

Parents often approach us with questions about what is common and developmentally appropriate for their child's age.

We are grateful to school counselors Denise Rousso (St. Anne) and Jennifer Moyer-Taylor (St. Joseph) for allowing us to reproduce this short compilation of their research in order to assist you in navigating these sometimes challenging, yet wonderful times.

Be aware that children move through these stages at different rates, some sooner, some later.

We hope you find their words helpful.

Your Kindergartener

Common Cognitive, Social and Emotional Developmental Behaviors of Kindergarten

Classroom:

- Parents and caregivers have a significant impact on a child's development at this age. Neurons are sprouting dendrites that transmit information to other cells of the body. This builds cognitive pathways that create every individual's "brain architecture".
- Kindergartners' brains actually grow in response to novelty and challenges because curiosity secretes *dopamine*—a chemical in control of the *pleasure and reward center* that stimulates the dendrite expansion that wires the brain.
- A kindergartner's attention span is about 5-15 minutes long and limiting TV watching (one hour a day) will reduce the over-stimulation to their neurological system. Engaging in activities that require focus and concentration instead will increase this attention span; activities such as board games, activities that require self-control (such as "Simon Says") and meditation will serve to enhance these skills.
- Can be oppositional—not sure whether to be good or "naughty".
- 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.
- Still may confuse reality and fantasy.
- Some become stuck in repetitive behavior (drawing rainbows) for fear of making a mistake when trying new things.

Social / Emotional Behaviors:

- Distinguishes right from wrong, honest from dishonest, but does not recognize *intent*. Reminding them that sometimes actions from others are not on purpose might help de-escalate anger when assuming someone has "wronged them".
- Seeks to play rather than be alone, friends are important.
- Needs/wants to conform and may be critical of others who don't.
- Needs help from adults in using words to describe their emotions.
- Seldom able to see things from another's point of view.
- Temper tantrums, striking out are common.
- Wonderful at home, terrible at school and vice versa.

Communication style

- Very literal and succinct.
- Often does not communicate about school at home.
- Thinks out loud. "I am going to move my truck now."
- Equivocates—sometimes "yes", sometimes "no".

*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.***

Information compiled by Jennifer Moyer-Taylor, St. Joseph School Counselor and Denise Rousso, St. Anne School Counselor. For permission to customize, copy and circulate, please call Denise Rousso at 206-282-3538 X115 or email at drouso@stannesea.org. Copyright 2012.

Ask the Experts – A snapshot of a common friendship behavior

My Kindergartner Doesn't Play Well With Others

By Debra Collins, Family Therapist

QUESTION:

My 5-year-old son doesn't play well when he has playdates 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 me or his dad 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 playdates 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 playdate 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 playdate manageable by starting with only an hour at first and building up to more time.

Advice from 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. If you have any questions or concerns about your child, consult your pediatrician.

Your Kindergartener References

Collins, Debra. In Social Skills. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from

In *Developmental Milestones*: Retrieved August 18, 2011, from [greatschools.com](http://www.greatschools.com).

<http://www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/1494-kindergartner-doesn't-play-well.gs>

Pellissier, Hank. Retrieved on September 2, 2011. www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/slideshows/4403-brain-kindergartner.gs

Wood, Chip (1997). *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom 4-14*. Maine: Northeast Foundation for Children.