

Starting school

What can you do to help your child starting school in September?

Some of the self-help skills that children need when starting school are:

- Listening skills and the ability to follow simple instructions
- Communication skills
- Attention/concentration
- Toileting and washing their hands
- Undressing and dressing (when changing for PE)
- Feeding/drinking
- Mark making
- Beginner scissor skills
- Physical skills – need to know body parts, use their hand-eye coordination to catch and throw a ball/bean-bag, stamina and strength, co-ordination.

If you spend a little time every day encouraging your child to practise some of these skills; they will find it easier to manage and be more confident when they start school.

Listening Skills and following instructions

- Make sure that you have your child's attention and they are listening. Give simple clear instructions and ask them to repeat what they have to do. See if your child can follow one instruction at a time or can they remember more?
- Play games with simple instructions e.g. go around the house and find four things that are red in colour and put them into the box.
- Play simple 'Simon Says' and encourage them to do actions e.g. Simon says to put your hands on your head; Simon says to jump three times.
- Tell your child to move like a bear, crab, monkey, snake etc. – what noises do these animals make? Ask the child what the animal would like to do?
- Read a simple story book and then ask them questions about the story.
- Make up part of a story and ask them what happens next?



Communication Skills

- Encourage your child to label things, encourage them to answer questions, describe things – what did you see? what happened? how did you feel? Always give your child time to process the question/information and more time to allow them to answer. Be patient and try not to guess what they are trying to say.



Attention/Concentration

- Give your child a choice between two things e.g. a puzzle and colouring. Encourage them to finish the task before moving on to the next. If they do not want to finish a task because it is challenging, help them by doing a couple of steps and giving lots of encouragement and praise – encourage them to continue by saying 'two more pieces, then finished'. If you use this technique, the child knows that they only have to do a certain amount for a short period of time and then you can gradually extend how much they do over a few weeks/months.



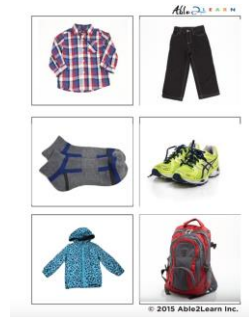
Toileting & Washing Hands

- Encourage your child to go to the toilet independently. Break the task down and teach them how to manage their clothing, teach them how many squares of toilet paper is needed for wiping and to look to make sure that the paper is clean after wiping and then teach them how to wash their hands thoroughly. Be patient if they have accidents as they are still learning to recognise body signals and deal with all the steps of this new skill. See the advice hand-out on toileting if your child is struggling with this task. You can use a sticker chart/star chart to encourage and show your child how often they have been successful with using the toilet. A toilet insert and non-slip steps may be helpful.



Undressing & Dressing Skills

- Bath time is a good time to practise dressing skills. After enjoying bath-time, encourage them to towel dry themselves and to sit on the towel ready to help with dressing. Break down the task into small chunks – get them to pull on the pyjama bottoms and steady them as they stand to pull them up. Show them how to place the top on their lap with the front picture on their knees and the neck hole furthest away – then ask them to lift the back layer of the top and put their head and arms inside.
- Encourage lots of dressing-up games so they get to practise taking clothes on and off.
- Encourage your child to post pennies into a money-box. A pincer grip is needed to hold buttons and post the button into the button-hole when getting dressed.
- See advice sheet on dressing skills.



Eating & Drinking

- Encourage your child to feed themselves using cutlery.
- Encourage and supervise practise with a child safe knife – they could cut up pretend food and have a tea-party with their dolls/teddies/characters.
- Have a picnic on the lawn or carpet and encourage them to open the sandwich boxes, packets of other foods, insert the straw into box of juice etc. so they are confident of their ability.
- Don't worry about perfect technique have fun and encourage as much practise as possible.
- See advice sheet on cutlery skills.



Mark making

- Have fun making marks. Use a variety of mediums to keep your child interested e.g. use fingers or sticks in dry and wet sand or dirt, make marks in shaving foam, corn-flour paste, paint, use crayons, felt-pens, pencils and pens, try using chalks on the pavement, marker pens on a white-board, water on a large paint-brush and paint patterns on the ground. Encourage the child to draw lines and circles as school will help use these marks and develop them into



letters. Try to remember to start a circle at the top and then move in an anti-clockwise direction to move to join up the circle. Lines should start at the top and then move in a downwards direction.

- Use the interests of your child to expand their creativity: if they are very keen on dinosaurs – show them how to draw a simple dinosaur – they can then draw foods for the creature and draw a house or toys or friends.
- Some children love colouring in pictures, some love incorporating stickers or pre-cut shapes.

Scissor Skills

- Encourage your child to sip off pieces of coloured card from a 2cm wide strip of thin card – the pieces can then be stuck on to a picture or form a picture.
- Make sure that your child has left handed scissors if they are left-handed.
- Start learning by making single cuts and then progress to several cuts in a row.
- They are various types of scissors for young children – they can start off with the small loop scissors or easi-grip scissors and then progress to spring assisted scissors and then learn to coordinate normal scissors. Always supervise your child as you do not want them to cut their hair or their sibling's hair or the furnishings etc.
- See advice sheet on scissor skills.



Physical Skills

- It is important that all children engage in physical activity for at least one hour every day. Children learn about their bodies, their environment and their capabilities through moving, playing and exploring. They need to run, jump, skip, hop and climb, to use scooters and bikes, play ball games, make up skipping games and enjoy hide and seek adventures.
- Encourage games such as 'Simon Says' so they learn about body parts and the right and left sides of their body. Play Twister or put coloured circles on the ground and use those in the same way.
- Encourage various obstacle courses both in the house and outside and then encourage children to make up their own courses.
- Use balloons to play catch as they are slower moving – try hitting the balloons to each other using an empty cardboard kitchen-roll inner.
- Encourage children to throw bean-bags, balls, rolled up pairs of socks and small soft toys into the laundry basket.



- Encourage children to move like animals, to walk along a rope – forwards and backwards, to jump sideways over the rope from one side to the other.

Backwards Chaining

This is a technique that can be used for any activity your child is finding difficult. This is where the adult completes all but the last step of the task and the child is encouraged to finish it independently. For example parents could pull up the child's trousers to their thighs then encourage them to complete the task by pulling them up the last few centimetres. Once they can independently complete the last step gradually work backwards so they are completing more and more themselves.

Problem Solving

Children learn to problem solve from a young age and this informs every stage of their development. For example; many toddlers learning to walk will fall over multiple times before problem solving how to stay upright on their feet. Problem solving is an important skill to maintain growing up into adult life. When a child is able to problem solve an activity they find difficult, they are more likely to retain this skill than if an adult tells them what to do. This will aid their learning and development at school. You can help a child to learn problem solving skills through giving them time to try out an activity themselves before telling them what to do and by asking them questions such as "what could you do differently" or "can you try changing your plan".

-See advice sheet on problem solving for further ideas

The most important thing to remember when encouraging your child to practise new skills – is to have fun, make it enjoyable, be silly with them and give lots of praise.



Contact details

Children's Therapy Services

Telephone number: 0300 019 2936

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

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We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499 or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk for advice.

If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk

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