

FREE TOOLKIT · FOR SOUTH AFRICAN PRESCHOOLS

The School Readiness Toolkit

Track a child's developmental journey along the South African NCF and the six ELDAs — and hand it over to big school as a complete story, not a half-page. Print it, work from it, give every child the start they deserve.

6

Readiness domains

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Developmental phases

16

Pages, ready to print

EN & AF

Bilingual product

WHAT'S INSIDE

- › What school readiness means
- › Phase-by-phase milestones (x5)
- › Four-term readiness planner
- › Domain checklists (photocopiable)
- › School Readiness Report template
- › The six readiness domains
- › Weekly observation log
- › Red-flag & referral protocol
- › Handover comment starters
- › How EarlyTrack does it for you

START HERE

Readiness is a journey, not a test

School readiness is a child's developmental preparedness for formal schooling — across the body, the mind, language, getting along with others, managing feelings, and managing themselves. It is built over years and observed along the way, not measured once in the final term.

PRINCIPLE 1

The whole child

A child who reads early but cannot cope with a change of routine is not more ready than the child who shares, waits and recovers. Weigh all six domains together — never one in isolation.

PRINCIPLE 2

Observed over time

One weak morning means nothing. A consistent pattern across a term means something. Track the trend across weeks — not the performance on a single test day.

PRINCIPLE 3

Handed over well

The goal is a readiness report the Grade 1 teacher can use — specific observed evidence, clear strengths, areas still developing, and any concern flagged early enough to act on.

COMMON MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: "Ready" means knowing letters, numbers and writing their name.

Reality: The Western Cape Education Department puts **emotional readiness first** — a child must manage their emotions, be reasonably independent, and cope with separation from a caregiver. Pre-academic skills matter, but they sit on top of a social and emotional foundation. A child strong in letters but unable to separate or share is not yet ready; a settled, confident, independent child without every letter often is. Grade R has been part of the Foundation Phase since 1998, and CAPS sets the standards a child should reach by the end of that year — readiness is the bridge built long before Grade R begins.

REFERENCE


What to weigh when you judge readiness

No child sits at the same level across all six domains. Strength in one can support growth in another. Use these as the lens for every observation you record — and as the structure for the final handover.

 Domain

Gross & fine motor

Body control, pencil and scissor skills, and the self-care that underpins independence.

 Domain

Cognitive & pre-academic

Pattern, number, letters and sounds, and the focus to see a task through.

 Domain

Language & communication

Speaking, listening, following instructions, and expressing needs in words.

 Domain

Social

Sharing, turn-taking, cooperative play, and resolving small conflicts.

 Domain

Emotional

Separating from a caregiver, managing frustration, and recovering from setbacks.

 Domain

Self-management

Following routines, tidying up, self-care, and sustaining attention.

HOW THIS MAPS TO THE NCF

These six readiness domains map directly onto the six ELDAs of the South African National Curriculum Framework — well-being, identity and belonging, communication, exploring mathematics, creativity, and knowledge and understanding of the world. Tracking the domains *is* tracking the ELDAs.



DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE 1 · 0–18 MONTHS

Babies

Trust, attachment & the first foundations



WHAT READINESS LOOKS LIKE BUILDING

- ✓ Responds to a familiar caregiver; settles when comforted
- ✓ Reaches, grasps, sits, crawls, pulls to stand
- ✓ Babbles, responds to own name, turns to sound
- ✓ Explores objects with hands and mouth — early curiosity



HOW TO SUPPORT IT

- Respond warmly and consistently — attachment is the foundation
- Talk, sing and name things all day to build early language
- Give safe floor time and space to move and reach
- Follow predictable routines so the world feels safe

EXAMPLE — A CHILD ON TRACK

Smiles back, holds eye contact, and reaches for a offered toy — settles within a minute when picked up by a familiar adult.

WATCH FOR — RAISE EARLY IF CONSISTENT

Not responding to sound, no eye contact, or not sitting by around 9–10 months — note and discuss with the family.



DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE 2 · 18–36 MONTHS

Toddlers

Language explosion & growing independence



WHAT READINESS LOOKS LIKE BUILDING

- ✓ Walks, runs, climbs, kicks a ball
- ✓ Uses words then short phrases; follows a simple instruction
- ✓ Begins to feed self; shows toileting readiness
- ✓ Plays alongside others; shows feelings clearly



HOW TO SUPPORT IT

- Narrate and expand — repeat back what they say, adding a word
- Offer simple choices to build independence
- Allow safe risk in movement — climbing, balancing
- Name feelings out loud to start emotional vocabulary

EXAMPLE — A CHILD ON TRACK

Points to name objects, follows “get your shoes”, and uses 20+ words moving into two-word phrases by around 24 months.

WATCH FOR — RAISE EARLY IF CONSISTENT

Very few words by two, not walking, or no interest in interaction — observe across weeks and raise early.



DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE 3 · 3–4 YEARS

Young children

Social play & fine-motor beginnings



WHAT READINESS LOOKS LIKE BUILDING

- ✓ Holds a crayon; threads beads; uses scissors with help
- ✓ Speaks in sentences; asks and answers questions
- ✓ Takes turns and shares with prompting; joins group play
- ✓ Sorts and matches; counts a few objects with meaning



HOW TO SUPPORT IT

- Set up shared play that needs turn-taking
- Offer threading, cutting and drawing daily for fine motor
- Read together and ask open questions
- Coach sharing and waiting — name the feeling, model the words

EXAMPLE — A CHILD ON TRACK

Plays a turn-taking game with one prompt, draws a person with a few features, and tells you a short story about their picture.

WATCH FOR — RAISE EARLY IF CONSISTENT

No interest in other children, speech hard to understand, or cannot hold a crayon — flag for closer observation.



DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE 4 · 4–5 YEARS

Older children

Pre-academic skills & self-regulation



WHAT READINESS LOOKS LIKE BUILDING

- ✓ Controlled pencil grip; draws recognisable shapes
- ✓ Follows two- and three-step instructions
- ✓ Recognises some letters and sounds; counts with meaning
- ✓ Manages emotions in a group most of the time



HOW TO SUPPORT IT

- Build pre-writing through drawing, cutting and play dough
- Play counting, pattern and sorting games
- Give two- and three-step instructions and praise follow-through
- Coach calming strategies — breathing, a quiet corner

EXAMPLE — A CHILD ON TRACK

Follows “put your book away, wash hands, then sit on the mat”, writes some letters of their name, and recovers from losing a game.

WATCH FOR — RAISE EARLY IF CONSISTENT

Cannot follow a two-step instruction after practice, or melts down most days — note the pattern and plan support.



DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE 5 · 5-6 YEARS

Towards Grade R

The full readiness picture comes together



WHAT READINESS LOOKS LIKE BUILDING

- ✓ Independent with self-care, lunchbox, bathroom, routine
- ✓ Concentrates on a task to the end; works in a group
- ✓ Pre-literacy and pre-maths foundations in place
- ✓ Separates confidently; recovers from disappointment



HOW TO SUPPORT IT

- Build stamina — slightly longer tasks, seen through to the end
- Strengthen pre-literacy and pre-maths through play
- Practise the routines of big school — lining up, packing away
- Talk positively about school to build confidence

EXAMPLE — A CHILD ON TRACK

Settles without a parent, finishes a 10-minute task, writes their name, counts with meaning, and joins a group activity happily.

WATCH FOR — RAISE EARLY IF CONSISTENT

Cannot separate, cannot sustain attention, or no pre-academic foundation — this is the year to act, with the family and receiving school.

PHOTOCOPIABLE · ONE PER CHILD PER WEEK

Capture readiness as it happens

A line a day across the domains builds the whole journey by year-end — no term-end scramble. Note what the child did, with what support, and whether it is emerging, developing or secure.

CHILD'S NAME

AGE / PHASE

WEEK OF

Domain	Observation — what you saw	Context / support	Trend
Gross & fine motor			
Cognitive & pre-academic			
Language & communication			
Social			
Emotional			
Self-management			

TREND KEY

Emerging — beginning to show this with support · **Developing** — shows it sometimes, inconsistently · **Secure** — shows it independently and consistently. Watching the trend move from emerging to secure across terms is the whole point — it is the child's readiness story, written as it happens.

PLAN THE YEAR

From first observation to final handover

Readiness reporting is calm when the work is spread across the year. Here is the rhythm that turns term-end into a summary of what you already know, instead of a crisis.

Term	Focus for the term
Term 1	Settle in. Take baseline observations across all six domains. Note where each child is starting from — no judgement yet, just a clear picture.
Term 2	Track growth. Identify any consistent concern early enough to act. Begin gentle conversations with families where something needs watching.
Term 3	Deepen support. Focus where the trend has plateaued. Confirm or release the early concerns. Plan for the children who may need more time.
Term 4	Summarise & hand over. Pull the year's observations into each child's School Readiness Report. Meet families. Hand over to big school.

THE PRINCIPLE

By the time the readiness report is due, you should be **writing down what you already know** — not discovering it. Every observation logged through the year is one less thing to reconstruct from memory in Term 4.

A NOTE ON TIMING

If a child may need another year or extra support, the family needs to hear it well before Term 4 — ideally from Term 2. Early, kind, specific conversations give everyone time to plan together.

WHEN TO ACT

Flag early, flag specifically, flag kindly

The point of watching closely is to catch the child who needs more support in time to do something. A single weak observation is never a red flag — a consistent pattern across a term or more is.



PATTERNS WORTH FLAGGING

- No pencil or scissor control with any consistency by the final year
- Speech that is hard to understand, or very limited language for their age
- Cannot follow a simple two-step instruction after repeated practice
- Cannot separate from a caregiver without prolonged distress, well into the year
- Cannot regulate emotions enough to function in a group most days
- No interest in other children, or cannot share or take turns at all



THE REFERRAL PATHWAY

- ✓ Document the specific, observed pattern — dates, context, frequency
- ✓ Speak with the family early, kindly, with concrete examples
- ✓ Suggest a professional assessment where appropriate (OT, speech, educational psychologist)
- ✓ Plan with the receiving school so support is ready on day one
- ✓ Where needed, discuss whether another preschool year would help

UNHELPFUL

"Cannot concentrate. Not ready."

HELPFUL — SPECIFIC, KIND, ACTIONABLE

"Sustains focused attention for about three to four minutes on a chosen task, then needs redirection — observed consistently across Term 2. Suggest short, structured tasks and a follow-up conversation with the family about support options."

PHOTOCOPIABLE · ONE PER CHILD · TICK E / D / S

Domains 1–3

Mark each skill **Emerging**, **Developing** or **Secure**. Use it at any point in the year to see the whole picture at a glance.

Gross & fine motor

- Runs, jumps, hops, balances on one foot E D S
- Holds a pencil with a controlled grip E D S
- Cuts along a line with scissors E D S
- Manages buttons, zips and a lunchbox E D S
- Independent in the bathroom E D S

Cognitive & pre-academic

- Recognises and continues simple patterns E D S
- Counts objects with one-to-one meaning E D S
- Knows some letters and their sounds E D S
- Completes an age-appropriate puzzle E D S
- Concentrates on a task to completion E D S

Language & communication

- Speaks in full sentences E D S
- Follows two- and three-step instructions E D S
- Listens attentively in a group E D S
- Expresses needs and feelings in words E D S
- Enjoys and retells a story E D S

PHOTOCOPIABLE · ONE PER CHILD · TICK E / D / S

Domains 4–6

The social, emotional and self-management domains are the foundation everything else sits on. Weigh them as heavily as the pre-academic skills.

Social

- Shares and takes turns E D S
- Plays cooperatively with others E D S
- Resolves small conflicts with words E D S
- Responds to a non-parent adult E D S
- Shows empathy towards others E D S

Emotional

- Separates from a caregiver calmly E D S
- Manages frustration appropriately E D S
- Recovers from disappointment E D S
- Shows confidence in new situations E D S
- Expresses a range of emotions appropriately E D S

Self-management

- Follows the daily routine E D S
- Tidies up after an activity E D S
- Attends to personal needs independently E D S
- Sustains attention without one-to-one support E D S
- Transitions between activities calmly E D S

COMMENT STARTERS

A handover the Grade 1 teacher will use

A great handover names a strength, gives concrete evidence, flags one area to watch without alarm, and ends with a practical suggestion. Use these openers — fill in the child's real, observed detail.

NAMING A STRENGTH

"A real strength is... / Settles easily and... / Plays cooperatively and resolves small conflicts by... / Listens well in a group and..."

FLAGGING AN AREA STILL DEVELOPING

"Still developing: ... is functional but tires quickly, so... / Benefits from short tasks when... / Will need extra practice with... early in Grade 1."

ENDING WITH A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION

"A confident starter who will benefit from... / Suggest... in the first term. / Responds well to... and will settle quickly with..."

RAISING A CONCERN — EARLY, SPECIFIC, KIND

"Observed consistently across Term...: We have discussed this with the family and suggest the receiving school plan for..."

PHOTOCOPIABLE · THE HANDOVER DOCUMENT

School Readiness Report

CHILD'S NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

YEAR

Domain	Observed evidence & strengths	Still developing / watch
Gross & fine motor		
Cognitive & pre-academic		
Language & communication		
Social		
Emotional		
Self-management		

OVERALL SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION FOR THE RECEIVING SCHOOL

TEACHER SIGNATURE

PRINCIPAL SIGNATURE

DATE



EARLYTRACK DOES THIS FOR YOU

Let the readiness report **write itself.**

You have the toolkit. EarlyTrack's Milestone Tracker does it automatically — following each child's journey along the NCF and the six ELDAs from the observations you already capture, then producing a branded School Readiness Report at the Grade R transition. The whole story, gathered the whole way.

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R299

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