

Preparing Your Child for Nursery or Preschool

A Guide For Parents and Carers

The period before a child starts nursery can be an anxious time for parents. We have put together the following information as a simple guide to how you can best prepare your child for this exciting time in their lives!

Promoting Independence

Your child will really benefit from being as independent as possible when they start attending nursery. Of course teaching staff will always be on hand to help but children feel a real sense of achievement when they can accomplish things by themselves! For example, your child will have access to an outdoor space throughout the day so being able to put their coat on and zip it up independently will really help them. It also means that they can get straight to their playing and learning without having to stop and ask an adult for help!

Your child will also really benefit from having experience of spending some time away from you, such as going to a friend's house to play. This will really develop their confidence and independence and stand them in good stead when it comes to saying goodbye on that first session at nursery.

Communication and Language

Many parents worry if their child will be able to tell the teacher when they need something or if they will make friends. Good communication skills will allow them to do these things.

We know that parents can have a huge impact on their child's speaking and listening development and these simple language boosting activities are a great way to help:

Listening and Attention Skills

Your child will be given many spoken instructions throughout their time at nursery and will need to be able to shift their attention from what they are doing to listen to what the teacher is saying.

A lovely activity to promote this is to go on a 'listening walk' where your child listens for all the sounds around them in the park or town centre. You could also jot down all the sounds your child notices and talk about these back at home to retell the journey based on the sounds they heard.

Understanding Spoken Instructions

Classroom instructions often contain several parts for children to remember. A simple game of 'Simon Says' could really help. You could give instructions containing two parts e.g. 'Simon says touch your nose, then clap your hands'. It's a good idea to start off with one step instructions and gradually build up to two or even three.

Vocabulary Development

To help develop your child's vocabulary development you could play sorting games. For example when packing a suitcase, as this is a great way to help word categorisation, which is important for vocabulary learning. Items can be sorted into different piles, such as clothing, toys and things for washing ourselves. Outdoor 'treasure hunts' work well too. Collecting objects found on walks in the park or on the beach help introduce new types of vocabulary, such as describing words. Treasure can also then be used to create feely bags, where objects have to be described by the way they feel before revealing what the object is.

Mathematical Development

Counting Verbally and One-to-One

Being able to count verbally to at least 10 will be of great benefit to a child starting nursery. Practise counting up to ten, and backwards too. One to one counting can also be done incidentally throughout the day, for example counting steps as your child climbs the stairs. You can count anything, for example: How many lampposts are on the street? How many houses have a red door? How many pieces of fruit are in the bowl (and how many did we have yesterday)?

To help your child understand what numbers mean, ask them to find the same amount of different items. For example, find 3 spoons, 3 hats, or 3 socks. You can also sing counting songs, many of which are available if you search for 'number rhymes' on the twinkl website.

Shape, Size and Quantity

You could go on a shape hunt to see how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find. You could look for patterns too. Talk about the shape and size of objects, e.g. big car, little car, round ball, square table, rectangular book and ask your child questions, such as 'Can you pass me the biggest box?', or 'Which one is the smallest shoe?'. Play with blocks – encourage your child to think about size, colour and shape. Also play with containers – how many socks can you fit in the box? Which container holds the most, or the least, sand/water/beads etc.

Number Recognition

A number hunt is a fun way to look for numerals on doors, buses, cars, signs, at home, at the shops or on TV. You could also play 'I spy' but with numbers.

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Reading and Writing

Having good sound awareness skills, such as rhyming and identifying what sound a word begins with is a great foundation for reading. Sharing songs and stories which rhyme is a really good way to support this. You could also say the sounds that letters make, along with their names as you come across them day to day.

A good foundation to being able to write is to develop your child's fine motor skills. This is because good fine motor skills enable a child to hold a pencil firmly as they are writing. There are many resources that could support the development of this skill on the Twinkl website, just search for 'fine motor skills'. Threading is also a great way to develop fine motor skills, whether it is with beads or buttons, or making necklaces out of dried pasta. Weaving wool around a cardboard template or strips of card through each other are also other simple activities that you could do at home.

Social Skills

Being able to interact appropriately with other children and share resources is a key skill that will really help your child when they start nursery. Play dates with other children will help to promote these skills and you could arrange these with future classmates if possible. During the play date you can model useful social phrases such as 'my turn please' or 'let's share'. You could also join in with pretend play by starting the game off and then fade out as children get into character.

