



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Preparing Young Children for Primary School

A Resource for Parents, Early  
Learning and Care Settings  
and Schools

*Tionscadal Léirithe um Theiripe ar Scoil agus Tacaíocht na Luathbhlianta*  
Demonstration Project on In-school and Early Years Therapy Support

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# Aim of this booklet

This resource was created by Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists working with the Demonstration Project on In School and Early Years Therapy Support.

The content of this booklet is based on evidence and therapist's clinical experience of working with practitioners and teachers in Early Learning and Care settings and in primary schools.

This booklet may be useful for parents, Early Learning and Care Practitioners and teachers of early primary school years in preparing all children to transition smoothly from the ECCE years into Junior Infants.



# Important Information for Your Child's School

- If your child has any identified needs, diagnoses, or health needs discuss these with the principal and teacher. The school will work with you to make sure your child's additional needs will be supported.
- Give copies of any reports to the school.
- You could create a scrapbook with your child called "All About Me". This can include information about:
  - Areas of strength (e.g. I am good at playing sports/ taking turns etc.)
  - Areas of difficulty (e.g. I find it hard to make new friends/ tie my shoes etc.)
  - What your child likes and dislikes (e.g. favourite and least favourite activities, foods, games etc.).



# Prepare Your Child for the Transition

- Familiarise your child with the school building (e.g. walk or drive by, point out and name the school).
- Meet with your child's teacher if possible or tell your child the teacher's name.
- Visit the school's website and look at relevant photos or videos.
- Try on the school uniform in advance.
- Involve your child in choosing a school bag/lunch box/pencil case (e.g. your child may choose a bag that has his/her favourite colour or character, you could decorate a plain lunch box with stickers etc.). Make sure that the school bag/lunch box/ pencil case are easy to open and close.
- Speak positively about school (children pick up on your anxiety)
  - ✓ Talk about your favourite things about school when you were small.
  - ✓ Relate school subjects/activities to your child's interests (e.g. if your child likes football, talk about the school's gym and pitches etc.).
- Reassure your child that there are class teachers, special education teachers (SET) and special needs assistants (SNAs) in the school to help them as needed.
- Read stories about starting school. This will help prepare your child for what going to school might be like. Remember that you can find and order books from your local library! There are lots of books to choose from but here are some examples:

- Llama Llama Misses Mama
- Topsy and Tim Start School
- Charlie Chick Goes to School
- Do I Have to Go to School?
- Harry and the Dinosaurs Go to School
- Come to School Too, Blue Kangaroo!



- Create your own scrapbook or story about your child's new school with photos of and comments about the building, the school uniform, who they know in the school (e.g. siblings, neighbours, and friends from preschool).

# Routines

Get into morning and evening routines at least 2 weeks before school starts. Gradually put your child to bed earlier at night time over those 2 weeks to help embed the new routine and to ensure that your child is rested for starting school.

Set a **regular bedtime routine** that will allow your child to wake up fresh and ready for the day. The 30 minutes before bed should ideally be calm, with no screen time (phones, tablets, TV) and if possible follow a set sequence of steps, for example: bath, teeth, pyjamas, story, and bed.

Practice the **morning routine** of getting up early, having breakfast, putting on your child's uniform and packing the school bag. Try to have everything ready the night before to reduce stress and rushing.


Regular Bedtime Routine	Morning Routine
Eat snack	Snuggle
Clean up	Use toilet
Put on pyjamas	Put on clothes
Brush teeth	Eat food
Use toilet	Put away
Take bath	Brush teeth
Read book	Get bag
Snuggle and sleep	Go to school

# Healthy Habits

Limit screen time to less than 1 hour a day

### Benefits of Screen-Free Time

Activities that don't involve smartphones, tablets and other screens can help children's development, imagination and provide hours of fun.



Encourages physical activity

Encourages family time

Regulates mood

Improves social wellbeing

Improves sleep

Some alternatives to screen time

### School-Age Children (up to age eight)

#### School-age toys

- Board games
- Construction tools
- Science equipment
- Items for "collections"
- Modeling and craft materials
- Tools for dramatic performances and storytelling
- Materials for creating small worlds like dollhouses and castles.



Play helps children learn about teamwork and following rules. They can learn to organise objects, ideas and skills in logical, interconnected ways. Play also helps language and communication development.



Source: <https://www.kettler.co.uk/screen-free-learning>

## The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend

### Guidelines for children and young people (aged 2 - 18)

All children and young people should be active, at a moderate to vigorous level, for at least 60 minutes every day. Include muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises 3 times a week.

Physical activity can be lots of fun for children. Help them to do activities they enjoy like cycling, walking the dog, running, games, playground, dancing, soccer, swimming, etc.

You could walk, cycle or scoot to school to build in daily exercise.

#### Benefits of physical activity:

- Improves sleep.
- Reduces anxiety and stress levels.
- Improves social skills.
- Improves concentration.
- Helps to develop a healthy body.
- Improves self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Helps to develop coordination and movement skills.





# When Your Child Starts School

## On the first day:

- Have everything ready the night before to reduce last minute panic (e.g. school bag packed, uniform out, plan for breakfast).
- Leave plenty of time so you arrive a few minutes before the bell rings. This will help you and your child arrive to school relaxed.
- Reassure your child and talk about the fun they will have in school.
- Try not to let your child see if you are upset and don't hang around for too long on the first morning as this could unsettle your child.
- Make sure your child knows who will be collecting them and where.



## Going forward:

- If you have any concerns about your child, contact the school immediately (do not wait!). Find the best way to communicate with your child's teacher, e.g. use a 'communication diary' where parent and teacher put notes in a diary or notebook about what went well at home/in school, any concerns, and/or important information; arrange a meeting with the teacher through the school secretary.
- Attend courses or parent meetings offered by the school. There you will learn more about your child's school, what you can do to support your child at home and to meet other parents.
- Arrange for your child to arrive and be collected on time. This may involve changing your daily schedule if you work or seeking support from family members/ friends.

# Milestones – Aged 5 years Old

Developmental milestones describe the skills most children acquire by a certain age. All children develop at different rates but if you have any concerns about your child's developmental milestones talk to your GP.

## Use My Body

- Stands confidently on either leg.
- Hops with both legs.
- Runs up and down stairs using one foot per step.
- Walks on narrow line.
- Skips on alternate feet.
- Throws and catches a ball well (catching with 2 hands).
- Enjoys ball skills within games.



## Independence Skills

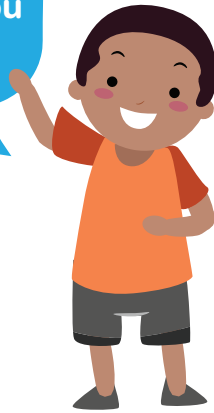
- Undresses and dresses alone (may need help with small buttons, zips).
- Blows nose.
- Washes and dries face and hands.
- Uses knife and fork.
- Uses toilet independently.

## Understanding

- Loves to be read or told stories. and acts them out in detail later, alone or with friends.
- Understands time and sequence concepts and uses terms such as 'first', 'then', 'last'.
- Enjoys jokes and riddles.



'A crayon is something you colour with'



## Talking

- Gives full name, age, address and usually birthday.
- Can explain a concrete noun by use (For example: 'A crayon is something you colour with').
- Enjoys reciting or singing rhymes and jingles.
- Constantly asks meaning of abstract words and uses them, usually appropriately but with some errors.

## Social skills

- Follows tidiness routines but needs constant reminders.
- Shows a definite sense of humour.
- Enjoys imaginative play.
- Understands meaning of time in relation to daily routine.
- Protective towards younger children and pets.
- Comforts playmates who are upset.



## Speech

- May still have some difficulty with saying the sounds 'ch', 'j', 'r' and 's'

# Top Tips to Develop Your Child's Skills

The more your child practices relevant skills at home the more he/she will be prepared to participate in real world situations in school.

Try to introduce these skills naturally during your child's day at home.

## 1. Encourage self-care skills and independence:

- Practice dressing skills during quiet times when you can give your child extra time to learn, e.g. at weekends.
- Encourage your child to take off/put on own coat/shoes.
- Practice opening and closing their lunch box and drink bottle. Get your child to carry and open and close his/her own schoolbag and put in and take out lunchbox and books when needed rather than the parent doing it.
- Encourage your child to complete toileting tasks independently. Teach your child how to wash his/her hands by showing how to use the soap, rub hands together and dry them with a towel. Use pictures to show the sequence of events if needed.
- Write your child's name on their bag, books, coat, uniform and lunchbox. This will help you and your child easily locate items if misplaced.
- Try to get clothes and bags etc. which your child can easily manage (e.g. Velcro shoes, bag with one zip pocket only).
- Use a reward chart and some stickers to motivate your child to practice these independence skills at home.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri
 <p>Wash hands</p>					
 <p>Put on coat</p>					
 <p>Put on shoes</p>					
 <p>Put books in Bag</p>					

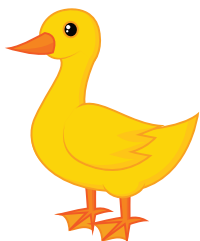
## 2. Develop gross motor skills (using big muscles in the body):

The following activities can help develop your child's gross motor skills:

- Wheelbarrow Games e.g. races and walking over cushions and mats.
- 'Pushing and Pulling' games:
  - pushing each other's hands.
  - pushing each other's feet.
  - tug-of-war.
- Animal walks: for example, Bunny hop, duck waddle, crab walk, etc.



**Waddle Like a Duck**



**Shuffle like a Penguin**



**Soar like an Eagle**



**Hop like a Frog**



- Obstacle courses: climbing up and over, crawling through, sliding down, spinning around, running around cones, jumping over, ball games etc.
- Ball games: With younger children, start with a balloon. Catch and throw a medium sized soft ball standing close together- move further apart as the child masters each distance, throw a bean bag or ball at, or into a target, e.g. skittles, wall target.
- General activities including use of playground equipment, trampolines, space-hoppers, play Simon Says, rolling and jumping games.
- Extra-curricular activities such as swimming, gymnastics, Taekwondo, dancing, football, etc.

### 3. Develop fine motor skills (using small muscles in the hands):

#### Posture:

- At home, think about how your child is sitting when doing activities such as colouring, cutting or using cutlery.
- Try to ensure their feet are flat on the floor or resting on a surface. Pop a box under their feet if necessary.



#### Strengthen hands and finger grips:

- Use playdough.
- Building activities such as blocks and Lego.
- Use clothes pegs - hang up pictures on a line or pick up cotton wool balls.

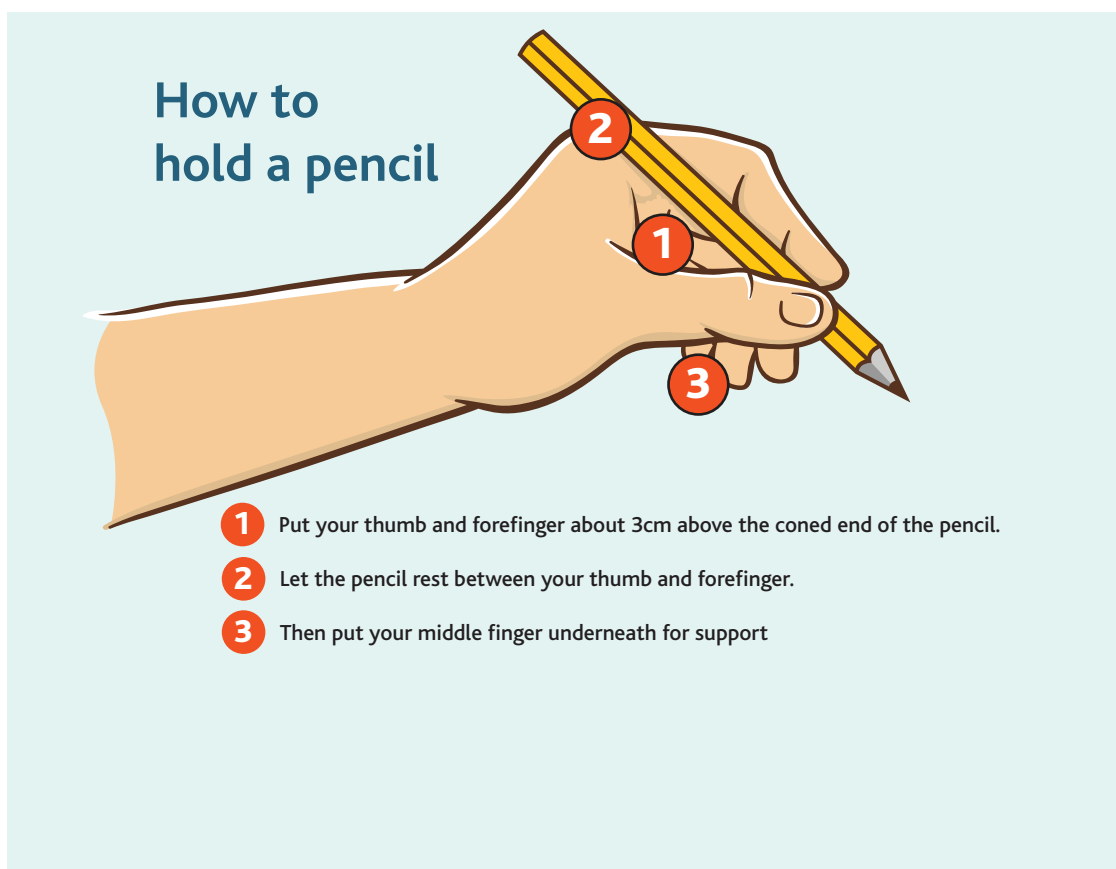
#### Scissors activities:

- Get some small child-sized scissors and show your child how to hold them.
- Cut along thick lines on paper and cut playdough with scissors.



### Pencil activities:

- Drawing and colouring activities.
- Drawing lines and shapes.



Top tip! Give your child very short crayons if they have difficulty holding their pencil correctly.

## Develop Communication Skills

**Play listening games:** Listening games help to build children's attention skills and encourage them to follow longer instructions. These skills are very important when understanding and learning in the classroom. Examples of listening games are 'Simon Says' & 'Run and Touch'.

**Repeat repeat repeat!** Repeating words lots of times and in a variety of different sentences and situations helps children to learn. Think of when you were learning a foreign language in school- you needed lots of repetition!

**Recite nursery rhymes together:** Use a slow pace when saying rhymes so that your child can hear all the words and join in more easily. Use lots of actions and facial expressions to make the rhymes fun!

**Show them the right way:** It's normal for young children to make mistakes in their speech and language. If your child makes a mistake, say the word or sentence again correctly for your child to hear but without directly correcting him/her. Give the correct model more than once if possible so that your child hears the right way several times.

### Speech example



### Language example



### Use everyday routines:

Children can learn a lot from talking about everyday events. For example, let your child help you unpack the groceries, put laundry in the washing machine or use a plastic knife to cut up fruit. Encourage conversation by talking about what you are doing and why. Mealtimes are also a great time to chat!







### Read stories with your child:

- Use books with lots of pictures.
- Try to guess what the story is about by looking at the title and pictures on the cover.
- Read the story using an interesting voice and lots of facial expression!
- Explain new words that you come across.
- Develop your child's story-telling skills by encouraging him/her to talk about the pictures and asking questions to get him/her thinking about the story.

### Play with your child:

Follow your child's lead during play so that you know it is something that he/she likes! Chat with your child about what you are playing and use your imaginations in pretend play!



## References

- Sharma, A. & Cockerill, H. (2014). *Mary Sheridan's from Birth to Five Years: Children's Developmental Progress*. Routledge.

## Websites That Informed the Content of this Resource

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