

Parents' Guide

The period before a child starts school for the first time can be an anxious time for parents. We have put together a simple guide to how you can best prepare your child for this exciting time in their lives!

To help your child get ready for school and adapt to new routines, make friends, participate in new things, and understand how to behave in a school setting, they will need some help.

Do not worry, we have developed a list below for you to use and remember, together with the nursery team you have been preparing them for this since they began nursery!

You can help them by:

Promoting Independence...

Your child will really benefit from being as independent as possible when they start school. Of course, teaching staff will always be on hand to help, but children feel a real sense of achievement when they can accomplish things by themselves!

An important part of being independent at school is being able to use the toilet independently, including washing and drying their hands. They should also be able to blow their nose on a tissue and put it in the bin.

They will also be having lunch independently. If they will be having hot dinners, continue to practise using a knife, fork, and spoon. If they are taking a packed lunch, practise opening the packets and containers of food they will be taking. Encourage them to help choose and make a practice packed lunch. Maybe they could use their new school lunchbox and water bottle, this would enable them to practise opening their food and learn about their likes/dislikes and suitable items for school lunches.

Dressing themselves...

This is something which can be difficult when time is of the essence. However, if you give your child time to practice and learn how to get dressed this will really help as they will have to do this for PE. When buying uniform consider school shoes with Velcro rather than buckles or laces and elastic waist bands rather than buttons and zips as these will be quicker and easier at first, but they will learn this in time and with your help!

Helping with everyday tasks...

Encourage your child to help you with simple jobs around the home, for example gardening, tidying up, baking and cooking, putting washing in the washing machine, pairing socks, putting away their toys, getting the cutlery and helping to lay and clear the table.. This will help them to develop coordination and listening skills as well as independence and self-confidence.

Understanding simple rules...

Make up some house rules together, so your child gets used to this, e.g.: 'You must hang up your coat when we arrive home'. 'You must take your empty cup to the kitchen when you have finished'. 'You must put each toy away when you have finished playing with it'.

Sharing...

Encourage your child to share whenever possible as there will be many other children in the class, and they will not always get what they would like. Use the language which goes with this, such as: "One for you, one for me", "You have those and I'll have these" "Have this one instead", "Their turn now" and "You can have a turn when I am finished".

Waiting their turn...

Try not to let your child have the first turn with everything as this will not happen at school! If you know I find waiting difficult we could get a timer such as a phone timer, kitchen timer or egg timer etc. Then increase the time they wait 'things' for until they are used to it.

Playing simple board games...

Give your child plenty of experience of playing very simple turn taking games such as snap, lotto etc. Encourage them to wait for their turn and to watch and wait while others have their turn. Your child does not always have to win, they should be introduced this concept now to develop their own understanding. Encourage them to praise others (brothers or sisters if they win!) We may make it sound easy, but it will help you in the long run, trust us!!

Talking about themselves and others...

At school, your child will need to be able to share basic information about themselves so encourage this at home. They will also be encouraged to use language to organise and sequence ideas and events. Make this more fun by creating a family book and getting them to tell you about the people it features, starting with themselves and their name, age, and interests. Then move on to family and friends' names and how they are related to your child. You could include photos of special days and your child can then organise the pictures into the correct sequence and retell the story in their own way. You can model important concept words like 'first', 'last', 'next', 'before' and 'after', and the correct use of past, present, and future tenses of verbs, which typically will not yet be fully developed.

Following instructions...

Your child will be given many spoken instructions throughout the school day and will need to be able to shift their attention from what they are doing to listening to what the teacher is saying. Classroom instructions often contain several parts for children to remember. A simple game of 'Simon Says' could really help. Give your child an instruction to do, like 'Simon says put your finger on your nose' and see if they can follow your instruction. The game becomes more difficult as they are only supposed to follow your instructions if you start the sentence with 'Simon says...' Can your child listen carefully and only follow the instructions when directed? The game can be made more challenging by building up to instructions with two or three steps, for example 'Simon says touch your nose, then clap your hands and then put on your hands on your head!'

You can also make up your own games where your child must follow a set of instructions to find something. As they become more confident with this, make the instructions more complex to add challenge. You could always leave a little treat at the end to encourage them to really focus!

A lovely listening activity is to go on a 'listening walk' where your child listens for all the sounds around them. You could jot down all the sounds your child notices and talk about these back at home to retell the journey based on the sounds they heard.

Asking for help...

It is really important that children are confident and have the language to be able to ask for help, They need to be able to explain if they are upset or have been hurt and make themselves heard if they have something important to say. Talk to them about the words they can use and the new feelings that they might experience at school. They do need to know that these feelings are fine, and they can manage them and have nothing to worry about, it is all part of growing up!

Putting their hand up what they want to say something...

This will not be easy at home but as they will be doing this at school you could play games and give it a try! If they have older siblings, they could help to teach them, they could play 'schools.

Building vocabulary...

At school, children will be expected to start extending their vocabulary, so it is a good idea to encourage your child to learn and use new words. You could play sorting games as this is a great way to help word categorisation, which is important for vocabulary learning. Items can be sorted into different piles, such as clothing, toys, and things for washing ourselves.

Outdoor 'treasure hunts' work well too. Collecting objects found on walks can help introduce new types of vocabulary such as describing words. Treasure can also then be used to create feely bags, where objects must be described by the way they feel before revealing what the object is.

Reading and writing...

Teachers do not expect children to know their alphabet or be able to write sentences when they start school. A good foundation in sound awareness skills such as rhyming and identifying what sound a word begins with would be helpful. Sharing songs and books is a really good way to support this. You could also say the sounds that letters make, along with their names as you come across them day-to-day.

Encourage your child's interest in books and other forms of text, for example comics, postcards, labels, and posters. After reading with your child, discuss what you have read, for example, ask what they liked about it.

Consider reading books about 'starting school' with your child, we have provided some examples of these in our Book List. Use these to discuss all the fun activities they will be doing at school. You can also develop an interest in reading by reading notices and labels when away from home and postcards or greetings cards from family members or friends.

'Name Treasure Hunts' can be a fun way of getting your child to recognise their name. Write your child's name on pieces of paper and hide them around the house. Encourage your child to find them all. Other names (or words) can then be introduced to encourage your child to look carefully at each letter of their name.

A good foundation to being able to write is to develop your child's fine motor skills. This is because good fine motor skills enable a child to hold a pencil firmly as they are writing. Threading is a great way to develop fine motor skills, whether it is with beads or buttons, or making necklaces out of dried pasta. Weaving wool around a cardboard template or strips of card through each other are also other simple activities that you could do at home. As is playing with handheld construction toys, small toys and cutting and sticking activities.

If your child is ready and interested in writing, encourage them to write their name into greetings cards, on to artwork they have done or on to letters.

Counting things...

Being able to count verbally to at least 20 will be of great benefit to a child starting school. Practise counting to 20, and backwards too. One to one counting can also be done incidentally throughout the day, for example counting steps as your child climbs the stairs. You can count anything, for instance how many lampposts are on the street, how many houses have a red door, how many pieces of fruit are in the bowl (and how many did we have yesterday), how many pencils fit in the pencil case, etc.

You can also do this when giving things out, for example: "an ice cream for you, an ice cream for Susie and one for me - 1,2,3 ice-creams!" Encourage reliable one to one counting by showing your child how to point to each item as they count, or to move the items as they count so they do not count each item more than once. This will help your child understand what numbers mean. Ask them to find the same number of different items. For example, find 3 spoons, 3 hats or 3 socks. You can also sing counting songs.

Looking at shapes...

You could go on a shape hunt to see how many circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles your child can find, for example square windows, circular plates, and rectangular posters. You could look for patterns too. Talk about the shape and size of objects, e.g. big car, little car, round ball, square table, rectangular book and ask your child questions such as 'Can you pass me the biggest box?', or 'Which one is the smallest shoe?'.

Play with blocks and encourage your child to think about size, colour, and shape. Also play with containers and ask, 'How many socks can you fit in the box?', 'Which container holds the most, or the least, sand/water?', etc.

Recognising numbers...

A number hunt is a fun way to look for numerals on doors, on clocks, buses, cars, signs, at home, at the shops or on TV. You could also play 'I spy' but with numbers.

Being creative...

Explore different ways of being creative, such as colouring and drawing with pens, pencils and crayons, painting, cutting and sticking materials together, building models with 'junk' materials like cardboard boxes, exploring sounds made by instruments or 'noise makers', for example rice in an empty yoghurt pot.

Going to school is a big step, your child will be excited but probably also anxious. It is important to emphasise all the positives about moving on to school. Remember to also give your child the opportunity to express any worries they may have and then you can reassure them. Your help will make them more confident and ready!