

# Ready, Steady for Primary School!

Going to BIG school for the first time is both an exciting and slightly scary thought for most children and their parents. I have been asked many times how best a parent can prepare their child for this important step in their development. Having just had my first child in Reception and sending my second child this coming year I have thought and gathered the opinions of many of my friends and colleagues and we have come up with the following:

## Independence

### **Organisational skills**

Your child will be expected to put their book bag in a designated place, hang up their coats, bring their water bottle into class and put their lunch box or money purse in the right place. Making this part of your home routine will help your child getting used to doing more than one thing at once, e.g. hang up their coats and put their shoes away and put their play bag (my daughter usually have at least three different bags with her own toys!) away.

- ❖ Changing books in the library over the summer holidays will help establish a routine of taking responsibility for this task when they are in school and bring reading books home to you.

### **Changing clothes**

It helps if your child can dress and undress themselves. Putting on socks and shoes, T-shirts and shorts are important for PE.

- ❖ Using tube socks without a toe and a heel are much easier for most kids
- ❖ Shoes with Velcro fasteners are great until they learn how to tie shoelaces (only when they are about six or seven years old).
- ❖ Another helpful skill is to teach your child how to do up and take off their school coat – crucial in winter when they have to do it several times a day when going outside.

### **Lunchbox / School dinner**

Whether you decide that your child will have a lunch box or have a school dinner it is important that they are independent either in:

- Carrying a plate of food
- Drinking from an open cup
- Eating with a spoon and fork
- Starting to cut up food with a knife (playing with Playdoh at home, cutting up soft foods such as potatoes and soft boiled carrots are great ways to encourage your child)

Or:

- Opening their lunchbox
  - Opening their drink bottles or cartons
  - Inserting a straw
  - Opening snacks ( I started by opening the snacks halfway at home, then encouraged my kids to open very motivating bags and wrappers filled with their favourite treats as this made them want to have a go at a very fiddly task)
- ❖ A great way in the summer is to pack a lunchbox for each child when you go to the park or have a picnic

## **Attention and Listening**

### **Eye contact**

Make sure you look at your child when you talk, laugh and play with them as this will encourage them to do the same!

- ❖ Playing eye spy, wink murder are all great ways to encourage eye contact in a playful way

### **Concentration**

- ❖ Listening to story tapes on CD, rather than watch a DVD encourages children to rely on their listening skills and concentration skills
- ❖ Encourage your child to finish games and tasks they start are a great way to give them the idea of focusing on one thing at a time, rather than flit between several things.

## **Language Skills**

### **Speaking**

- ❖ Talking to your child, reading them stories, explaining the world around them with them is important in developing their vocabulary.
- ❖ Listening to them and giving them your undivided attention encourages them to feel that what they have to say is important

### **Listening and Understanding**

- ❖ Encourage your child to participate in fun tasks such as baking, making and following directions encourages them to listen.
- ❖ Retelling books, DVD's and events helps them to focus on listening

## **Social Skills**

Personally, this is the thing that I am worried about most, much more than whether my kids can read or write well – I want them to be happy and to have friends!

## **Making friends and negotiating their way around friendship**

Turn taking is probably one of the most important skills your child can acquire if they want to be successful in making friends and joining in playing games – even games with made-up rules.

- ❖ Playing simple board games, taking turns at home, making up game rules, helping friends negotiate sticky situations will teach them how to deal with this when they are in school.

## **Pencil Control**

Your child's teacher is best placed to teach them how to form letters and numbers, but it is helpful to encourage your child to hold pencil utensils with what is referred to as a tripod hold.

Doing fine motor activities, those that require small manipulative movements of the fingers can help improve pen control.

Examples of fine motor activities are:

- ❖ Threading small beads
- ❖ Shaping Playdough into small pieces e.g. make pretend food such as baked beans, sausages.
- ❖ Folding paper
- ❖ Construction e.g. Lego, Mobilo, K-nex, Meccano
- ❖ Peg board
- ❖ Card games
- ❖ Collage / sticking pictures
- ❖ Using stencils

## **Ways to Help a Child Use a Tripod Grasp**

Position - Encourage the child to grasp the pencil between the tips of his/her thumb and index finger and to support it against the side of his/her middle finger. His/her ring and little finger should be curved and resting against the table surface. His/her wrist should be bent back (extended) slightly and the pencil is held about 1 inch from the tip.

- ❖ Provide chunky triangular pencils (available from Tesco's and Sainsbury's etc)
- ❖ Provide large or jumbo crayons, as these are easier to grasp with fingers and thumb.
- ❖ Whenever the correct grasp is assumed, give praise.
- ❖ When the child is able to assume the desired grasp, place paper over a textured surface (such as plastic template, rough sandpaper, or textured objects) the child scribbles or makes large drawing movements with a crayon, pencil or marker pen. This will help the child "get the feel" of the correct finger positioning.
- ❖ Encourage the child to use this grip position for large scribbling activities on chalkboard, mural paper on wall, or large paper on the desk.

## **Body and Movement Control**

### **Sitting still**

Sitting on a carpet and on a small chair for up to 10 minutes at a time is probably reasonable for young children.

- ❖ Having meals at the dining table is an excellent way of helping your child getting used to sitting.

### **Games and PE**

Balancing, ball games, stopping, starting and positioning their bodies in different ways can all be encouraged in so many fun ways.

- ❖ Playing musical statues, making up obstacle course in the garden, going to the park, too many to mention here – and extremely fun to do as a family!

Despite all of these tips, I guess the one thing remains is to:

- **BELIEVE IN YOUR CHILD,**
- **BE THERE FOR HIM / HER, AND**
- **TALK TO THEIR TEACHER EVEN IF YOU ARE EVEN SLIGHTLY WORRIED – YOUR CHILD IS NEVER TRIVIAL OR UNIMPORTANT!**

Enjoy this time!

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