

## COURSEWATCH 😔

Parenting

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A year's gain

Dr Sitara Vickram explains the importance of starting school at the right age

**P**arents are keen to send their children to school as early as possible - sometimes even as young as 3 years for LKG. They believe they are "saving a year" for their child. However, parents need to think about the many advantages of being an older child at the time of school entry.

Here is a common scenario. Arjun and Mithun (names changed) were class mates in STD I. Arjun quickly became the favourite of his teachers and made many friends in class. He learnt quickly and was bold. He was even good at many physical activities. His parents were pleased with his progress. Mithun on the other hand was

the very opposite. He was shy, was a below average performer in writing, reading and spelling tasks. He also found it a challenge to compete in cocurricular activities. His parents were told that their son was "slow to learn".



Why is there such a difference between the two? Well, very often parents (and schools) overlook the most fundamental factor that explains the difference. Arjun was born in January and Mithun was born in December of the same year. Arjun was 11 months older than Mithun! One year is a long time in the life of a 6 year old — Arjun was therefore physically and mentally far better developed than Mithun. If Mithun had been in a class one year lower he may have been an Arjun!Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), UK found that younger children scored substantially lower in national achievement tests and other measures. At the age of seven, they are more than three times as likely to be regarded as "below average" in reading, writing and maths. They are also more likely to be unhappy at school and to have



experienced bullying.

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Special Education

Will Mithun not catch up at some point? Increasingly, evidence from many studies implies that this early advantage has a lasting impact.

Younger children are more likely to become labelled as low achievers and they often start to view themselves as such. A child's self esteem and perception of himself in comparison with his peers develops in early childhood. A child who is too young for her class often comes to think of herself as less capable in comparison to her older peers.

It seems that what starts out as a developmental disadvantage becomes a real one as the older child gets selected for tournaments, competitions etc to represent his / her school. The child gets extra attention and coaching and eventually this becomes a real advantage.

Faced with a choice of putting a child in an earlier or later class, the wise parent should choose the latter. The ideal age of entry to LKG should be 4 years and STD I at 6 years. There is the mistaken impression among people that their child will "lose a year" if they are put in a class lower than what they are officially eligible for.

In fact, the truth is that these children are "gifted an extra year" by their parents — a year in which they dramatically increase their chances of being successful in their lives.



A child's perception of himself in comparison with his peers develops in early childhood. A child who is too young for her class often comes to think of herself as less capable than her peers

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