, love; read, read, read.

Lucky You, Lucky Kids...

Lucky us. Children at age five and six are usually so happy and excited about themselves, their families, and now their school, that they're fun to be around.

Children are excited about learning since they've been doing it from day one. We humans are born to learn, so kids do not find learning scary. To them, it's fun!

Think about all the things they have learned about their world. It's really amazing. Learning is like play for these little ones, and in fact, they learn best *through* play. So relax and enjoy their excitement. Just don't expect them to have long answers about school. "Good" and "Fine" is about it for now.

Expect the first half of kindergarten to go pretty well, but expect some change/challenges in the second half. That's because their minds, bodies, and emotions are developing so rapidly. Change at this period is *so* fast and *so* complex that it's hard to keep up. Be patient; it's confusing and hard on them too.

Here are two examples of gain/loss/change at this age: It's common for these kids to learn a new skill, like writing letters or words, and a half-year later, as their vision develops in complex ways, to reverse the order of the letters. Socially, their moods can go

from joyful and wanting to please us to *needing* to test us, test the rules, and even try out being "naughty." Use fair and firm rules when needed.

So Many Changes = Big Need for Stability

Providing a safe, stable, loving home life *really* helps your child cope with all the changes in their lives. *Sleep and breakfast are essential!* Try to make your home as calm and stable as you can. "Fried" kids need calm adults.

Pick a schedule that works best for you. Set aside the same times each day for meals, TV, and bedtime. Mealtime is "turn off TV" time! Let children know that you really want to listen to them. Keep this up, and they'll still be talking to you as teens.

Here are three additional things adults can do to help children become happy and successful learners:

- Give lots of love and attention. Read, read, read to them. Help them "read" to you by pointing to pictures, telling you the story, or making up a new story. Children who spend time with families and who enjoy reading do well throughout their school years.
- Spend time with them around the house. Teach them to set the table and help pick up the house. Tasks like these help them learn hand-eye coordination. Play and paint with them. Let them cook with you. All of this develops skills and teaches them about life and being a family.
- Limit TV time. *TV acts like just like a drug. It shuts down their bodies; it shuts down their brains. If it's on, they aren't learning.* Think of TV as sleep time. Too much is *not* a good thing! ***A learning brain uses 20% of a child's energy,***

so children must have eight hours of sleep and a nutritious breakfast to be able to learn.

Six-Year-Olds in Kindergarten

Age six is a period of amazing changes for children.

You'll notice the physical growth and hear a lot of complaints that their teeth hurt. Their teeth are erupting and so they chew on anything they can find: pencils, fingernails, books, worksheets, anything to relieve the hurt. Don't add being yelled at to the list of hurts – they truly can't help it, and it will pass.

They have also added a lot of speed to their lives, as if the speed of inner changes is driving them forward at a breakneck pace. They want to be first, or last, and work gets done in a hurry and is often sloppy. Tasks are rushed to see "what's next?" At this stage, adults need to praise the attempts and repeat to themselves, "It's the process, not the product."

Six is also the time of the biggest intellectual growth-surts in their lives. These amazing beings are extremely open to new ideas, are eager to learn, and are very, very curious—propelled by lots of *energy and joy*.

They can also think symbolically, understand concepts, and begin to see how and why things happen. Cause and effect now make sense, as do the differences and similarities of things.

Sixes have also changed socially and emotionally. Friends have become as important as family. They are hard-working, even if sloppy. They want to be first, are not always a "good sport," and are very confident and very insecure. Criticism is met with a flood of tears; praise with hugs and smiles. It is your choice!

Most importantly, enjoy your six-year-old. It truly is a miraculous year.

Characteristics of a typical five-year-old

Physical	Young brains and bodies are growing very quickly, but not always in a "straight line." <i>Expect some gains and losses at each age.</i> Eyes focus on things close-by. Small movements like writing and drawing are difficult. Younger fives can pace themselves; older fives tire easily.
Mental/Academic	Learns best with body, hands, and muscles. Needs both structure and adventure, plus lots of physical outdoor activity. Active, physical learning is best for brains and bodies at this age. <i>Passive TV watching is harmful!</i> Use blocks, finger paints, arts/crafts, and dramatic fantasy play. Flash cards are <i>not</i> needed; at this stage, <i>play is learning!</i>
Emotional/Social	Younger fives are eager to please. They want and need to know the rules. They are very literal. However, <i>younger children are not capable of seeing things from another's point of view.</i> Explain the rules and consequences and move on. Older fives need to test rules, try new things, and even fail. Give lots of reassurance and encouragement to try again.

Based on *Yardsticks Children in the Classroom Ages 4 – 14*, by Chip Woods, NE Foundation for Children, Turner Falls, MA, rev. ed. 2007. and, *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards*, by Kathy-Hirsh-Pasek, Ph. D., et.al., 2003.

Characteristics of a typical six-year-old

Physical	Active with somewhat better control of body, but still awkward and tends to fall sideways out of chairs. Likes lots of physical activity, but tires easily and is often sick. Vision maturing, so reads more easily. Eyes can't track well from left to right, so points to one word at a time. Chews pencils, hair, fingernails to help with discomfort of new teeth coming in. Being speedy seems a need. Expect sloppy work. "It's the process, not the product."
Mental/Academic	Loves new games and new ideas. Enjoys cooperating with others. Asks LOTS of questions, loves to paint, color, and be in plays. Tries way more than can finish, no sense of the amount of time things take or how to take steps. Uses symbols, has a better understanding of past when tied to present. Beginning to take an interest in specific skills and techniques. Inborn skills start to show up this year. Watch for their interests and help them explore ways to enjoy what they love.
Emotional/Social	Competition is natural at this age, so not always a "good sport." Either rushing or falling behind. Enjoys dressing up and putting on plays with other kids. They are easily upset when they make mistakes or are criticized. Need LOTS of reassurance. It's time to test authority, complain, tattle and even throw tantrums. Be patient but firm when needed.

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