

Preparing your child for school.

A guide for parents and carers.

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 help you prepare your child for this exciting time in their lives.

Communication and Language

Many parents worry if their child will be able to tell the teacher if they need something or if they will make friends. Good communication skills underpin these abilities. An easy way to check out concerns is by using the ICAN 'progress checker'. This is an online tool which helps parents to look at what is expected in terms of talking, listening and understanding language for their age range.

Listening and attention skills

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 what the adult is saying. Go on 'listening walks' where your child listens for all the sounds around them in the park, on the beach or in the town centre.

Why not try...

Asking your child to help name their school clothing/lunch box. This will aid name recognition and help them know which things are theirs!

Vocabulary development

At school children will be expected to start extended their vocabulary, so it is a good idea to encourage your child to learn and use new words.

You could collect objects found on the beach or a walk in the park, helping to introduce new types of vocabulary such as describing words.

Understanding spoken instructions

Classroom instructions often involve several parts for your child to remember. A simple game of Simon Says during long car journeys could really help.

You could...

- Encourage your child to help you with simple jobs around the home, eg gardening, tidying up, baking and cooking. This will help them to develop co-ordination and listening skills.

Social Skills

Being able to interact with other children and share resources is a key skill that will help your child when they start school. Play dates with other children will help promote these skills. During these play dates you could model useful social phrases such as 'my turn please' or 'let's share', join in with their pretend play to start the game off.

Vocabulary development

Teachers do not expect children to know their alphabet or write sentences when they start school! A good foundation is sound awareness skills, such as rhyming and identifying what sound a word begins with. Sharing songs, nursery rhymes and books is an excellent way to support this. You could also say the sounds the letters make as you come across them every day.

Encourage your child to develop an interest in books and other forms of text, eg comics, postcards, labels, menus

Mathematical Development

Counting verbally and one-to-one counting.

Being able to count verbally to at least 20 will be of great benefit to a child starting school. One-to-one counting can also be done throughout the day, eg counting steps as your child climbs the stairs. You can count anything, for instance, how many lamp posts are on the route to school, how many houses have a red door, or how many items of fruit are in the fruit bowl. Encourage reliable one-to-one counting by showing your child how to point to each item as they count and move them too so they do not count an object more than once.

Shape, size and quantity

You could go on a shape hunt to see how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find, eg square windows, circular plates, etc. You could look for patterns too. Talk about the size and shape of objects, eg big car, little car, round ball, square table etc. Ask your child questions such as 'Can you pass me the biggest box?' or 'which one is the smallest shoe?'. Play with blocks, containers and empty food boxes too, ask 'how many socks can you fit in this box?' or 'what colour/size/shape is this block?'

Writing development

Writing foundations.

A good foundation in being able to write is to develop your child's fine motor skills. This is because good fine motor control enable a child to hold a pencil firmly as they are writing. Threading is a great way to develop these skills, whether it is beads or buttons or making necklaces out of dried pasta. Building using construction such as duplo and lego is also a great way to build those smaller hand muscles, as is cutting and sticking, playing with play dough, making bread by kneading the dough and playing with other small toys.

Mark making to writing.

If your child is interested in writing or making marks to represent writing encourage them to tell you what they have written, show them how to write simple words such as 'mum' 'dog' or 'hat' and help them to practise writing their name using a capital letter at the beginning and lower case for the other letters. Encourage them to write their name in greetings cards, onto pictures they have done, or on postcards from holiday for friends or family.

Some other ideas to try...

- Encourage your child to be active, especially outdoors-play running games, practise riding a bike or scooter and play simple games with a ball or frisbee.
- Explore different ways of being creative, eg colouring or drawing, building models using 'junk modelling', exploring sounds using instruments or 'noise makers'(rice in a yoghurt pot) or listening to and moving to music.
- Use everyday experiences as opportunities for learning, eg visiting the shops, walking around the local environment, visiting a friend or relative.
- **Have fun with your child and make learning interesting and enjoyable whatever you do!**