

## Social Competence: Helping your Child with School Readiness

All parents want their children to succeed in school; to enjoy learning and playing with others, to explore new opportunities, and to be able to take advantage of the many learning experiences offered.

School readiness is the term often used to describe a child's ability to meet the tasks of the school setting. Often, people assume this means knowing ABCs and having other academic skills, but that is not truly school readiness. Many other areas of development have an impact on how a child will do at school. Readiness for school means that a child is able to take advantage of the learning environment and experiences provided in school.

In many communities across Canada, school readiness is measured through a teacher-completed checklist called the Early Development Instrument (EDI). Developed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, the EDI looks at 5 main areas of school readiness. These areas or domains are Physical Health and Well-being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

Children who start school ready to learn are more likely to continue to thrive. Many studies have shown that children who do well in kindergarten, continue to succeed in the early grades and are more likely to complete high school. They also have better long term outcomes in the areas of health and career success. On the other hand, children who are not developmentally ready for school are considered vulnerable; they are likely to find the expectations of school difficult, and to struggle to succeed both in the early grades and in later years.

In this column, let's look at the developmental domain or area of "Social Competence", and how a parent can encourage readiness in this area.

This area of development looks at a child's social development which includes **curiosity and eagerness to try new experiences**. Parents can encourage this by providing a variety of experiences for their children, introducing new games, toys, and interacting together through recreation, outings, and any other new activities. Parents can remember that what is a common experience for an adult, may be new and exciting to a child. Some examples are riding the bus, going to the dump, watching the work of large machines at a construction site, attending a parade, or visiting a farm. Parents should talk about what they see, encourage questions and answer them. Another very important part of school success is the **ability to get along with other children and adults. It also includes showing respect for others and for property, self control, and an ability to follow rules and routines**. Parents can help their children with these skills by creating opportunities for children to play with other children, through arranging play dates, participating in play groups, and or enrolling the child in an early learning program or preschool. Parents will need to guide a child's behaviour, pointing out the need to share, take turns, treat others kindly, take care of toys, clothes and other property. Parents can also help children to use self control, by modeling and reinforcing appropriate behaviour. Having certain regular routines at home helps children to adapt to the structure of school. To help children be ready to learn from a teacher, children should have spent time with adults other than their parents. Relatives, family friends, child care providers, are all adults that children can learn from. Parents can help children to understand that other

families may have different rules, that a coach or caregiver is someone to listen to. Another area of readiness for the child is to know what is **acceptable public behaviour**. Such things as walking, not running in a crowded area, using appropriate language and 'an inside voice', not grabbing things in stores, being able to wait in a line are all experiences that children will benefit from having, before they arrive at school.

There are many other suggestions and sources of information to help a child develop in the area of Social Competence. In general, the more experiences that a child has in social situations with other children and adults, the more he or she will be comfortable in these group settings and able to get along. Then, the child will be able to enjoy the company of other classmates, will know what is expected regarding behaviour, and will be more likely to benefit from the experiences provided in school.

The following websites are a reliable source of information:

[www.investinkids.ca](http://www.investinkids.ca)

<http://www.zerotothree.org>

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