



SIGNPOST

A year's gain

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

Parents 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 co-curricular activities. His parents were told that their son was "slow to learn".

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experienced bullying.

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.



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