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Say 'hello' to learning

The importance of learning at school and at home in the early years



Department of
Education



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From the Minister



It is an exciting and important milestone when your child starts school. These first years – Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1 – are opportunities for your child to continue to learn, develop and build on the foundations you have laid at home.

Research shows that these early years are vital in making sure children get the best start to life. Across Australia, early childhood is a priority for all states and territories.

An Early Years Learning Framework has been developed to reinforce the importance of the relationship between schools, children and families in making children's transition from home to early childhood settings and school easier.

Say hello to learning is written for parents of young children starting school. It includes tips to help your child settle into school life, as well as provides information about a typical day in Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1.

The first years of school are the essential building blocks for future learning. Every day matters and every day at school helps your child become a happy and confident learner.

I hope you find this booklet helpful as your child starts school.

Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA

Minister for Education

Your child's school journey

Research shows just how quickly children's brains develop in the first five years. It also shows that the encouragement and support you give as parents in these early years really benefit children and help them to be positive about school.

Importantly, your child's journey through school builds on all the things they have learned with you at home – just as Pre-primary builds on the learning from Kindergarten and Year 1 builds on the learning from Pre-primary.

While not compulsory, Kindergarten and Pre-primary are incredibly important for your child. Nearly 98 per cent of all children in Western Australia go to Kindy and more than 99 per cent go to Pre-primary. By the time children start Year 1, the first compulsory year, most have been to school for one or two years.

You are an essential part of your child's learning and development through school. Talk often with the teacher and find out what you can do at home to support your child's learning in class.

Your enthusiasm will help your child be excited about going to school and proud of the things they are learning.

Did you know?

Your child's brain will grow to around 85 per cent of its adult size by the time they are three years old. Imagine all the learning they do in this time!





Science fact!

Learning to read does not come naturally to the human brain. Research shows that our brains actually have to adapt to allow us to talk and understand what we hear so we can make sense of the written word.

Children who struggle to read often use the right hand side of the brain which is not suited for reading. They may read slowly, often guessing words based on the first letter or the general shape of the word, rather than actually reading.



Every day matters

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Going to Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1 each day gives children the best start to school. If your child attends school regularly in the early years, they are more likely to continue this in the future.

Teachers plan programs in a sequence so children learn how to read, write and understand maths. Children also learn how to share and get on with other children.

When children don't go to school regularly, they miss out on important ideas and skills that might mean they experience difficulty later.

You can help make every day matter at school by:

- talking with the teacher if you have trouble getting your child to school
- talking positively about school so your child is happy and confident about attending
- showing an interest in what your child is doing at school and talking with the teacher about what you can do at home
- setting play dates to help your child make friends
- teaching your child how to share and take turns
- arriving and collecting your child on time

- making sure your child gets enough sleep each night so they are not tired in the morning
- making appointments after school with the doctor, dentist or specialist
- taking family holidays during the school holidays and not during term time.

If your child is unwell and unable to go to school, telephone or text the school to let them know. If your child misses a day, talk with the teacher to find out how you can help your child catch up.

Every day matters and, as children get older, every lesson counts!





Important information

Taking an interest in what your child does at school, helping in class and being part of the school community all show your child how much you value schooling.



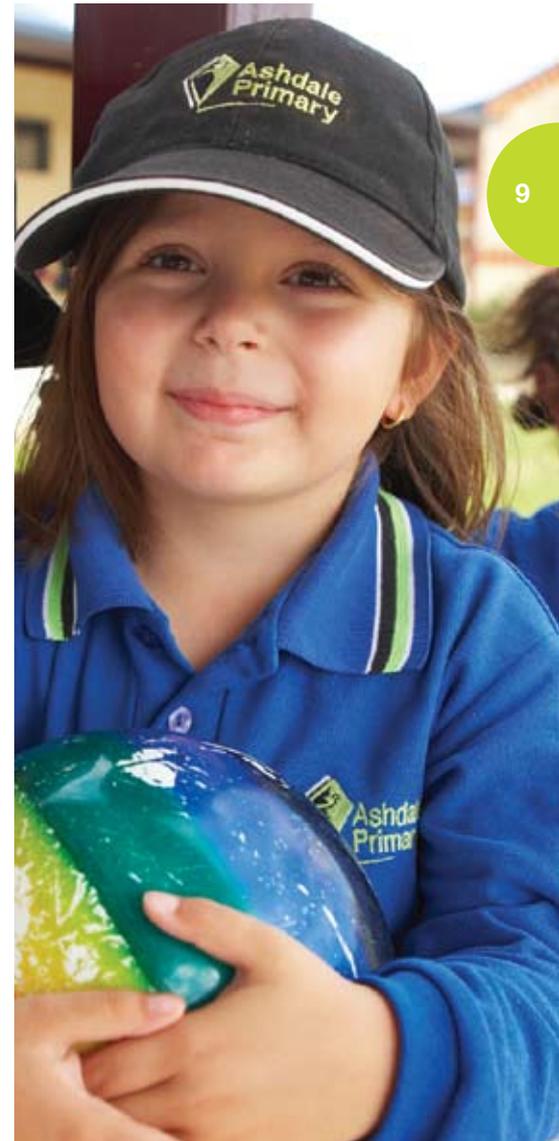
Find out more



The Department's Schools and You website is fantastic for parents who want to find out how they can help their child learn at home. Download booklets on the different ways you can support your child's learning in the home, or subscribe to the Schools and You parent e-newsletter or the early childhood e-newsletter for information on what's happening in early childhood in Western Australia.

W: det.wa.edu.au/schoolsandyou

W: det.wa.edu.au/education/ece



Starting Kindergarten: the beginning of the journey

Kindergarten is the first experience your child has of school life. Even though Kindergarten is not compulsory, children learn important early maths, reading and writing skills as well as social skills that will help them through school.

Going to Kindergarten encourages a love of learning and helps children become confident learners.

Being confident and happy about your child starting Kindergarten helps make the transition from home to school easier for both you and your child.

What happens during the day?

Your child will go to Kindergarten for either 11 hours or 15 hours each week, depending on where you live. Over the next few years, all Kindergarten programs will increase to 15 hours each week as part of changes across Australia.

The increase in Kindergarten hours means children have more time to learn and develop socially and emotionally. It may also make it easier for them when they go to full-time school.

Talk with the school to find out how the Kindergarten program is set up. Some schools have full days and half days each week, while other schools have only half days or only full days.





Whatever the timetable, the teacher plans regular breaks each day so children can eat, play and rest. Some schools ask parents to contribute fruit and snacks which are shared with all children for morning or afternoon recess. If your child is in a full day Kindy program, pack a nutritious lunch for them.

Many Kindergartens encourage parents to join in at the start of the day. This is a great way to settle your child into the school routine as well as see your child's work and talk about what they do during the day.



Important information

If you need someone else to collect your child after school, such as grandma or a carer, find out from the school how you can arrange this and be sure to let the teacher know.

The teacher waits for someone to collect each child so it is important to make sure you always have someone organised.

What does my child learn?

Kindergarten is a wonderland of painting and storytime; of talking and listening; of exploring the world; and of making new friends.

Your child begins to build on what they have learned at home. This includes their understanding of language – that language is made up of words, that written words are made up of letters in the alphabet and that spoken sounds can be written down. They also learn about numbers and shapes and the many different ways we use maths in our lives every day.

These early lessons help your child later with reading, spelling, language and maths skills. Your child's teacher takes into account the many different experiences and backgrounds of the children in the classroom to make sure the learning program helps each child.



At school



Children develop literacy skills by having books read to them, sharing stories, learning songs and rhymes and experimenting with shapes, colours and textures.

They start to learn how to identify words, syllables and rhymes. These skills help with reading and writing in the future.

Your child learns to describe objects, tell stories and recognise print such as their written name. Talking about what they are doing is a big part of the Kindergarten day.

At school



At this age, your child may not understand that there is a connection between letters and sounds. Their writing may show randomly placed letters or scribbles that look similar in form to a letter.

They may focus on the first letter of a word as they learn about letter-sound connections. Later they may also recognise the last letter, for example they may recognise the word *mummy* by the first letter, or by the first and last letters. So they may read *monkey* as *mummy*.



At home

Children at this stage take an interest in books and the words or writing they see in them.

Tell stories, say or sing nursery rhymes, poems and songs. Make up actions together.

When reading aloud, point to pictures and talk together about the story.

At school



Your child learns to match and compare small groups of things to say which has more or less, and begins to link number names to their quantities. At this age they may start to notice the difference between numbers and letters but may not be able to read them.

They also learn about shapes, size, position and order. Activities might include making models and patterns, sorting and rearranging small collections, and comparing the size of things. Children play games that help them read and say numbers, and do puzzles to develop problem solving skills.





At home

Children hear and see how numbers are used in their home and begin to match number names to very small groups of objects just by looking – for example *We need four plates, so if I get two plates and then get two more, we'll have four plates.*

A great way to practise maths skills at home is by cooking together. Have your child fill cups of flour or tablespoons of water while you count out loud how many are needed.

Children at this age learn about measurement by hearing everyday words like full and empty, big and small, tall and short, and heavy and light.

When tidying the bedroom, shopping or when you are out and about, chat about positions such as in and on and under. Also chat about whether something is near, far or upside down.

Number songs and number rhymes are important in helping your little one learn about counting. Spend time together singing songs like *One, two, three, four, five, once I caught a fish alive* and *One, two, buckle my shoe*. Number books that you read together and talk about are also a great way to learn.



At school

Children learn social skills by playing with other children and sharing equipment. Play allows your child to share and take turns while developing coordination and confidence.





Starting Pre-primary: five days a week at school

Pre-primary is five full days each week. This may feel quite unusual if you are used to having your child home with you during the week.

If your child went to Kindergarten, you will have seen all the wonderful things they learnt the previous year. Imagine the exciting learning opportunities in Pre-primary!

What happens during the day?

Your child's Pre-primary classroom may be set up much like the Kindergarten classroom.

As with Kindergarten, many schools encourage parents to visit the classroom at the start of the school day. Wherever possible, try to spend this important time with your child.

By visiting the classroom, you find out what your child is doing at school. The teacher might write the classroom topic on a noticeboard or you may receive a parent newsletter.

You can then visit your local library and borrow books about this topic. Encourage your child to draw, 'write' or tell stories at home.

As most children stay at school for lunch, pack a healthy and nutritious lunch for your child each day.

Schools often have a set day for physical activity and a set day when children can take out books from the library. Make time to read the library book or other favourite books with your child. This not only promotes good reading habits, it's also a great way to spend time together as a family.

At the end of the Pre-primary day, you need to collect your child from the classroom. If someone else is picking up your child, you need to let the school know in advance so the teacher knows who to expect.

Top tip

For great ideas for healthy and interesting school lunches, visit: det.wa.edu.au/healthyfoodanddrink.





What does my child learn?

Pre-primary builds on all the things your child learnt at Kindergarten. The skills and ideas your child learns are really important for the future.

Literacy, numeracy and social and emotional development are the focus of Pre-primary programs.



At home

Children at this age often 'read' by using pictures or their memory of the story. They may identify some words but are often more focused on the meaning rather than reading every word.

Encourage your child to 'have a go' and let them pretend to read their favourite book. Children pretend to read in the early stages by making up the story. This is a great start.

Read your child's favourite book over and over. Encourage them to join in. Get them to tell you the story using the pictures for prompts or let them pretend to read and make up the story.

Talk about the end of the story and encourage your child to express their opinion. Did they like the ending? How else could the story have ended?

Your child may 'have a go' at writing words using one, two or three letters. They can tell you the reason for writing and why – for example *I am writing a letter to Granny to say thank you for my birthday card.*

At school



In Kindergarten and Pre-primary, your child learns that writing is different from drawing and that talk can be written down. They learn that writers write from left to right and from top to bottom.

They may begin to experiment with letters of the alphabet using things such as sand and play dough, as well as crayons and paints.

Through storybooks, your child learns that stories have characters and events. The teacher may ask children to talk about how the characters are similar or different from people in your child's life.





At school

Pre-primary is when your child learns to say number names in order beyond 10 and starts to notice patterns in numbers, for example 21, 22, 23, or 31, 32, 33. They learn to solve everyday story problems involving adding, removing, handing out and sharing very small numbers of objects. For example, they may use toy farm animals to show *three cows were put in a paddock with four cows* and to work out how many cows there are all together.

They learn to count and talk about how much, how many and how long and use very small numbers to 'get enough' items for their games and activities.

In their games and activities they start to compare the size of things using language like longer, shorter, taller, heavier, lighter, fatter and thinner. They begin to learn shape words (for example round, circle, square and triangle) and position words (for example near, far, between, under and behind).





At home

When at home, practise using numbers and counting with your child. When setting the table, ask your child *We have two visitors coming. There are four people in our family so how many plates will we need?*

Encourage your child to use their new number skills to say how many objects when there is no need to count, for example you can just 'see' three things, or even six things as three things and three things.

Measurement is an important part of learning about maths and numbers. Chat with your child when you are cooking, shopping or at bath time about how different things might be longer or shorter, thicker or thinner, lighter or heavier.

Help your child pour water or sand from one container to another to decide which holds more, or investigate whether a tablecloth is big enough to cover the table.

These easy activities help children understand and relate to numbers, counting and measurement.





Starting Year 1: it's compulsory

Year 1 is the start of full-time school. It is compulsory for all children to attend school five full days each week.

Year 1 is a time of rich learning experiences where your child will build on everything they learnt at home, Kindergarten and Pre-primary.

It's important to make sure your child attends each day of school. Not only does every day matter – every lesson matters! If your child is unable to attend school because they are unwell, ask the teacher what you can do at home to help them keep up.

What happens during the day?

You may notice a difference in how the class looks, with more desks or tables in the room than in previous years. You might also find that the learning program is more structured than in Kindergarten and Pre-primary.

Some schools have split classes – where classes are combined to include Kindergarten and Pre-primary, or Pre-primary and Year 1 children. These classes allow children of varying ages and abilities to learn together.

In Year 1, all children wear the school uniform. Wearing the uniform helps children feel they belong to the school family and means they can be identified at all times, such as in the playground.





Helpful hint

Most schools hold a parent information session before the school year starts or in the first couple of weeks of school. These are helpful for parents as teachers outline what they are planning for the learning program during the year. It is also a great opportunity to meet other parents and ask questions or raise concerns.

If you cannot attend the parent information session, call your school or talk with the teacher to make another time to meet. Teachers often send home written information they have given out at the session.

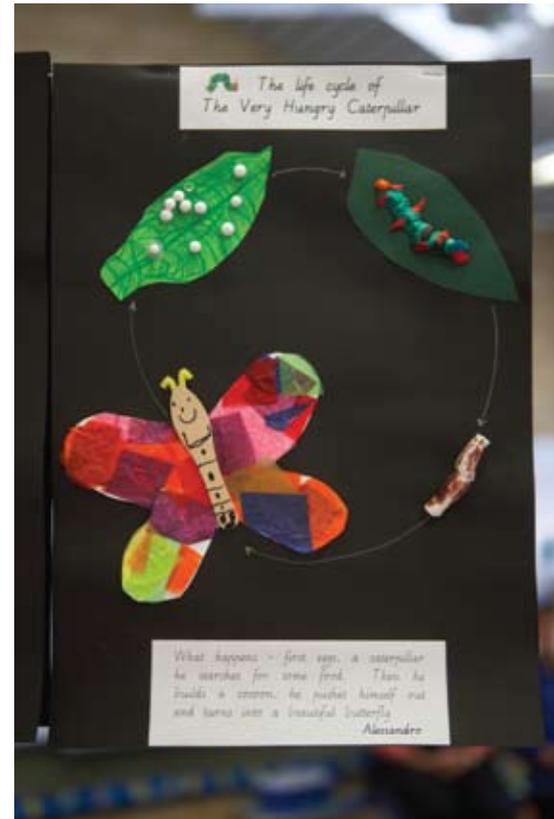


What does my child learn?

The learning program in Year 1, like the classroom, may look different. Teachers make sure there is a progression of learning from one lesson to the next and from one year level to the next.

As well as continuing to build on their reading, writing, maths and social skills, your child starts to learn about:

- the world around them
- living things and how things work.





At school

Year 1 builds on the language skills your child has learnt in Kindergarten and Pre-primary.

Phonics: Phonics are sound–letter relationships used for reading and writing. Children are taught about the difference between letter names (such as A, B, C, D) and their sounds.

They are also taught that the letter name remains the same but the sounds may change depending on the letters around them.

For example:

Cake – c/ae/k/e

Call – c/aw//l

Phonological awareness: Phonological awareness is about understanding words, syllables and rhymes in sentences.

For example:

The word ‘monkey’ is made up of two syllables – mon-key.

The words cat, hat and mat all rhyme.

Phonemic awareness: This is about knowing that the word ‘cat’ is made up of three sounds – c / a / t. If the middle sound is replaced by /u/ the word becomes ‘cut’, and that ‘cat’ starts with the same sound as ‘car’.

High frequency words: These are often referred to as ‘sight words’ and include ‘a’, ‘I’, ‘the’, ‘and’, ‘is’, ‘to’, ‘was’ and ‘saw’. These are words children learn to recognise and understand automatically when reading.



At home

Your child starts to become a more confident reader. They may now read slowly and deliberately, paying attention to what is on the page. They may tell you about the things they have read.

Encourage your child to talk about what happens in a story. Point out words in a book such as ‘and’, ‘the’ and ‘when’ and see how many times familiar words come up.

Use items such as shopping lists, receipts, recipes, newspapers and television guides to show your child how reading is useful in day to day life.

At school



In Year 1 your child learns more about numbers and starts to see that the number of objects don't change even when the objects are rearranged or counted in a different way.

Children begin to visualise combinations of small numbers for example *Ten is made up of five and five or nine and one*. They also learn to read and write numerals and begin to add and subtract to solve problems. They may start to use signs to show what a problem is asking, for example $8 + \underline{\hspace{2cm}} = 10$ (*There are 8 seats; how many more will be enough for 10 people?*).

They continue to learn about measuring through activities during which they talk about, for example How many fit? How long? How heavy? How much taller? Other activities focus on the shape and position of things.

At home



Help your child learn about position (where something is), distance (how far away) and direction (which way something is pointing or facing) by talking about these ideas and giving simple directions.

Your child may learn that sometimes small things can be heavier than big things, depending on what they are made of or what they contain.

You child may also learn that they can use numbers to count large collections and that the last number said tells them how many.

Count 20 or 30 objects with your child and then ask them to say 'how many'.

Help your child learn that numbers can be used in different ways by asking 'which one' (page or house numbers, numbers on sports jumpers and in car parks) or 'how many/how much' (money, mass, quantity and volume on cartons and cans and signs showing distance).





Getting ready for school

Starting school is exciting – whether it's for the first time at Kindergarten or going back to school in Pre-primary or Year 1.

There are many things you can do at home to make sure your child is happy and confident on the first day of school:

- Read stories with your child about starting school.
- Drive or walk past the school with your child and talk about how they will soon be going there, the exciting things they will do and the friends they will make.
- Go shopping with your child to buy a special lunchbox and drink bottle – let your child choose their favourite colour or character.

- Talk with older children – such as family friends and siblings – who already go to school. Get them to talk about fun and interesting things they do at school.
- If your child is going to Pre-primary or Year 1, try to continue play dates during the school holidays with friends from school.
- For the first few weeks of school, walk with your child into the classroom and pick them up at the end of school. Make sure you leave plenty of time to be there for the start of the school day.
- Introduce yourself to your teacher. Find out if the teacher needs helpers for classroom activities.

Important information



When enrolling your child, make sure you indicate on the enrolment form if your child has any allergies or medical conditions. Many children have allergies to nuts or nut products – please check with your school to see what plans they have in place for this.

It's also helpful for the teacher to know if your child has attended speech or occupational therapy.



You and your child's teacher

Your relationship with your child's teacher is one of the most important relationships you can have. They can tell you what is expected of your child and what you can do at home to support your child's learning.

By planning learning programs that build on children's knowledge and skills, teachers extend and enrich learning. This is why it is so important to make sure your child attends Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1. You will be amazed at what they learn and how much they develop over the year.



Getting in to a routine

Starting the new school year can be a challenge for most parents. Whether your child is starting Kindergarten, going to school a few days a week or attending five full days a week, it's important to be as organised as possible.

Having a routine at home makes getting to school easier. The following tips will help you and your child get the best start to your day!

Before school

- Allow plenty of time for dressing, having breakfast and brushing teeth.
- A healthy breakfast is very important! It helps your child concentrate in class and have the energy to run and play during breaks.

- Pack your child's lunchbox with nutritious food. Children sit down to eat at recess and lunch before they are allowed to play.
- Put sunscreen on your child throughout summer and on sunny days in other seasons. This is especially important when they have physical activity classes.
- Get your child dressed just before you leave home – this saves the uniform if there is a spill at breakfast or while brushing teeth.
- Put a note on the fridge or on your calendar if your child has a regular physical activity day or a day they need their library bag.
- Getting to school on time is really important. Try and leave plenty of time to get to school to make sure you are not late.

Top tip

Having a routine makes the start to school easier for you and your child. Start the routine a few weeks before school begins – have regular meal and bed times, wake your child at the same time each morning, and get dressed and ready to leave the house by a certain time.

Timesaver
Half fill your child's water bottle and put it in the freezer overnight. Top it up in the morning. This keeps the water cold and refreshing during the day!

Important information

School canteens follow healthy eating guidelines which have a red, amber and green traffic light system for foods. There are lots of ideas for healthy lunches and snacks at home and school at det.wa.edu.au/healthyfoodanddrink.

Timesaver
Get your child's school clothes, shoes, hat and bag ready each night – this helps with the morning rush!

After school

Going to school can be a big change for your child. Days at school mean lots of learning, playing and exploration!

At the end of each school day, children are keen to tell you what they have been doing. Take the time to listen and ask lots of questions:

- When you get home, make your child an afternoon snack.
- Allow your child to have some play time to unwind and relax.
- Eat dinner together as a family and encourage everyone to talk about their day.
- Make all meal times television free.
- Storytime is a great way to prepare for bed. If your child has a book from school, read it together before bed or let your child choose a book from home.
- Join your local library so you have lots of books to choose from.
- Set a time for bed for school nights – children need lots of rest so they can concentrate and play at school.



Did you know?

Children's brains grow and develop at a phenomenal rate from birth to five years old. This period of growth directly affects things like learning and memory, which can be enhanced by making sure your child gets lots of sleep.

Set a time for bed each night. If children go to school tired, they might get left behind – both in the classroom and in the playground. Teachers plan learning programs in a sequence. By not being at school your child can miss out on important lessons that might mean they experience difficulty down the track.

Top tip



Make sure your child's bedtime routine is happy and calming. A warm bath or shower followed by quiet activities such as reading are better than playing action games before sleeping! If your child is calm and relaxed, they are more likely to sleep well.

Making friends

Your child will make lots of new friends at school. As they go from one year to the next, they are likely to have different children in their classes.

Making friends is one of the most important social skills children learn at school. You can encourage this by:

- chatting with your child about how they talk with other children
- getting your child to share their toys
- teaching your child to listen to others
- teaching your child to say 'please' and 'thank you'.

Often children have so much fun at school that they want to have more fun after school. They may ask to have a play date. This is a great way for you to get to know your child's friends and their parents. Meet at a park or play at each others homes.



Talking with your child

In Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1, children learn about the importance of communication. You can help by talking with your child about the things they do at school, both in the classroom and the playground. Talk about your day too.

Ask your child to explain or describe the things that happened during the day. This helps them learn how to express themselves.

Ask questions to draw out more information if they can't think of anything. For example:

You ask: *How was your day?*

Child says: *Good.*

You ask: *What was your favourite thing at school today?*

Child says: *Story time.*

Ask 'open' questions so your child answers with more than 'yes' or 'no'. For example *Tell me about the book your teacher read. Which character did you like the most? Why?*



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Top tip



Teachers often need items for art, craft, maths and science such as empty cotton reels, buttons, material scraps, sea shells, plastic containers, milk cartons and bottles – the list is endless! Offer to coordinate the collection of these items.

Importance of reading together

Children love being read to. The earlier you start reading to your child, the better – they will be more prepared for school if they are familiar with language and the many ways it is used.

Look at pictures, sing nursery rhymes and make up actions. Read a range of books but don't object if your child wants to hear the same stories over and over again. Let your child pretend to read – in the early years children pretend to read by making up a story which is a great start to becoming a good reader.

Your local library has a treasure trove of books – let your child pick out a book that interests them. Ask your library if they run any programs like Better Beginnings or Baby Rhyme Time for little ones.

The time you spend reading with your child helps them develop a love of books and words.

Discovering numbers

Children like to use numbers and counting but may not realise that numbers are a 'go-between'.

When talking about numbers as a 'go between', it means you don't need to physically see if you have enough to buy something – the numbers tell you.

It is important that you share aloud with your child what you are thinking or how you solve a problem, for example *You have two friends coming over for a play date. If you and I are already at the table, how many chairs will we need? There are two of us, plus two of them, which makes four chairs all together.*

Developing an early understanding of maths can help your child make sense of and enjoy learning.





Join in at your school

At the information session at the beginning of the year, the teacher may ask parents for help during the year. Your child will enjoy having you in the classroom if you are able to help out. As an added bonus, you will see the learning that takes place and become more familiar with what to expect during the year.

If you are able to offer some of your time to the school, help is always very welcome in the uniform shop, canteen, at sports days and on excursions or special projects such as fundraising activities.



Top tip

You may like to join the Parents and Citizens' Association or School Council. Your child will be in the care of staff at the school for several years so your input into its direction and ethos will be valuable for the school, your family and your child.





Notes



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