

How to help your child get ready to start school



Children & Families

Starting reception class at age four or five is the beginning of school for children. Some children will have attended a nursery or other formal childcare; other children will be coming straight from a home environment with family into a full day of school.

For all children, it will be a big step – some may be very excited, others may be a little worried; especially if they've not been away from family before.

Once they begin school, some children will find it easier than others due to a number of factors including the individual personality of the child. Like adults, some are more sensitive than others, some respond to change better than others.

“The good news is there’s a lot you can do to help your child prepare for school on both an emotional and practical level.”

And the more you can practice these things and openly discuss starting school in a happy and excited way – the better chance your child will have of adapting to school life more easily.”



Start by chatting to your child about school

Help your child look forward to:

- Making new friends
- Play time
- Fun activities in the classroom
- Learning new things
- PE and doing sports

You can also:

- Shop together for the uniform
- Have fun trying it all on
- Allow your child to pick a pack lunch box or bag and water bottle.
- If the school offers a visit or walk-around – go with your child.
- Walk past the school regularly with your child
- Look at the school website with your child and look at photographs of activities and events.
- Read books with your child about starting school, start with looking at this booklet together.

Give reassurance

Talk to your child about what to do in case something happens at school or they feel worried about something or feel unwell. This will help to avoid your child becoming very anxious about being away from you. Say things like:

- Your teacher is there to help you
- If you don't feel well, the school has a nurse who will look after you.
- You can tell me everything about your day when you get home.
- School ends at 3.30pm (or whenever your child's school ends) and you will be collected.

This is also a good time to make sure your child has had all the vaccinations they need before starting school such as the second MMR and the 4-in1 pre-school booster. Talk to your GP if you are unsure and to arrange this.

Practical tips to get your child ready for starting school

If you can help your child with these everyday practical activities – they will be much more ready to do them confidently by themselves and this will support an easier start to school.

Can your child feed themselves?

- ✓ I can use a knife and fork
- ✓ I can open my packed lunch on my own.
- ✓ I can open wrappers and packets
- ✓ I don't mind eating in front of others



Encourage independence at mealtimes by encouraging your child to feed themselves and open packets and wrappers. It is best to use full size cutlery to practise. Find ways of eating when you are outside of your home environment, so your child is comfortable eating in front of others e.g. take a picnic to the park or have a snack at a friend's house.

Does your child know basic self-care?

- ✓ I know when to wash my hands
- ✓ I can wipe my nose
- ✓ I can ask for help if I don't feel well



Encourage hand washing and hygiene routines throughout the day and talk about when and why we wash our hands. Demonstrate the right way for your child to wash their hands and wipe their nose.

Can your child go to the toilet by themselves?

- ✓ I can go to the toilet on my own, wipe myself and flush.
- ✓ I can wash and dry my hands without any help.



Encourage your child to use the toilet on their own. When you visit the school ask that your child be shown the bathroom area. Encourage and talk about hygiene and why we wash our hands to support children in consistently building this into their routine. If they forget, provide a gentle reminder to support their thinking. For example, “What might happen if our hands are dirty?”

Can your child dress themselves?

- ✓ I can get dressed and undressed on my own.
- ✓ I can button and unbutton my clothes and use a zip.
- ✓ I can put on my shoes and socks
- ✓ I can change into my PE kit and put my coat on.



Help your child to practice dressing and undressing at home and make it fun. Use zips and buttons. Slip-on or Velcro shoes are easier to put on.

Does your child enjoy being independent?

- ✓ I am happy to be away from my mum, dad or main carer.
- ✓ I am happy to tidy and look after my things.
- ✓ I am feeling confident about starting school.
- ✓ I can make my own choices



Help your child by creating opportunities for them to be without you for a short period of time i.e. with family or trusted friends. Get into the habit of telling your child what time you will collect them. This is to help build trust in the child that they will be collected. Encourage your child to look after their things by having places to put them that your child can return them to.

Has your child practised any routines?

- ✓ I have practised putting on my uniform and getting ready to leave home on time.
- ✓ I have a good bedtime routine so
- ✓ I'm not too tired for school.
- ✓ I'm learning to eat at times I will on school days.

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Help your child to practice putting on their uniform and then practice the journey to school together. A regular bedtime with a routine is very important. For example: bath time, getting clothes ready for the next day and going to bed at the same time. Giving your child meals and snacks at the same time they would get them on school days prepares them for new routines.

Tips to encourage your child to enjoy learning

If you can help your child to learn some basic skills at home – this will develop their self-confidence and they will feel more able to build on that learning once they are at school.

Help your child to practice counting

- ✓ I enjoy counting objects
- ✓ I notice things to count
- ✓ I am starting to know basic shapes
- ✓ I like saying number rhymes and playing counting games.



In every day experiences provide opportunities for children to notice and count objects around them. For example: the number of plates on the table, how many stairs as they are climbing them. Talk about the size and shape of everyday objects. For example: the table is round, the paper is square.

Is your child used to sharing and taking turns?

- ✓ I can share and take turns
- ✓ I like playing games with others
- ✓ I like interacting with other children.
- ✓ I understand that taking turns will help me make friends.



This is so important as it will help your child interact well with other children and make friends more easily. You can discuss this with your child when talking about meeting new children and making friends. Provide opportunities for sharing and takings to help your child understand they sometimes need to wait for things. Play games with them where you need to share toys or other items.

Help your child to enjoy speaking and reading books

- ✓ I like it when we read books together.
- ✓ I can recognise my name when it is written down.
- ✓ I like asking questions and will wait to hear the answer.



Read with your child and make sure there are a few nice books available for your child to pick up and look at with words suitable for their age to begin reading. To improve your child's vocabulary (range of words they understand) try to introduce new words and find different ways to explain things. Encourage your child to talk out loud and using longer sentences. So, if they answer a question with 'yes' or 'no' encourage them to give you a longer answer.

Help your child to listen better so they can understand what's happening

- ✓ I can sit and listen for a short while.
- ✓ I understand when someone is asking me to do something.
- ✓ I know I can ask a question if I don't understand anything.
- ✓ I know that there are rules I will need to follow.



Encourage short periods of uninterrupted time for sitting together to share everyday experiences. For example: go over what has happened in the day and what was fun about it. To help your child understand how to follow basic instructions, make this a fun exercise by telling them you are playing a game and let's see what they can do when you ask them. You can try instructions like 'please tidy your toys' or 'choose a book and bring it to me' or 'please put your coat on'.

Help your child with their writing

- ✓ I like tracing patterns and colouring in.
- ✓ I enjoy making marks on paper
- ✓ I am practising holding a pencil



Encourage your child to make marks on paper. Use big and small pieces of paper, use different pens and pencils and crayons. The more confidence your child has making marks – the easier they will find it to begin to write. Talk with your child about the marks they have made. Let your child see you writing different things. For example, a shopping list or a greeting card. This will help your child understand that we write for different purposes.

Useful contacts

If you have any questions about your child starting school, please talk to the school where your child is registered as they may be able to help. You can also get in touch with the following teams who will be more than happy to help you.

Ealing Family Information Service

For general advice and guidance including information on family support services, childcare providers and childcare funding, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and more.

020 8825 5588 (Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm)
children@ealing.gov.uk

Ealing School Admissions Team

Help and advice if you have a question about your child's school registration or need urgent help to find a school place for your child.

020 8825 6339 (Mon-Fri, 9am-12pm)
in-yearadmissions@ealing.gov.uk

Early Start Ealing

Teams offering a wide range of support for families; based in children's centres around the borough. Get advice and information or access to services that may be able to help as your child approaches school age. More information at www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk

020 8102 5888
clcht.ealingadminhub@nhs.net

You can find a lot of information for children and families living in the London Borough of Ealing by visiting www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk

And for children and families with Special Educational Needs and / or a disability (SEND) you'll find lots of information, advice and guidance on our Local Offer www.ealinglocaloffer.org.uk

For more information on the stages of a child's development visit www.healthmatters.clch.nhs.uk/ealing

