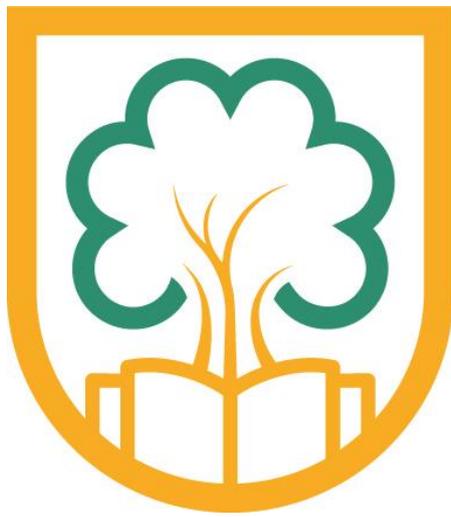


Preparing your child for school



Helpful hints...

Dear parent,

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet which contains some ideas and activities that you and your child may find useful.

The activities will give your child the chance to explore new situations and practise important skills in preparation for starting school.

The emphasis throughout is on **learning through play**.

Play at home may be organised differently to play in school, but in all contexts play activities lead to learning in a fun and relaxed way for your child.

We hope that you will find the booklet fun to use and perhaps you will try some of the activities suggested.

Praise and reassurance are essential.

Please remember children do not all develop at the same rate, so do not be anxious if your child is not interested just yet, if he or she tires easily or does not complete an activity.

Sharing Books and Preparing for Reading

It is never too early...

It is never too early to start looking at books and sharing stories with your child. Children who are read to and enjoy books from an early age are most likely to become fluent and successful readers themselves in the future. We want children to know that reading is fun and worthwhile so it is important that they see adults reading and enjoying books, newspapers, magazines etc.

Reading must be fun...

There are plenty of well-illustrated and colourful picture books and stories for reading aloud to choose from. Sit your child on your knee or close to you while you read so that you can enjoy the story together. Let your child hold the book and encourage him or her to turn the pages in the correct order. Talk about the pictures first. Ask questions and listen to what your child has to say about them.

Involve your child...

Try to involve your child in the story as you are reading. Relate events to things you have done together and let him or her talk about what they think will happen next. Sometimes point to the words accompanying the pictures. Your child may be able to join in with the words when the story is repeated, and words are remembered. This can also help to reinforce the left to right movement needed for reading.

Encourage your child...

Encourage your child to retell favourite and familiar stories in their own words. Taped stories, simple information books and carefully selected comics can add to your child's experience of 'reading'. Listen to music together and sing and recite nursery rhymes, finger plays and simple songs. Children enjoy rhythm and repetition.

Use your local library...

Your child can join the local library. Even the smallest libraries have a children's section with a range of books for pre-school children to borrow free of charge. A trip to the library to borrow some new books can quickly become a regular treat for your child.

Writing

Making marks...

At first children need plenty of time to explore and experiment making marks on paper with a variety of implements. Try pencils, chalk, wax crayons and felt-tip pens. No formal instruction is needed at this stage. These marks and scribbles have real meaning for children, so it is important to praise and value each attempt.

Learning about writing...

Children learn about writing by noticing print and watching others write and draw. Point out bus or street signs and supermarket labels so that children come to realise that the funny squiggles all around them convey meaning. They may even start to say, “what does that say?” when they see print. Let children see you writing letters and shopping lists and filling in forms. Give them opportunities to ‘write’ lists of their own or sign birthday cards and invitations.

Holding the pencil...

Always encourage your child to hold the pencil correctly. The dynamic tripod grip is the correct and most comfortable hold. The child holds the pencil between the index finger and thumb with the other fingers resting on the paper. Do not worry if your child is left-handed. The images below show you the developmental stages of holding a mark-making tool.



Patterns and lines...

Before learning to write letters, children can benefit from drawing patterns and lines across paper. If these are based on letter shapes, they help the children to develop good habits and move their pencil in the correct direction from the start.

Activity ideas:

Activities which will help to strengthen fingers and develop the physical skills necessary for writing are important at this stage too.

- Encourage your child to make models and roll and cut out shapes from playdough or pastry.
- Make simple sewing cards using old birthday cards. Punch holes around the edge and let children sew around them using wool or laces.
- Let your child use scissors to cut out pictures from old catalogues, magazines or cards and glue the resulting shapes onto paper. If your child has difficulty cutting paper let him or her try cutting playdough first—it is much easier.
- Make shapes or patterns in shallow trays or dry sand or with paint using fingers.
- Use wide brushes to make pictures with water on slabs outside on a dry day.
- Use magnetic letters to make simple words or your child’s name.
- Play matching or sorting games using sets of alphabet cards.

The following activities can also help writing skills to develop:

- Tracing pictures
- Following mazes
- Joining dots to form patterns
- Drawing around templates (your child's own hand is useful!)
- Colouring in
- Using paint brushes with water to make marks on paving stones.

Maths

It's not just about numbers!

The idea of mathematics for pre-school children can seem a bit daunting. However, at this age a lot of maths is about understanding ideas such as size, shape, and pattern—things that most adults would not think of as maths at all. If your child gains an early understanding of these concepts, then this can give him or her a flying start with number work.

Shapes...

Give your child opportunities to notice and recognise shapes around them. Use proper names when talking to children about shapes and encourage them to find shapes in the real world.

Counting...

Children enjoy counting real objects. Counting the stairs as you take your child to bed each night, counting buttons on clothes, counting the number of apples into a shopping bag, or counting the pennies in a money box. Make up games and ask your child to collect 3 books, 4 spoons or do 5 claps, 2 jumps etc. Draw your child's attention to numbers in everyday life. Look for numbers on cars, buses, clocks, houses, telephones. Show your child how to write numbers in a tray of sand or salt.

Counting rhymes...

Recite counting rhymes such as "1,2,3,4,5 once I caught a fish alive.." and read counting books such as 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' by Eric Carle.

Pattern...

Helping to lay the table encourages children to notice pattern—1 knife, 1 fork, 1 plate in each place. Let your child use beads and cotton reels or pasta tubes for threading. Encourage repeating patterns using two colours...

Matching...

Playing matching games with pairs of socks, shoes, gloves, and picture cards can be fun. The ability to match lids to pans and tops to bottles is useful too. Talking with your child while doing an activity will help him or her to develop a vocabulary of words to describe positions e.g. front, back, up, down, over, under. Use words such as big, little; long, short; heavy, light; to describe items when you are shopping for food or clothes.

Time...

Talk to your child about events in the day, night, morning and afternoon. Encourage them to talk about the order they do daily activities in, e.g. "I brush my teeth then I go to bed".

Sorting...

Sort objects into colours e.g. buttons, toys. Look out for certain colours e.g. how many red cars will we see on our walk? Objects can be sorted for size, shape and function too. A collection of seasonal items is useful for developing sorting skills, e.g. leaves in autumn, shells in summer. Encourage your child to notice what is the same and what is different.

Maths at bath time...

At bath time let children fill different sized bottles with water and discover which holds the most.

Measuring and weighing...

Children like to help with cooking. Let them measure ingredients with a cup or spoon and watch you use the scales to weigh and balance. If possible, set the time on your cooker to beep when your food is ready. This will help to make your child aware that it sometimes takes a length of time to cook food.

Understanding the World

Questions, questions, questions...

Science for young children mainly involves asking questions to encourage them to be observant and inquisitive about the world in which they live.

Activity ideas:

- **Plants:** Plant cress seeds on damp cotton wool or blotting paper. Put some on a sunny windowsill, some in a fridge and some in a dark cupboard and see what happens to them. Sprout carrot tops in a saucer of water. Let your children help to plant seeds and bulbs in the garden.
- **Changes over time:** Observe growth in your family on a height chart. Draw attention to seasonal changes. Talk about the weather every day.
- **Collections:** Collect and sort leaves using describing words such as rough, smooth, crinkly. Look for pebbles, shells and sea life on a visit to the seaside. Put a collection of familiar objects in a bag or box and let your child try to work out what they are just by the sense of touch.
- **Clothes:** What sort of clothes do we need to put on if it's hot, cold, wet today? Why are warm clothes warm?
- **Cooking:** Cooking with your child gives opportunities to see the changes brought about in food by mixing, heating and cooling.

- **Sand play:** Children enjoy playing with sand. Try to provide opportunities for children to compare how wet sand can be used for building and how dry sand pours like a liquid.
- **Water play:** Fill a sink, bath or paddling pool with water and let children play under supervision. Add soap or blow through a straw to make bubbles. Add food colouring to make coloured water. Provide bottles, funnels, cups and jugs for pouring and measuring. It takes a lot of skill to fill a small container from a large one and vice versa. Provide corks, bottle tops, boats, small pebbles for floating and sinking games. Use water vocabulary, e.g. pour, squeeze, drip, soap, rinse, soak, suds, spill etc.

Expressive Arts and Design

Drawing, painting and craft activities can help children to express their feelings when it may not always be easy to put these into words.

They can also help children to developing the physical skills necessary for hand-eye coordination—being able to hold a brush or pencil and control it.

Activity ideas:

You can help your child by providing a variety of materials and experiences. Paint can be applied to paper or any suitable stain resistant surface. It can be applied with brushes, rollers, fingers, sponges or any small object with a textured surface, e.g. Lego, cotton reels. Collage pictures can be made from anything; pasta, tissue, sequins, fabric scraps, paper cut out by children.

- **Threading:** Children can also enjoy threading necklaces using pasta, polystyrene shapes and straws.
- **Making models:** Cardboard boxes and cylinders can be used to make models of all kinds. Sticking can be frustrating so adult help is vital. Also make models with clay and dough.

Children find pleasure and satisfaction in handling all these materials and learn about texture, colour, size, shape and quantity. Remember, for a child it is the doing that matters not the finished picture. Talk and share ideas but try to resist the temptation to change or improve a drawing or painting.

Social Skills

Social skills are for life...

Social skills are important for your child. We begin learning social skills from the moment we are born, and we keep on learning all through our lives. They are the key to your child making and keeping friends and to the enjoyment of life.

Please, thank you and no...

Remember to encourage “please” and “thank you” and asking for things politely. Children learn

how to behave by copying what adults do. So, the more often they see those around them being polite, the more likely they are to be polite themselves. It is also important to make sure that children understand that “no” means no!

Neat and tidy...

Encourage your child to tidy away his or her own toys and complete one activity before choosing something else.

Sharing and taking turns...

The idea of sharing, whether a toy or anything else, can sometimes be difficult for children to learn. Give lots of praise and reward when your child shares to encourage this behaviour. Also try and make sure your child understands the concept of taking turns when using a toy or piece of playground equipment.

Personal Care and Hygiene...

- **Toilets and washing:** Before coming to school children should be confident in going to the toilet by themselves and able to wash their hands independently.
- **Independence:** Please help and encourage your child to:
 - Roll up their sleeves and wash their own hands.
 - Use a tissue on their own.
 - Make an attempt at dressing themselves.
 - Take their shoes on and off (support with the correct foot)

Dressing up games...

Getting dressed does not come easily to young children. A collection of dressing up clothes can help to develop valuable skills in an enjoyable way. Dressing dolls and teddies gives useful practise at pulling on jumpers, jackets and trousers and fastening buttons.