

Preparing Your Child for School

A guide for Parents and Guardians

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

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! Examples include being able to dress and undress independently, as this will really help with PE sessions. Children in reception (FS2) will also have access to an outdoor space throughout the day, so being able to put their coat on and zip it up independently will really help them. It also means that they can get straight to their playing and learning without having to stop and ask an adult for help!

Your child will also really benefit from having experienced being away from you for short periods of time, such as going to a friend's house to play. This will really develop their confidence and independence and stand them in good stead when it comes to saying goodbye on that first morning at school.

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.

Your child may be starting school with identified communication difficulties, or you may have concerns that have not yet been addressed. An easy way to check out concerns is by using the ICAN 'Progress Checker'. This is an online tool which allows parents to look at what is expected in terms of talking, listening and understanding language for their child's age range. It's a simple way to alleviate any unnecessary anxieties or to seek advice if needed.

We know that parents can have a huge impact on their child's talking and listening development and the summer is a perfect time for trying out simple language boosting activities:

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 listening to what the teacher is saying.

A lovely activity to promote this is to go on a 'listening walk' where your child listens for all the sounds around them in the park or town centre. You could also 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.

Understanding Spoken Instructions

Classroom instructions often contain several parts for children to remember. A simple game of 'Simon Says' during long car journeys this summer 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!'

Vocabulary Development

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 when packing a suitcase, 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 in the park or on the beach, help introduce new types of vocabulary such as describing words. Treasure can also then be used to create feely bags, where objects have to be described by the way they feel before revealing what the object is.



Mathematical Development

Counting Verbally and One to One

Being able to count verbally to at least 20 will be of great benefit to a child starting school. Practise counting up 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. To help your child understand what numbers mean. Ask them to find the same amount of different items. For example, find 3 spoons, 3 hats or 3 socks. You can also sing counting songs, many of which are available if you search for 'number rhymes' on the Twinkl website.

Shape, Size and Quantity

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.

Number Recognition

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.

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Narrative Skills

Reception (FS2) age children will be encouraged to use language to organise and sequence ideas and events. Summer days are perfect for creating a photo journal of activities. Your child can then organise 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.

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.

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. There are many resources that could support the development of this skill on the Twinkl website, just search for 'fine motor skills'. Threading is also 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.

