**Its official: starting school later is better for kids in the long term**

By Pip Lincolne on 6th April 2017

While families ponder school readiness carefully, and make their own well-considered decisions based on what feels right for their child, a new US study is throwing some interesting research into the mix.

**Little lessons**

The study, via Stanford University, examined just over 54 000 parents, discovering some interesting patterns in the behaviour of their kids, depending on their school commencement age. These patterns related to the way very young children self-regulate their behaviour.

Experts tell us that much of a group of behavioural skills called executive function which involve self-control, time management and focus, even if a child has been distracted is learned in these early years. These behaviours affect kids' success and progress when they're at school. The way children spend their time and are cared for during pre-school years impacts profoundly on these executive functions.

**Unstructured playtime is important**

Kids develop these important self-regulating skills via creative play and by watching their parents create and adhere to routines, nurture relationships and interact with others. The Stanford team theorised that an extra year away from school may help foster these vital skills.

While research on academic success and school commencement has been pretty inconclusive up until now, this study links more evolved self-regulating behaviours to positive academic outcomes. Basically, children and teens who are able to remain focused and sit still, do better.

**Better behaviour may lead to better grades**

The Stanford team led by Thomas Dee and Hans Henrik Sievertsen found that the kids they studied showed some marked differences in behaviour, and related it to the age they started their schooling.

The kids who started schooling at age 6 tested better for self-control, and those important executive functions, than children who started at age 5. These benefits endured and remained evident in these kids, even five years later.

We found that delaying kindergarten for one year reduced inattention and hyperactivity by 73 percent for an average child at age 11, and it virtually eliminated the probability that an average child at that age would have an abnormal, or higher-than-normal rating for the inattentive-hyperactive behavioural measure, study co-author and Stanford Graduate School of Education professor, Thomas Dee said in a release.

**More time for play**

The benefits of a later start seemed to point to academic success later in school life, too. The Stanford team said kids who scored low for inattention and hyperactivity went on to have higher school assessment scores.

Researchers say exposing children to more creative play in their early years, and delaying school commencement, may allow more time to foster those important self-regulatory executive skills.

Children who delay their school starting age may have an extended (and appropriately timed) exposure to such playful environments, which in turn nurture positive and attentive behaviours the study authors suggested.

The study will give comfort to those who have [started late], and for those who are making the decision, itll give them a chance to consider the benefits, Dee said.

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