

Many children enter kindergarten at age five. Some at age six. And some at four. While many parents focus on academics, a child's school readiness also depends on his attention span, physical and motor skills, social skills, attitudes and interests in learning, and overall behaviour.

What is the right

BY CONAN BUSINGE

One of the most often asked questions, especially by first-time parents, is: "When is the right time to send my child to school?" Although some nurseries start accepting children at a much earlier age, they all seem to agree that the right age to start pre-school is three years.

Joyce Akugizibwe, a retired nursery teacher, says: "Readiness for pre-school has more to do with the time when a child is mentally set for the new life."

"Is your child socially, emotionally and physically ready to participate in daily, structured school programmes with other children?" she asks. Many children begin kindergarten at the age of three or four and a handful at the age of five.

By policy, the education ministry recommends that children must be at least three years of age to begin



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nursery school so that by the start of primary school, they are celebrating their sixth

birthday, the recommended age for Primary One entrance.

Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo, the state minister for higher education, says:

"There is a limit to what the brain can handle at a certain age. Care should be taken

Official view

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Psychologists and teachers agree that between three and four years of age are perfect timing. They argue that there is a huge difference between two years and three years, not just developmentally, but in terms of confidence too.

"Some schools are money-oriented and may accept the child, who is too young to even say their name. So, when you take them at just

three years below and they are asked a simple question which they cannot answer, they may freak out and start crying," Beatrice Nandawula, a counselling psychologist, says.

"Such a child is bullied by friends for always lagging behind. It affects them," she adds. Beatrice Langah, a child counsellor at Family Life Network Counselling Centre in Kansaanga, says despite some schools permitting children below the age of four to join kindergarten, the best age should be four.

Langah explains that children should be allowed to spend more time with their parents before joining kindergarten. This helps children, to learn socialising and basic values.

She notes that in a nursery school setting, most children compete for attention from their teachers, something that could have been avoided if the child was at home. "At home, it is always a one-on-one interaction between a

parent and a child," she says. Langah further clarifies that toddlers best learn in less structured environments unlike those of kindergartens, where everything is done at a particular time.

"At home, parents can teach their children numbers, colours, drawing, values, which they can absorb perfectly since they get a lot of freedom and gratification from being taught by their parents," she adds.

Mary Giles, who has spent a large proportion of her 30-year career teaching infants in the UK, believes that children who are barely four on entering junior infants may struggle to catch up. "When a child is barely four, they are more immature. They find it more difficult to look after

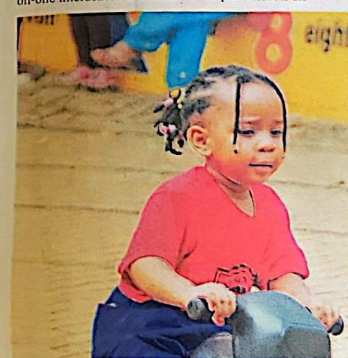
their belongings, to do basic things, such as tie their coat or open their lunch-box," she explains.

She believes that an extra six months and time spent in preschool, can make a big difference. A pre-school is an

educational establishment offering early childhood education to children between the ages of three and five, prior to the commencement of compulsory education at primary school.

However, Giles emphasises that home preparation for the child is huge. Teaching children to be a little self-sufficient, giving them a bit of

responsibility and preparing them in a positive way for the excitement and the new experience of entering school are all important factors in helping them become ready.



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age to start nursery school?