



03

FREE RESOURCE

Is My Child Ready for School?

Not the government checklist. The real one, from a qualified early childhood educator who works in this space every day.

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The readiness gap nobody warned you about

Most parents spend the year before school worrying about the wrong things. Letters, numbers, and counting to twenty are not what separate children who thrive from children who struggle in their first year of school.

Here is what a qualified early childhood educator who works in the transition space every day actually watches for. These are the seven skills that predict a smooth start to school. Not one of them is academic.

"The children who arrive ready for school are not the ones who write their name the clearest. They are the ones who can sit with a feeling they do not like and not be consumed by it."

Valando Demetriou, Co-Founder · Bachelor of Education, Flinders University

WHAT PARENTS FOCUS ON

Alphabet recognition. Counting to 20.
Writing their name. Knowing colours and shapes. Academic pre-skills that schools will teach anyway.

WHAT TEACHERS ACTUALLY NEED

Emotional regulation. Independent toileting. Following multi-step instructions. Persistence through challenge. Separation without crisis.

The good news: every skill on this list is developmentally buildable. And most of them are exactly what structured creative experiences develop in children aged 3 to 6.

What to look for before school starts

Use this checklist 6 to 12 months before your child's school start date. It is a conversation starter, not a verdict. Direction of growth is what matters, not perfection.

☐ **1. Emotional Regulation**

Can they sit with a big feeling without it derailing the whole day? This is not about never crying. It is about whether they can feel something hard and continue functioning. Watch for the speed of recovery.

☐ **2. Separation**

Can they spend time away from you without sustained crisis? Some resistance is normal and healthy. Sustained, inconsolable distress that does not settle after a reasonable transition period is worth addressing before school starts.

☐ **3. Following Instructions**

Can they follow a 2 to 3 step sequence without prompting? "Put your bag away, wash your hands, and sit at the table." If each step requires a separate reminder, practise multi-step directions at home in low-pressure moments.

☐ **4. Independent Toileting**

Can they manage toileting completely without adult assistance, including all clothing management? This is a non-negotiable for classroom function. If this is not in place, it is the single most important practical skill to prioritise right now.

☐ **5. Persistence**

Do they stay with a hard task for at least 5 to 10 minutes without adult intervention? Watch what happens when something goes wrong. Do they keep going, ask for help, or give up? All responses are data, not judgements.

☐ **6. Peer Interaction**

Can they play alongside or with other children without constant adult mediation? Conflict is normal and healthy. The question is whether they have any tools for navigating it at all.

☐ **7. Fine Motor Foundation**

Can they hold a pencil, use scissors, and manage buttons and zips? Not perfectly, but functionally. Fine motor development is one of the most overlooked readiness skills. See Guide 05 for age-by-age specifics.

What it really is, and how to build it before school

Emotional regulation is the single most frequently cited challenge by prep and reception teachers in Australia. It is also the most misunderstood concept in the pre-school parent space.

WHAT IT IS NOT

Never having big feelings. Never getting upset. Always being calm. Being "easy" or "low maintenance." Compliance without emotion.

WHAT IT IS

The ability to experience a big feeling and move through it without it overtaking everything around it. Recovery, not the absence of emotion.

Emotional regulation is a skill. It is taught, practised, and built. It does not arrive automatically at age 5. Here is how to build it at home:

01

Name the feeling before you try to fix it.

"You are feeling really frustrated right now." Naming an emotion activates the prefrontal cortex, the thinking brain. It is literally neurologically regulating to have an emotion named accurately and without judgement.

02

Give the feeling time. Do not rush past it.

Fixing, distracting, or minimising a feeling teaches children that feelings are inconvenient and should be hidden. Allow the emotion to exist before you help them move through it.

03

Teach the language of the body.

"Where do you feel it? Is your chest tight? Is your face hot?" Body awareness is emotional literacy. Children who can feel and name their physical state regulate more effectively than those who cannot.

THE 6-MONTH WINDOW

The 6 months before school are your best development window. Focus on

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