

Getting ready for school

For children starting primary
school in September 2026



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Note:

We understand that children reach milestones at different times, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

If you have any concerns about your child's specific needs or physical independence, please arrange a chat with the class teacher or special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) to discuss how they can be best supported in the classroom.

I can put my coat on

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The ‘ten-minute buffer’:** start getting ready 10 minutes earlier than usual to remove the pressure of rushing.
- **The ‘wait and see’ rule:** before stepping in to help, count to 10. Give them a moment to problem-solve on their own.
- **Scaffold the task:** you start the zip at the bottom, but let them be the one to pull it to the top so they finish with a ‘win’.
- **Practise at ‘low-stakes’ times:** try ‘coat races’ on a rainy afternoon when you aren’t actually trying to get out the door.
- **The ‘coat flip’ trick:** this is the easiest way for many children to learn:
 - lay the coat flat on the floor, with the inside facing up
 - stand at the hood or collar end, facing the bottom of the coat
 - slip hands into the armholes and flip the coat over the head



I can put my socks and shoes on

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The 'hockey' method:** have your child sit on the floor or a low step. It's much easier to reach their feet when they aren't trying to balance on one leg.
- **The sock 'donut':** teach them to bunch the sock up into a 'donut' shape first. This makes it easier to slip over the toes before pulling it up the heel.
- **The sticker trick:** if they struggle with wrong feet, cut a sticker in half and place each half inside the arches of their shoes. When the shoes are side-by-side and the sticker is 'whole', they're on the right feet.
- **Loosen up:** before they start, make sure the tongue of the shoe is pulled wide and the velcro is peeled all the way back.
- **The 'big push':** just like the coat zip, let them do the final step. You might get the sock over the heel, but let them pull it up to their ankle for that 'I did it!' finish.



I can eat with cutlery

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The ‘stab and scoop’ game:** practise with easy foods first. Use a fork for thick chunks of fruit or cooked pasta (easy to stab) and a spoon for thick yogurts or mashed potatoes (easy to scoop).
- **Choose the right tools:** ensure your child has child-sized cutlery. Handles that are slightly thicker or textured are much easier for small hands to grip securely.
- **The ‘helper hand’:** remind your child to use their non-dominant hand to hold the plate or bowl steady. This prevents the ‘sliding plate’ frustration.
- **Model the grip:** show them how to hold the utensil like a ‘bird’s beak’ rather than a fist. This transition from a palm-grip to a finger-grip is a precursor to a proper pencil hold.
- **Embrace the mess:** learning is messy! If you’re worried about the floor, try practising during play first, for example: scooping dried beans or rice from one container to another with a spoon.



I can open my lunchbox and carry a tray

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The test drive:** before school starts, have a carpet picnic at home. Let your child try to open every single part of their lunch box, from the main lid to the small snack pots.
- **The tab trick:** if a container is particularly stiff, add a small piece of colourful washi tape or a pull tab to the corner so they know exactly where to pull.
- **The 'hand over hand' method:** if they get stuck, place your hand over theirs and move together to open the clip. This helps their muscles feel the correct movement.
- **Check the fit:** make sure the lunch box isn't too snug for their bag. If they struggle to get the box out of the bag, they may be frustrated before they even start eating.
- **Carrying the tray:** practise carrying food on a tray at home. This will support your child when they have hot meals at school.



I can tidy up and look after my belongings

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The two-minute warning:** transitioning is hard. Give a 'heads up' two minutes before tidy-up time so they can finish their masterpiece without feeling interrupted.
- **Specific instructions:** instead of saying 'clean up', give a specific task: 'can you find all the blue blocks?' or 'let's put the books on the shelf first'.
- **The 'home' rule:** label bins at home with a picture of what goes inside. This teaches them to match the object to the image, making tidying a game of logic.
- **'Beat the clock':** put on a favourite song and see if you can get the toys in the bin before the music stops. It turns a chore into a challenge.
- **Model the 'reset':** encourage the habit of 'resetting for the next person'. Instead of just cleaning, explain that we are making the space ready for someone else to have fun.



I can use the toilet

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The 'dress for success' rule:** send your child in clothes they can easily pull down (elastic waists) rather than tricky belts or buttons.
- **Narrate the routine:** use a simple chant: 'wipe, flush, wash!' to help them memorise the order.
- **Ask, don't wait:** encourage them to listen to their 'tummy signals' and go when they feel the first nudge, rather than waiting until they are engrossed in play.
- If you have ongoing concerns about your child's toilet training, please contact your **health visitor** for personalised guidance.
- **Online resources:** for further information and practical tips, parents are encouraged to look at the ERIC website: <https://eric.org.uk/potty-training>



I can use my words to say how I feel

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **Name the feeling:** help them build a 'feelings vocabulary' so they can say 'I'm sad' instead of having a meltdown.
- **Narrate the need:** when your child is struggling, prompt them with simple phrases they can use in class, such as 'I need help please' or 'I feel worried'.



I can try again when something is hard

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The 'wait' game:** use a timer for small things. Explain to the child what you are doing such as, 'I'm just finishing loading the dishwasher, I will help you with that puzzle once I have finished'.
- When finished, wait to see if your child asks again for your help: you are building your child's resilience and problem solving by waiting.
- **Model healthy frustration:** when you drop something or make a mistake, say it out loud, 'Oh dear, I dropped my keys. That's frustrating, but I'll just pick them up and try again'.



I can enjoy a story book

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD



- **Left to right:** as you read together, track the words with your finger. This reinforces the same direction they will use when learning to read.
- **Interactive choices:** choose a book that requires active participation, like pointing to pictures or predicting what happens next to build focus.

Balancing screen time

According to the Kindred 2025 School Readiness Report, nearly 70% of teachers observed that high daily screen usage is directly impacting children's physical and mental preparation for the classroom.

Why balance matters

- **Physical strength:** the report notes a decline in the core strength needed to sit still on a carpet; active play builds the muscles that screens cannot.
- **Visual development:** looking at screens focuses the eyes on a fixed, close distance. The classroom requires long-distance vision (looking at a teacher or whiteboard), which is best developed through outdoor play.
- **Attention span:** the fast-paced nature of digital content can make the steady, deep focus of a classroom feel challenging.



Reducing screen time

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- **The 'green hour':** aim for at least one hour of outdoor play for every hour of screen time. This helps reset their visual focus and burns off restless energy.
- **Screen-free power hours:** designate meal times and the hour before bed as screen-free zones. This improves sleep quality and encourages family conversation.
- **Interactive choices:** if they are using a device, choose 'active' apps that require problem-solving or drawing rather than passive watching.
- **The 'audiobook swap':** try switching a cartoon for an audiobook or a podcast for kids. This builds listening stamina and imagination without the visual strain.
- **Model the habit:** children mimic what they see. Try to put your own phone away during 'connection times' like walks or dinner.



Be prepared

- Your home is your child's first classroom, and every coat zipped or shoe fastened is a building block for their success.
- You are their first and most influential teacher.
- The greatest gift we can give our children is the ability to say, 'I can do it myself'.

