

Discover...

Things to do before your child starts school

A guide for
parents and carers
by the Family
Information Service



**west
sussex
county
council**

www.westsussex.gov.uk/family

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As your child approaches school age there are many things you can do to prepare for the changes ahead. Helping children to feel confident and positive about school will give them a good start. They will be in a new place, with new children, new rules and routines. Many children find this very exciting whilst others will be a little daunted.

Many schools and pre-schools help children during their transition to school. They arrange programmes which may include:

- visits to the school over several weeks;
- walks around the school to see where things are, such as playgrounds and toilets;
- spending time in a classroom with teachers and other children;
- the new teacher visiting your child in their pre-school setting;
- time for parents to meet staff members and ask questions too.

These are some of the ways you can help your child:

Building confidence

Talk with your child about what they think school will be like and share books with positive stories about starting school. Your local library can advise you on which books to choose and you can borrow them for free.

Here are some practical ideas to help your child feel confident on their first day at school.

- Take your child along when buying their uniform, lunch box/school bag (if you need them) and choose items they can open and close themselves.
- Get used to bedtime and morning routines that they will have when they start school. Getting enough sleep is very important.



- Practice the route to school and work out how long it will take to get there.
- Plan to take your child to school on the first day. Remember to show them where you will pick them up at the end of the day.

Working together with the school

In the first few weeks it will help to think about the following for your child.

- They may be tired at the end of the day - don't plan too many activities after school.
- They may be really hungry after school - take a healthy snack when you pick them up and/or try giving them an early tea.
- They may want to tell you all about their day as soon as they see you - make sure you have time to listen.
- Ask them about what happened at school each day.
- Encourage your child to talk to the teacher if they are worried or upset about anything that happens.

If you do have concerns about how your child is settling at school, try and speak to the class teacher first. They may have made the same observations as you. Ask if there are things you can do at home that will help support your child. If you want to talk again about how things are going, agree a time with the class teacher.

It can also help if you:

- let the teacher know if there is something happening at home that may be affecting your child;
- let them know about any health problems your child may have;
- read all the school notices and reply as soon as possible.

Leaving your child at school

It can be quite difficult saying goodbye to your child. Ensure they know that you, or whoever is dropping them off, will be back to collect them later. If they're really upset, talk to the class teacher about ideas for making the separation process easier and work on them together. Ask if you can phone the school office later to check your child is okay.

Eating at school

Eating at school can be a different experience for your child compared with eating at home or at a pre-school. Children will often sit at shared tables or on benches. They will be encouraged to feed themselves and to cut their own food using a knife and fork, so try and practice at home. If your child suffers from any food allergies it is important that you inform the school as soon as possible.

All children in Reception, Year One and Year Two are now entitled to free school meals. If you plan to supply your child's own lunch here are some useful tips.

- Remember to label your child's lunchbox - half the class might have the same design!
- Children are more likely to eat new foods when you're not watching and when they are surrounded by other children eating.
- Some schools will not allow certain items in a lunch box. They should tell you this information before your child starts school.

Activities that will help your child:

Reading together is fun and can also:

- improve listening skills;
- develop their imagination;
- increase knowledge of people and ideas from around the world;
- introduce them to new words, ideas and information;
- improve their memory.

You can help improve your child's **language** skills by:

- singing songs together;
- having fun with rhymes and jokes;
- asking them to follow simple instructions, for example how to pack their school bag;
- identifying pictures, letters and words in books, magazines, on television or the internet;
- talking to your child and giving them time to think about their reply.

Develop their **thinking** skills by:

- asking questions about characters, places and events;
- retelling stories together or creating a different ending;
- making up sentences using a new or unusual word;
- drawing pictures about a story you've read.

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Help develop their **writing** skills by:

- drawing, making marks with pencils, crayons or paintbrushes on paper, or with sticks in sand;
- praising your child's efforts, even if that's not how you would do it yourself;
- looking at numbers, letters and familiar words you see around you.

Develop their **number** skills by:

- encouraging your child to use words such as many, a lot, more or less;
- finding things in a group that are different, or the same, such as shapes or colours;
- finding opposites and patterns;
- involving your child in everyday activities that require counting, for example setting the table for three people.

You can help develop their **personal and social** skills by:

- arranging for them to play with other children so that they can learn to share and take turns;
- encouraging them to tidy up after playing - make sure you join in too and praise their efforts;
- giving specific instructions. This helps children to be clear about what they are being asked to do, for example "I'd like you to put all of the bricks in the box please."
- talking about feelings and emotions;
- encouraging them to "have a go" and become more independent, for example dressing themselves, pouring a drink or going to the toilet.

Help them to develop their **physical** skills by:

- using scissors, drawing, craft activities and play dough;
- finding opportunities to climb, run, skip, jump and lift;
- playing and exploring at the park;
- taking part in games and activities that make them out of breath.

Play is one of the most important needs children have, even once they go to school. Children learn a lot from times when things don't go to plan, so under supervision let them have freedom to explore and take some risks.



Contact Us

You can contact the Family Information Service for further information and guidance about your family's needs.



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Opening hours

Monday – Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm

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We are able to supply you with a copy of this leaflet in a version most appropriate to your needs, for example audio, braille, large print or in another language.



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