

Ep 4. How do I know if my child is ready for school?

[00:00:00] **Bettie Rall:** When a child is only five, six years old. It's very difficult to always discriminate between a developmental delay and neurological difficulties. Um, so you see that the child's language is behind or the cognitive development is behind, but we can't always at that age, determine if it's just a developmental delay for some other reason, or if it is caused by a neurological disorder.

[00:00:30] **Vanessa Pickford:** Hi, I'm your host, Vanessa Pickford, and this is a podcast series "The Heath Wrap", powered by Mediclinic Prime - Healthcare experts at your service. In this podcast series, we're exploring various health topics that can affect children from birth to their older teenage years. Mediclinic Prime is a health programme created by our team of dedicated experts that unlocks a world of health information for you and your family.

[00:00:55] Please note that the views shared by any guests in this podcast may not necessarily reflect the views of Mediclinic, so please consult a medical professional if you have concerns. In the previous episode, we had a very insightful chat about how to handle tantrums and challenging behaviour. There were so many tools shared that I think would be helpful for anyone who has or cares for children, so go and have a listen if you missed it.

[00:01:21] **Vanessa Pickford:** Ok, so let's get to the topic at hand. School-readiness - perhaps you're asking yourself "Is my child really ready for Grade 1?" I found myself asking this question when my oldest entered school. Conservatively put, he was a reluctant school goer and protested wildly [00:01:38] whenever I tried to leave classroom. At that stage, I had his younger brother and one who was more than contented to stay at school. To the point where the teacher suggested that I might take my older child home and leave the younger one in his place because he appeared more emotionally ready for the school environment.

[00:01:55] So in the presence of a cognitive or emotional developmental delay, [00:02:00] perhaps your child's teacher has recommended that you hold your child back another year and you're wondering what to do. Albeit that our children all develop at their own rate. We also can't ignore the many social economic issues impeding childhood development here in South Africa, as well as the effects of the challenging pandemic years.

[00:02:19] In fact Stats SA reports that the percentage of children aged nor to four who attended grade R and preschool declined from 36.8% in 2019 to 28.5% in 2021. In this episode, I'm chatting with psychologist, Betty Rall. Who's going to offer valuable insights, interviews, and more questions and issues pertaining to school readiness.

[00:02:43] Now I think I have my hands full with four children, but I believe that you are a mother of five.

[00:02:50] **Bettie Rall:** Yes, four boys and a girl.

[00:02:54] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yeah, well, you've beaten me there with one extra boy. Um, but more so than that, we want to chat to you today about your [00:03:00] credentials. Um, holding a master's degree in psychology, being presently based at the Cape Gate Therapy Center, you've consulted in private practice for 22 years and have a specialist interest in child psychology, which is really what we are going to be focusing on today [00:03:16] as we discuss school, read. But not only that you've developed a study program that caters to children with learning disabilities.

[00:03:25] **Bettie Rall:** That's correct. Yes. I've got three children with ADHD and two of them also got dyslexia. So that's why, uh, the special interest in children and specifically those with learning difficulties.

[00:03:38] **Vanessa Pickford:** My goodness. Yeah, and I believe that, um, you've also got a lot of experience in Scholastic assessments to working with children on the autistic spectrum and to parenting and family relationships. Betty, as you know, the national department of basic education in South Africa has set certain

aid requirements for when [00:04:00] learners should attend preschool and school. [00:04:03] Can you go into further detail about this?

[00:04:06] **Bettie Rall:** Yes. In South Africa, the school going age is the year that you turn seven in. So they expect a child to go to grade one in the year that they turn seven.

[00:04:17] **Vanessa Pickford:** Well, I speak from experience and I think that in fact, most parents simply enrol their child in school and off they go, whether they are perhaps just under seven or seven but are there actual tests that determine readiness? [00:04:33] How do we know that our child is actually ready to be attending school?

[00:04:38] **Bettie Rall:** Yes, there is a few levels that the child needs to be ready on for school otherwise they struggle in grade one. Um, so there is tests to be done this, um, first of all, screening test that can be done by the teachers themselves. So they also know in most of the schools, uh, they know what the child needs to be ready [00:05:00] for school, and they've got screening tests that they can do.

[00:05:03] And if they're concerned about anything that they think is not on school readiness level, then they can refer to either occupational therapist or psychologist for testing for formal testing for school readiness.

[00:05:16] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right. So, so should these tests then be done at a grade R level?

[00:05:18] **Bettie Rall:** Um, we sometimes do the test already at, um, the pre grade R level, um, so that we can, um, attend to the areas where there's delays so that the, that we see if we can't get the child on school readiness level, by the time they at the correct age.

[00:05:39] So if we can address the problems during their grade R year, then they maybe will be ready to go to school by the time they're at the correct age. But, um, yeah, lots of times the schools

only refer because they, they only go to the grade R where the teachers are trained to [00:06:00] pick up on these delays. And then the teachers discovers that the child is not on school readiness level, and then they refer for testing.

[00:06:11] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right. So could some children then be ready in some areas and possibly not in others? For example, what if they're really on a cognitive level, but not emotionally, is that taken into consideration?

[00:06:23] **Bettie Rall:** Um, we struggle a bit, um, When it's not cognitive, um, uh, delays. And even these days with cognitive delays, the department refer that if there's a cognitive delay, that they'd rather repeat grade one than what they repeat grade R.

[00:06:44] So they're of the opinion that, um, grade one, they do all the base work for reading and spelling and all those things and that it's better for a child to repeat grade one than grade R. When it comes to emotional [00:07:00] readiness, we struggle to, um, convince them to keep a child behind cause of emotional readiness.

[00:07:07] So it's one of the areas that's more difficult because you can't pinpoint exactly what is delayed and it's more difficult because there's no fixed tests for that. It's more clinical opinion that the child's not ready. Um, so that's more difficult if they're ready on all the other levels and it's only the emotional development that's not on par [00:07:27] Then we struggle to get exemption.

[00:07:29] **Vanessa Pickford:** Ah, I can appreciate that. Yes. And then from your experiences, can you give us like some examples as to how learning disabilities and neurological differences could potentially affect school readiness

[00:07:42] **Bettie Rall:** when. The child's only five, six years old. It's very difficult to always discriminate between a developmental delay and neurological difficulties.

[00:07:55] Um, so you see that the child's language is behind or the [00:08:00] cognitive development is behind, but we can't always,

at that age, determine if it's just a developmental delay for some other reason, or if it is caused by neurological disorder. So it's quite difficult. Um, At that stage, but, uh, so we work on what is the results that we see on paper.

[00:08:19] And, uh, determine then if the child will be able to cope with a level of work that they have to be able to cope with in grade one. Um, and then later on, we, we usually recommend that there's a reassessment later on, uh, so that we can determine if it is a learning disability, a neurological learning disability, or if it is delay. When it's autism or something like that, um, then it's definitely having an effect.

[00:08:46] Um, when you look at autism spectrum disorder, it's a developmental disorder, and one of the key areas that's affected is language. Um, so they struggle a lot with language and language [00:09:00] is very important to be able to read and write and communicate and everything at school. So it definitely has an effect on the school readiness.

[00:09:11] **Vanessa Pickford:** Gosh, and you mentioned emotional maturity and I'm sure that this does in fact affect a child's school readiness and how they cope in school. Now in my home, I've got children ranging from grades R to 11, and one of the observations from our experience is that girls initially appear to be more ready and possibly eager to attend school than the boys.

[00:09:34] Is there actually any documented evidence to support this observation?

[00:09:39] **Bettie Rall:** Um, yes, definitely. Um, the research and everything shows that boys is only school ready at nine. So we are supposed to put them only in school at nine. Um, so the research indicates that what we supposed to do is to separate girls and boys at school level at [00:10:00] grade one level.

[00:10:01] Cause they say, we put go boys in the same class and girls where they immediately experience that when it comes to academics, they're behind and not as clever as the girls. And that's when they start losing interest in academics and things, and

already start giving up. Yeah. So, um, our schools doesn't function like that at all.

[00:10:22] I think there's one school in Cape Town that's doing it that way, um, in the Southern suburbs, but yeah, we don't do it that way, but yeah, the research indicates that boys are only ready at at nine years old, nine years of age.

[00:10:37] **Vanessa Pickford:** Gosh, that's, that's really fascinating. So, so all these little guys who going off to school, potentially prematurely, um, you've said that the effects of sending them possibly when they're not ready, um, can actually have quite long term outcomes or effects on their Scholastic achievements.

[00:10:57] **Bettie Rall:** Yes. I think that we [00:11:00] associate all the time. Um, so their association with academics then is that they're not as clever or that they're not as good or not as fast or whatever and then once they form that belief, it can have an effect and also cause them not to even try. Yeah. So it's definitely something that we can look into.

[00:11:21] **Vanessa Pickford:** Gosh. Yeah. So if your child is potentially, um, On the opposite spectrum, where they are overachieving, they have in fact settled into school really well, regardless of their gender. Um, they've settled down, they're managing Scholastically and they have now been assessed as being gifted. Should they actually have started school at an earlier age or should they be put into an enrichment program?
[00:11:50] What would you suggest for the gifted child?

[00:11:53] **Bettie Rall:** That's quite a difficult one because research also indicates that usually when a child is [00:12:00] cognitively gifted, um, there's a discrepancy between the cognitive development and the emotional development. So at an early age, they're cognitively advanced, but emotionally they still just age appropriate and then sending them to school, they emotionally doesn't cope.

[00:12:17] And that can cause a lot of, um, and problems and stuff. So what we do find is from the age of 10 to twelve, it's as if

the emotional development and cognitive development then catch up with each other as if they then emotionally start catching up with their cognitive development and then they can become bored and irritated with their peers and everything.

[00:12:40] So it's quite a difficult thing. So if you do advance them at an early age to school, you, it can create problems later on emotionally or create immediately, uh, because they emotionally not mature to cope with the expectations and with the peer group, they're not on the same level, with the older than the [00:13:00] older peers, but, um, later on they do catch up and then they sometimes can be bored with the school work and stuff.

[00:13:07] Yeah. So it's quite a difficult thing to manage. But you can't just have one correct on answer. So it depends on each child and each child's development. So it's an individual thing you need to individually look at each child to determine what would be the best way to go for ward.

[00:13:24] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yes, it, it does sound like the wisest way to manage it.

[00:13:27] So back to the school readiness question, are there any uniquely self African socioeconomic factors that could potentially affect children and their school readiness? Anything that you have particularly experienced in this regard?

[00:13:46] **Bettie Rall:** Um, yes, definitely. Um, it, uh, when we look at society, there's just some kids that has less stimulation in certain areas that cause them not to be, um, ready [00:14:00] for school.

[00:14:01] So exposure, um, to certain, um, social and economic stuff that helps with school readiness. Um, so there's some children that are deprived of that, but then also with the more advanced, uh, economically and socially advanced children, um, a lot of they often, uh, are exposed to a lot of technology. So they have less visual motor stimulation um, so that is also what we see these days.

[00:14:37] So, um, if you just take one hour or two hours of screen time, a day it's, um, 600 hours a year, less motor stimulation or less playing outside and visual motor integration exercise that they have. So we see a lot of children in grade one in the high economic [00:15:00] sphere that doesn't have enough motor stimulation and that struggles with writing and, um, coloring in and, uh, those kind of stuff.

[00:15:09] But then in the lower socioeconomic group, we have then more the cognitive things that's not always there, especially when it comes to abstract language and math and more abstract thinking stuff, then they not ready on that level again. So it depends on which part of the socioeconomic group you're part of. You look at what is the delays that we pick up on.

[00:15:33] **Vanessa Pickford:** And in terms of those children who are spending many hours looking at devices, um, you've touched on that. And what would your advice be for parents who are, you know, still have children who possibly are more inclined to listen to instruction and get off devices? How long should a child prior to going to school actually be spending on a screen?

[00:15:57] **Bettie Rall:** Yes, they've done a quite [00:16:00] extensive research on this due to all the problems that's pitching. Yeah. Um, with the technology stuff that we didn't deal with before and they find, or they recommend that up to the age of two, no screen time at all. And then from two years up to 12two hours, More or less.

[00:16:22] So it's not that they mustn't be exposed to screen time at all. There's also some positives, um, involved with being exposed to screens and technology and the internet and all those kind of things. But, um, we need to limit it, then just keep it within the normal limits. They compared children that doesn't have any screen time, uh, in more poorer communities with children that has just enough who screen time is managed and then a group that has too.

[00:16:53] much screen time and the group that is overexposed to screens, functioned the poorest [00:17:00] on all levels. Um, so

even, uh, weaker than the ones that doesn't have any screen time. Yeah. So there's definitely a negative to too much exposure.

[00:17:11] **Vanessa Pickford:** Mm-hmm, that's a fascinating point because I think a lot of parents think that the devices are one of the first forms of education.

[00:17:19] Whereas perhaps what you're saying is that by restricting screen time is one of the better ways of getting our children school.

[00:17:29] **Bettie Rall:** Yes. Um, in, um, some countries like America, they even now advertise screen-less schools so they start advertising schools where there's no exposure to screens, especially before, uh, they go to formal schooling, um, because of the negative effects that it can have.

[00:17:50] **Vanessa Pickford:** That's fascinating now. I mean, as you've already mentioned, screen time is possibly more averse in our more affluent society. Um, but one thing [00:18:00] that has affected all of us is this COVID 19 pandemic. And has this had any influence on school readiness for our South African children?

[00:18:10] **Bettie Rall:** Yes, definitely because the children, um, the parents had to do schooling so, um, we especially see major problems with the kids that was in grade R or grade one during the pandemic. Um, cause the basis for reading and spelling is at those two grades. So they, they already learned the sounds in grade R and then they need to, um, the synthesis and analysis of the sounds, putting it into words and words into sounds at grade one level.

[00:18:46] And there's specific ways, which is, um, backed by, uh, research, um, of how to do that, uh, where you start, the way you teach that, et cetera, etcetera. And that's why the teachers [00:19:00] of grade or, and grade one is specialized and they're trained to do exactly that. And now we had parents doing that, um, and the children missing out on the specific ways.

[00:19:11] So we see a lot of kids now spelling incorrectly. So they, the parents teach them alphabet and they teach them B, C, D E. So the child spells cat now a C a T, and then they can't make out the word at all, you know, so we see a lot of those kind of things. Yeah. And even with the writing, there's also a specific way of forming the letter and direction in which you form the latest, et cetera.

[00:19:36] Now they all write the wrong way around after the pandemic.

[00:19:40] **Vanessa Pickford:** yeah. Um, now I also partly home-schooled my children during the pan pandemic and it was not for the fainthearted.

[00:19:49] **Bettie Rall:** Yeah. And also you must remember the parents still had to work from home. Yes. So now they to manage to, uh, giving school and.

[00:19:58] Still do all the work that [00:20:00] the school is expecting of them now. So it was very difficult for parents do that.

[00:20:05] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yes. I, I, I count myself amongst the many masses of parents who rather envied those whose children were not yet school going now, I've heard that there are five key areas to be considered when assessing school readiness.

[00:20:22] So that little group of kids who were still at home during the pandemic. You know, in assessing their school readiness, can you please break down for us what these five key areas are and as parents, how we would be able to assess this in our children?

[00:20:39] **Bettie Rall:** Yes. The first one is the physical and motor development. [00:20:44] So physical is the muscle tone and body strength and things like that. Um, if a child doesn't have the muscle tone and the body strength, then sitting upright for five hours of the day is very tiring to them. And then they struggle to [00:21:00] concentrate cause it tires them out just to sit up straight for that amount of time.

[00:21:04] And then the motor development has to do with the ability to control the pencil and to move their body around and to be aware of their body and, um, their brain telling their hand, which way, or which direction to go handling scissors and all those kind of stuff. So that's the first area. The second area is the social development.

[00:21:26] Um, they put into a class with 40 children most that's the average, more, less in South Africa. Um, so they need to be able to cope in that bigger classes. Um, they need to be able to share, they need to be able to communicate. They need to be able to listen, um, to act in ways to conform to the rules and things of the classroom and things like that as well.

[00:21:56] So that's the social development, then the cognitive development, [00:22:00] that is the ability to make independent decisions, to have ideas of their own, to try new stuff to follow instructions, um, to be interested in learning, um, some children's just not ready, cause they're just not interested in any cognitive activities yet.

[00:22:18] And then language. They should be able to communicate effectively in their home language. Um, be able to tell stories in a sequence to give feedback of what's happening, um, to identify differences and similarities between objects, to associate one object with another one, to name, objects, to start with, they need to be able to name objects, but they also need some abstract language.

[00:22:44] Um, so abstract words. Um, so we all, we talk about the first level of abstract languages needed for school readiness. And then the fifth one is, um, emotional readiness, um, to be emotionally ready for school, [00:23:00] they need to be able to function independently. Um, they need to have reasonable control over the emotions.

[00:23:07] We don't expect that once to have all the control, but they must be reasonable control. Um, basic problem solving skills, um, confidence, um, the ability to speak out for themselves. Also taking responsibility for their actions or for what they're doing. One

of the important ones is they need to be able to handle separation well with their parents as well.

[00:23:32] Otherwise it's, they can't concentrate at school. And then, um, delay of need gratification is also very important. Um, we often see these videos on Facebook, where they put sweets in front of the children. People just like to do that and then tell them they can't eat the sweets until you back into the room.

[00:23:51] And then they take that. Now that's what we talk about when we talk about delayed gratification. If they're not able to resist taking the [00:24:00] sweets, then they won't be able to do that in the classroom. Cause they need to be able to ignore the food in their school bag and concentrate on the school work until it's break time and things like that.

[00:24:10] Yeah. So so that's the, that's the struggle with that of, of need gratification. Yeah. And definitely working independently is very important as well. Cause the teacher in a classroom. 40 children can't just attend to their needs all the time.

[00:24:29] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yeah. So you've mentioned that specifically separation anxiety also falls within the scope of emotional maturity.

[00:24:37] **Bettie Rall:** Um, yes.

[00:24:39] **Vanessa Pickford:** What would you advise for a mom who is really struggling with a child with separation anxiety? You know, to the extent that they're thinking, should this child be going to school? Should I be keeping them home? Are they not school ready? If they won't separate from mum?

[00:24:55] **Bettie Rall:** Um, there's a lot of reasons for, for that, but it's always [00:25:00] important to address that before the child goes to school, uh, a child with separation anxiety, even if they do separate from the parents eventually, and they stop crying, um, they still keep on worrying about the parents during the day which makes it impossible for them to take in new information and to concentrate on the school work. Anxiety just affects concentra-

tion and your ability to, um, to learn quite severely. So it's very important that the anxiety is addressed. Um, now we do get children that just because it's a new environment, they for the first, um, three days are

[00:25:43] Uh, just a little bit tearful or something like that. So we don't talk about that. We talk about children that really has anxiety to separate from the parent in all situations.

[00:25:55] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yeah. And then what would you suggest a parent or a caregiver could do to help their child [00:26:00] become more emotionally ready for school?

[00:26:04] **Bettie Rall:** I think we need to, um, sit to a crisis of over parenting yeah. So it starts with that. Um, we have a generation of parents that, uh, wants to keep their child happy all the time. And the moment the child is upset or bored or anything, they jump in and save the child. Um, so we don't teach them from the start to be independent or to find

[00:26:33] Something to keep themselves busy with or anything. So there's lots of things on Facebook and everywhere. Advice to parents of how to keep your child busy during the holidays and things like that. Whereas we all grew up just keeping ourselves busy, actually holidays being bored. I always tell parents boardness is the most important thing for a child to experience.

[00:26:57] They need to experience boardness because it [00:27:00] develops creativity that helps them to find a way of keeping themselves busy. And that's the best thing for creativity, but we take that away by jumping in and saving the child from boredom. And driving off to butterfly world and monkey Town and everything else to just keep them busy all the time.

[00:27:18] Yeah. Um, so that is, for me, one of the problems is that we are parent. Um, also at the moment the child is crying. We immediately jump in the moment to the, if we have social interaction with children and the ones fighting with the others, we jump in our parents to save the situation. Whereas. Just need to stay out

and let them sorted out themselves so that they can develop those skills.

[00:27:41] **Vanessa Pickford:** And ultimately then where could parents obtain help if their child is struggling with emotional readiness and where can parents gain tips on how to parent better?

[00:27:56] **Bettie Rall:** that's um, I always want [00:28:00] say, say to parents, first of all, is there's no, just, there's not just one right way of parenting. So I'm the last one that gives a recipe of how you should parent and what's the right way of parenting.

[00:28:11] Cause it differs from one child to another and it differs from one family to another. Cause our circumstances and everything is different. So that's the first thing that we all need to know. But if they do one help. With parent, especially when it comes to school readiness and emotional readiness, then I think, um, psychologist is a good way to go.

[00:28:32] Um, when it is with motor development and those kind of things, then you look at occupational therapists. So yes, I think there's a lot of professionals out there that can help in this record. So if you're unsure about, um, any of these things, the best is to just, um, go to a professional and get advice there. I often say to parents, you can rather later and say, oh, it was unnecessary.

[00:28:58] There's nothing wrong. And it's [00:29:00] fine than saying two years later, we should have to do this and this. Yeah. So it's better to rather take the action and look into it and make sure that the charts.

[00:29:13] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right now, if we return to that issue of physical and motor development as one of the five key areas that are considered or assessed for school readiness, you've already mentioned that too much screen time can cause an end development of physical and motor ability, but what else could potentially hinder physical readiness and how can parents help to enhance that?

[00:29:35] **Bettie Rall:** Yes. Um, A lot of the activities that's very important for preschoolers is cross movement activities. So that means climbing trees, climbing jungle gyms, and things like that. And that's one of the problems as well, because we don't have lots of places for kids to play anymore. The gardens is getting smaller and it's locked up and go situations and [00:30:00] flats and things like that.

[00:30:02] Um, so the child doesn't get the opportunity to climb trees and to climb jungle jumps or to even ride a bike cause it's too dangerous to go out in the streets. Um, so they don't get enough of that. So I think parents needs to really look into that and make sure that they do give the child enough of physical activity and it's normal play.

[00:30:26] That is the important thing. It doesn't mean you have to have a very expensive 6,000 school readiness program or anything it's playing in the mud, it's playing with water and all kinds of things. That's very important, but the physical place so important, and that's why screenplay or screen time is causing so much, uh, difficulty because it's not just only the effects of the screen it's taking away the time that they play outside and playing the, and climb the trees and ride the bikes and those kind of things that's taken away.

[00:30:58] **Vanessa Pickford:** Very valuable [00:31:00] advice. You know, when you send your child to school, I think most parents focus is on their academic development. What marks are they going to get on that report? So ultimately in terms of their cognitive development and readiness for school, what would be some of the reasons that children are not ready for school in terms of their cognitive development and, um, progress as, as a, a little sub seven year.

[00:31:31] **Bettie Rall:** Um, I again, think that, um, not being exposed to things in a concrete way does play a role. Um, so playing let's take playing with water. We think it's just messing around with water, but you discover volume. Um, and if I push, this cup, it's less than in this one and those kind of things, and it cause a mess.

[00:31:55] Or if I, um, full up the cup too much overflows and [00:32:00] those kind of stuff. So they discover volume and length and all those kind of things by playing, uh, with stuff and not with a, with a cell phone or a screen or something like that. So that's definitely, um, part of it. Um, but then, um, Also the, the, just the abstract language, um, that, uh, is not there.

[00:32:27] The parents also spent a lot of time on computers and, um, TV and things like that so there's less interaction with the children. So there's less communication and, um, conveying this information and knowledge and things like let's take an example. If you drive to work. Before technology, there was all kinds of discussions and things of keeping the children busy.

[00:32:54] So we played this little games of "I see with my two little eyes, this or that", whatever, [00:33:00] um, which is a lot of very good development for a child's cognitive abilities to discriminate between colors and shapes and frames and just name objects. Now we keep them busy with the screen while we are driving. So it's often an hour of stimulation.

[00:33:18] That's just, again, back to the screens. Um, so the, the basic knowledge of certain things is just not there. And so we asked yesterday, I saw a child, um, and I, I can't remember what it was, uh, what was the question or something, but a Giza, we talked about a Giza and she didn't know what the Giza is. And she's 12 years old.

[00:33:42] Um, so it's those everyday general knowledge things that's just not there cause we don't communicate anymore, um, with our children about everyday things. Um, and if we do communicate, we often then communicate about all the bad [00:34:00] stuff that's happening out there, all the new stuff, the, um, the robbings and

[00:34:07] the hijacking, all those kind of things. So if there is a conversation, it's all those negative things that we see on Facebook and everywhere. So then we cause more anxiety again, because then they sudden, yeah. There's stuff that they're not emotionally

able to cope with and then it causes more anxiety. Yeah. So I think we need to really, um, go back to the basics just a little bit.

[00:34:26] So it's not major stuff. It's just the normal. Everyday communication interaction sitting around the table and chat about your day and what you do and those kind of things, um, which is not there anymore. Yeah. Which we need to look into. It's not just all bad because I, um, can also see the advantages there's kids that can tell me.

[00:34:51] The names of lots of Fishes and sharks and stuff in the sea that I didn't even know about and they can tell me all the names of the dinosaur and they can tell me the [00:35:00] planets and all those kind of things. So they can name all those things, but there's everyday general knowledge. That's just not me. That that that be need for school relatedness as well.

[00:35:14] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yeah. You know, the, the repeated theme that I'm hearing, as we talk about both the physical and motor development, the cognitive development, emotional and social it's play, play, play, let these children play more so that they're able to develop these skills. Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, in terms of social development, uh, we found that.

[00:35:34] Well, what we are seeing amongst our peers and those a bit younger than us, that family sizes tend to be getting smaller now, and where I'm telling my children go off and play with your siblings and part of their play is actually learning about social, um, interactions and what is appropriate, what isn't appropriate, et cetera.

[00:35:51] What about all these single child households now where there are only, there is only one child in the family? How would those parents then [00:36:00] nurture social skills in that child, appropriate social skills amongst sort of child to child rather than adult to child? as you were suggesting is inappropriate to a degree?

[00:36:10] **Bettie Rall:** Um, yeah. So it important is that, um, up to age three individual attention is the most important. Um, so we do

find, and I'm of the opinion, especially that, um, if a child can be in a smaller group or daycare or a day mother or whatever way they get the individual attention, that's better for them than being in a big creche with 40 children and things, because attention is the most important for them at that stage.

[00:36:43] And, um, being in a big creche, it sometimes cause negative ways of getting attention like biting and all kinds of things that develops them in those years. Yes. Um, being exposed to that. So up to age three, individual attention is [00:37:00] much more important than social interaction. They don't play with each other yet they, we talk about parallel play, so they will play next to another child, but they don't really interactive play.

[00:37:12] They play interactively with each other from three to six, the social part, uh, the social development is important. So I always say to parents, even if you are stay mom and you, which is, can be wonderful because you can give all the individual attention you need to address the social needs of the child from age ten.

[00:37:34] So even if it's just a playgroup twice a week or something like that, then, um, it's fine, but they must have some social stimulation, um, where they can learn to play with each other, with other kids and interact with other kids and fight with other kids and find out that not everybody's tending to your needs and that others has needs as well and stuff like that too.

[00:37:55] So it's important to if, if you have a child, uh, you only have one [00:38:00] child that you create the opportunities for that child to play. It doesn't have to be all the time, but it's, uh, you just need to make sure that they do have that.

[00:38:10] **Vanessa Pickford:** mm. Now let's talk about the emotional impact on the parents of a child who is not school ready.

[00:38:19] This is not going to be an easy thing for those parents to hear. What would you say to assist a parent who's struggling to accept that their child is not school ready?

[00:38:31] **Bettie Rall:** Um, yeah. I usually work with the fact that a lot of these things are socially constructed. Um, so we decided that the child must be school ready at six years with so it's a society, this fine, these things.

[00:38:53] So define what is normal and what's not normal and now we as parents [00:39:00] stress because our child needs to fit into those criteria. We all stress about that. So six people sit around a table and, uh, draw up a table with body mass index and decide if you're this length, you must be this weight and things like that.

[00:39:15] And then we all buy into that and the diet industry blooms. Of course, we all think now we overweight and stuff. So, but who gives them the powers? We're giving them the power to make us feel that way by believing in what they're saying, and this is the same with children going to school. So part of the over parenting is the fact that it's the socially constructed ideas of what, when you are a success or not successful.

[00:39:44] So we, as parents need to have a mind shift regarding that. Um, so that, because if you are going to be upset and completely in shatters about your child not being ready, you're going to carry that over to your [00:40:00] child. And your child's going to feel that he's disappointing you or she's disappointing you, which is terrible for

[00:40:07] A child to go through and can have made a major effect on the emotional functioning for the rest of their lives. So we as parents need to first free ourselves from the socially constructed norms out there. And then make peace with the fact that my child is not where the 50% of society is, but remember, there's a lot of other parents that's maybe at the same, at the same place.

[00:40:33] And then accept that. Accept that my child's not there now. And now we start, um, stimulating that we work towards improving that and then we celebrate every little bit of progress that we make instead of constantly looking at what's not there cause if we constantly do that, you going to be disappointed all the time.

[00:40:56] You're going to fall apart and it's going to be carried over to the [00:41:00] child.

[00:41:01] **Vanessa Pickford:** As parents, it sounds like the best attitude to have when we embark on the school journey with our children. Is an open mind and to accept that not every school suits every child, you may need to try more than one before you find the right fit.

[00:41:15] I think, let me take this opportunity then to mention In the event of an emergency or concern for the health of the child, Mediclinic has a 24hr call centre where they are able to speak to a registered nurse and receive medical advice and assistance. The nurse can even arrange for an ambulance if necessary. The number is 0860 233 333. Why not pause this episode quickly and save this number to your phone so that you can have it on hand in case of an emergency.

Let me repeat the number being 0860 233 333.. Well, Bettie, thank you so much, our conversation has been so insightful. We've spoken in detail about what school readiness is. We've also touched on so many solutions to help guide parents and caregivers to prepare children for school and help them in areas where they need assistance. Remember to look at the show notes for more information and to get in touch.

[00:42:12] Thank you for joining me, Vanessa Pickford, on The HealthWrap podcast, powered by Mediclinic Prime. If you haven't yet done so, subscribe to our podcast channel.

[00:42:30] I'm chatting with many more parenting and healthcare experts in future episodes, so don't miss out! And, if you'd like more health insights and tips brought right to you in your inbox, then sign-up for our informative Mediclinic Prime newsletter called YOUR FAMILY and if you're looking for any other health information for your child or teen, don't forget to use the search function in our Infohub on the Mediclinic Prime website page. You'll find the link to the Mediclinic Prime website in the show notes.