

Getting ready to start school

Children's Therapy Services Patient information

Starting school is exciting. There are lots of skills that help children feel confident. You can help your child by practicing a little every day.

Skills that help children at school include being able to:

- **listen and follow instructions**
- **talk and communicate**
- **pay attention**
- **use the toilet and wash their hands**
- **dress and undress**
- **eat and drink independently**
- **mark make**
- **use scissors**
- **use physical skills** like balance, strength, and coordination

Practicing these skills help your child feel ready and proud of themselves.

Listening and following instructions

- Make sure your child is **looking and listening** before you speak.
- Give **simple instructions** and ask them to repeat what they need to do.
- Play games like:
 - **Find things around the house**
 - **Simon Says**
 - **Move like animals**
- Read a short story and ask **what happened next**.

Communication skills

- Encourage your child to **name things, answer questions**, and **describe** what they see or feel.
- Give them **time to think** and time to answer.
- Try not to finish their sentences for them.

Attention and concentration

- Offer a choice between two activities, like a puzzle or colouring.
- Encourage them to **finish one task** before starting another.
- If it's tricky, help with a few steps and say things like '**two more pieces, then finished**'.
- Slowly increase how long they work over time.

Toileting and handwashing

- Teach your child to go to the toilet **independently**.
- Break the steps down: clothing → wiping → checking the paper → flushing → washing hands.
- Be patient with accidents.
- Use a **sticker chart** for encouragement.
- A toilet insert and non slip step can help.

Dressing and undressing

- Practice after bath time.
- Let your child **dry themselves** and sit on a towel.
- Break dressing into small steps:
 - Pull trousers to knees → stand → pull up
 - Lay top on lap → lift back layer → put head and arms in
- **Play dressing up games**.
- Practice **pincer grip** by posting coins into a money box.

Eating and drinking

- Encourage your child to **use cutlery**.
- Practice cutting pretend food and having a tea party.
- Have a picnic and let them open boxes, packets, and straws.
- Focus on fun, not perfect technique.

Mark making

- Make marks in lots of fun ways:
 - Sand, shaving foam, paint, chalk, crayons, pens
- Practice **lines and circles**:
 - Circles start at the top and go **anticlockwise**
 - Lines start at the top and go **down**
- Use their interests (dinosaurs, cars, princesses) to inspire drawings.

Scissor skills

- Start with **snipping** small pieces from a strip of card.
- Use **left handed scissors** if needed.
- Begin with single cuts, then move to cutting along lines.
- Try loop scissors, easy grip scissors, or spring assisted scissors.
- Always supervise.

Physical skills

Children need at least **one hour of active play** every day.

Try:

- running, jumping, hopping, skipping
- scooters and bikes
- ball games
- **Simon Says** for learning body parts
- obstacle courses
- balloon games
- throwing beanbags or rolled up socks into a basket
- walking along a rope or line on the floor

Backwards chaining

This means your child does **the last step** of a task first. Example:

- You pull trousers up to their thighs
- They pull them up the last bit
- When they can do that, let them do more steps. This builds confidence.

Problem solving

Children learn by trying things themselves. If something is tricky, ask questions like:

- **What could you do differently?**
- **Can you change your plan?**

This helps them learn the skills they will use at school.

Most important of all

Have fun. Be silly. Give me lots of praise. Your child will learn best when they feel happy and supported. www.parentkind.org.uk/for-parents/send-support-hub

Contact details

Children's Therapy Services

Telephone number: **0300 019 2936**

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