**Getting ready for school**

Starting primary school can sometimes be daunting for you and your child, but it marks the start of an exciting new chapter. Before you know it, your child will be making friends, learning new skills, and becoming increasingly independent.

What will my child do in the Early Years?

At this stage of their learning, your child will be mainly learning through play-based activities. They will also be learning about routine and developing early literacy and maths skills, learning about the world around them and learning social skills.

### The importance of play

Your child will learn by doing things for themselves, by exploring and investigating, watching and listening, talking and discussing, creating, and communicating – in other words, playing.

Play is children’s work and playing hard is very tiring! Play can also be very messy as your child will be learning both inside with sand, water and paint, and also in the outdoors with mud, leaves and so on, so you can expect some mucky clothes at the end of the day.

### The Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a curriculum for 3–5-year-old children. This is broken down into three prime aspects and four specific areas of learning. The three prime aspects of learning are:

#### Communication and Language

#### Personal, social and emotional development

#### Physical development

In addition to these three prime aspects of learning, there are four specific areas:

#### Literacy

#### Mathematics

#### Understanding the world

#### Expressive arts and design

Most of the time, your child will be learning all seven areas of learning together, in a cross curricular way. So if they spend lots of time in the sand area, for example, there’s no need for concern! They may well be covering all kinds of important learning, such as:

* finding out about shape, quantity and volume
* creating imaginative worlds
* feeling different textures and working with different materials
* and even developing motor skills and strength for writing!

How can you help them prepare for this? Here are some top tips for preparing for Nursery (FS1)

### Talk (and listen)

It seems very obvious, but at this stage one of the best things you can do for your child’s learning is to spend time talking together. They are constantly learning new words and will be exploring ways to build sentences and put words together through trial and error.

Encourage eye contact and back-and-forth conversation. Get them talking about the toys they are playing with. Ask them for their opinion about things – what is their favourite piece of equipment to play on in the park and why? Chat together about what you need to buy from the shop and encourage them to help you find items.

If you’re looking for an easy way to encourage conversation, why not try baking together. This is a fun way to learn to follow instructions and to chat together about what you are doing.

### Read, read, read

Time spent reading together brings so many benefits to your child – and you! Through reading, your child will hear lots of words that they might not be as likely to come across in everyday conversation. They will also develop their listening skills and develop their understanding of how stories work.

Rhythm and rhyme are so important for early language development and, luckily, there are masses of wonderful books available. Encourage your child to talk about the pictures, or to make predictions about what will happen next.

There’s no reason reading should be limited to stories, either – why not encourage your child to recognise and read print when you are out shopping, on the bus or at the park?

### Sing songs and rhymes

Have lots of fun singing songs and nursery rhymes together. Don’t worry about how good your singing voice is! Singing songs and saying rhymes can help your child to develop early language skills.

Have fun with numbers by singing counting songs, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5… Once I caught a fish alive. Other songs such as Ten Green Bottles progress in reverse order, which can be especially helpful when young children start thinking about adding and taking away.

### Point out numbers on the go

Point out the numbers you see when you are out and about and encourage your child to do the same. Look for bus numbers, prices and house numbers. When shopping, ask your child to select the number of apples or bananas you need – they’re helping you out, and learning at the same time.

### Dress up

Dressing up and role play are great opportunities for talking and listening and for imaginative play. On a practical level, a fun dressing up session can help your child to practise getting themselves dressed. You can fit in a sneaky bit of training with those tricky zips, armholes and buttons.

As well as the tips above, here are some more top tips for preparing for Reception (FS2)

1. **Support your child’s independence**

The most useful thing you can do to get your child ready for school is to make sure they are comfortable doing simple tasks by themselves. This includes:

* **Going to the toilet**. Resist the temptation to pop your child onto the loo and wipe their bottom. It is better to get your child into the habit of doing this for themselves.
* **Getting dressed**. Avoid clothing with fiddly buckles and buttons. It is also a good idea to have a few dry runs with the PE Kit.
* **Putting on shoes**. Tie-up shoes might be a bit difficult. Go for shoes with Velcro fasteners if possible.
* **Eating**. This includes using a knife and fork, opening their lunchbox, being able to open everything in the lunchbox (some yoghurt tubes and drink cartons can be tricky) and peeling an orange or banana.
* **Solving simple problems**. Encourage your child to resolve problems by talking when they don’t understand or something isn’t going well. It is important that they also learn when to ask an adult for help.

1. **Build up your child’s social skills**

Learning in a classroom is a social activity. Children learn and develop by playing alongside their peers, and they will make better progress if they are happy mixing with other children and adults. You can encourage this by:

* **Organising play dates**. Play dates with children from your child’s new class help improve their social skills and makes the leap to primary school less scary – they will like knowing one or two of their classmates before school begins. Virtual meet-ups can be useful too.
* **Practising greetings**. Your child should know how to start a conversation with their new classmates. You can use dolls and soft toys to practise saying “hello”!
* **Practising conversations**. Giving your child time to talk – and also having time when they have to *listen* – teaches vital speaking and listening skills. You could take turns to talk about the best part of your day during dinner. Can they ask questions to find out more? Can they remember their sibling’s favourite part of the day?
* **Encouraging sharing and tolerance**. Sharing games such as Snakes and Ladders let children practise social skills and turn-taking. Be sure to use the language of turn-taking, like ‘Whose turn is it next?’ and ‘Thank you for waiting’.

1. **Make a start on early literacy and numeracy skills**

Your child is not expected to have amazing literacy or numeracy skills at this age – that’s what school is for! However, there are some ways you can get your child ready for learning:

* **Help them recognise their name**. It is handy if your child can find their space in the cloakroom, and can keep track of labelled clothes and other belongings.
* **Share stories**. Reading to your child improves their vocabulary and listening skills, and acting out stories is a great way to practise communication. Seeing you enjoy stories also primes your child to be an enthusiastic reader. You can find storytelling videos YouTube and free eBooks on [eBook library](https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/find-a-book/library-page/).
* **Hone fine motor skills**. Building hand strength, fine motor skills, and hand-eye co-ordination helps prepare your child for writing. Making Lego models, using scissors, and threading beads onto string are fun ways to develop hand strength. Drawing and colouring activities introduce your child to mark-making tools.
* **Introduce them to numbers**. Why not go on a number hunt around your local area and take pictures of any numbers you find? You could also share [counting songs](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p077df3s) together or count objects as you set the table for dinner. Can your child get five forks or three cups out? Can they share them between members of the family?

1. **Help your child learn to concentrate**

Being able to concentrate in 10–15 minute bursts will be really useful at school. Here are some ways to practise:

* **Enjoy extended play together**. Building kits like Lego are great for encouraging your child’s resilience, especially if they can finish the activity in one sitting. Race-the-clock games are good for improving concentration (and are helpful when you need your child to get their socks and shoes on quickly!).
* **Follow instructions**. Giving your child simple instructions to follow helps build their concentration. Why not have a go at some of these [child-friendly recipes](https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/?s=recipe&fwp_post_types=activities)?

1. **Talk to your child about school**

Talking about the exciting things your child is going to do at school helps them get over any nerves. You could:

* **Visit the school**. Walking or driving past the school will help them familiarise themselves with the location and environment.
* **Talk about how fun school is**! If you’ve been on a settling-in morning, there might be something your child particularly enjoyed playing with (the dinosaurs, the paints, the climbing frame). Older siblings could be enlisted to share all the things they enjoy about school – as long as they’re thoroughly briefed not to share things they’re not so keen on! Giving your child time to talk also lets them raise any concerns or questions.
* **Practise the school routine**. It can be helpful to do a practice journey before the big day, looking for interesting things on the way. It might be a good idea to make sure your child has school-friendly bedtimes and getting-up times a few days in advance.

