



# Preparing your child for school.

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## Your Child in the Primary School: Tips for parents

### From Home to School

From birth, children learn naturally and informally from their parents and from their environment. Parents are often anxious to see some results of formal learning soon after the child starts school. Children will start to read and write at their own pace. Just as they walk and talk at different ages – they also read and write when they are ready to do so themselves. It is not necessary for children to be able to write or recognise letters before coming to school. It is far more important for parents to prepare children so that they will look forward to starting school.

### Help prepare your child for learning

**POSITIVE ATTITUDE** It is important to create a positive attitude towards learning. If children have this positive attitude then they will try to become involved in the learning process.

**CURIOSITY** The natural inquisitiveness of children should be encouraged. It is central to the learning process. Children will be encouraged to ask more questions when they get positive and encouraging responses.

**SELF CONFIDENCE** if children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be willing to take on new challenges.

**LISTENING** Children should be encouraged to develop good listening skills. Instruction and directions are given continually at school so children need to be good listeners if they are to participate fully in school life.

**INTERACTING WITH OTHERS** Children need to learn how to be sociable, how to share and take turns. They also need to learn respect for others and to be aware of the feelings of others.



INDEPENDENCE In order to take part fully in school life children need to have developed a good level of independence.

The following will help you develop your child's management of new skills:

PLAY Children learn through play and should be given lots of opportunities to:

- Act out roles – pretending they are someone else. Children love to pretend that they are nurses, doctors, mothers, fathers or shopkeepers and such opportunities enable them to use language.
- Play with objects – sand, water, jogsaws, boxes, bricks and other toys.
- Engage in physical play – such as ball games, skipping, chasing games.
- Engage in social play – is essential for good development. Not only do children learn many social and emotional skills through play with their peers, they also acquire a variety of linguistic skills.
- Choose toys carefully. Children should have blocks to build, simple jog-saws or basic construction toys. Encourage them to build and make use of odds and ends such as paper-plates, used packets, cartons or egg boxes.

Adapted from [www.into.ie](http://www.into.ie) for Powerstown Educate Together N.S.

Developing you child's fine motor skills

Things to remember:

Upright working surfaces promote fine motor skills.

Examples of these are: vertical chalkboards; easels for painting; flannel boards; magnet boards or fridge;

windows and mirrors; white boards, etc. Children can also make sticker pictures; do rubber ink stamping; use reusable stickers to make pictures; complete puzzles with thick knobs; use magnadoodle and etchasketch as well. The benefits for these include: having the child's wrist positioned to develop good thumb movements; they help develop good fine motor muscles; the child is using the arm and shoulder muscles.



Fine Motor Activities

- Moulding and rolling play dough into balls using the palms of the hands facing each other and with fingers curled slightly towards the palm.
- Rolling play dough into tiny balls (peas) using only the fingertips.
- Using pegs or toothpicks to make designs in play dough.
- Cutting play dough with a plastic knife or with a pizza wheel.
- Tearing newspaper into strips and then crumpling them into balls. Use to stuff scarecrow or other art creation.
- Scrunching up 1 sheet of newspaper in one hand. This is a super strength builder.
- Using a plant sprayer to spray plants, (indoors, outdoors) to spray snow (mix food colouring with water so that the snow can be painted), or melt "monsters". (Draw monster pictures with markers and the colours will run when sprayed.)
- Picking up objects using large tweezers such as those found in the "Bedbugs" game. This can be adapted by picking up 'Cheerios', small cubes, small marshmallows, pennies, etc., in counting games.
- Shaking dice by cupping the hands together, forming an empty air space between the palms.
- Using small sized screwdrivers like those found in an erector set.
- Lacing and sewing activities such as stringing beads, Cheerios, macaroni, etc.
- Using eyedroppers to "pick up" coloured water for colour mixing or to make artistic designs on paper.
- Rolling small balls out of tissue paper, then gluing the balls onto construction paper to form pictures or designs.
- Turning over cards, coins, checkers, or buttons, without bringing them to the edge of the table.
- Making pictures using stickers or self sticking paper reinforcements.
- Playing games with the "puppet fingers" the thumb, index, and middle fingers. At circle time have each child's puppet fingers tell about what happened over the weekend, or use them in songs and finger plays.
- Place a variety of forms (e.g. blocks, felt, paper, string, yarn, cereal, cotton) on outlines
- Match shapes, colour, or pictures to a page and paste them within the outlines

Self Care Skills important for life: important for fingers!

- Buttoning
- Lacing
- Tying
- Fastening Snaps



- Zipping
- Carrying
- Using a screwdriver
- Locking and unlocking a door
- Winding a clock
- Opening and closing jars
- Rolling out dough or other simple cooking activities
- Washing plastic dishes
- Sweeping the floor
- Dressing
- Closing toilet door



### Scissor Activities

When scissors are held correctly, and when they fit a child's hand well, cutting activities will exercise the very same muscles which are needed to manipulate a pencil in a mature tripod grasp. The correct scissor position is with the thumb and middle finger in the handles of the scissors, the index finger on the outside of the handle to stabilize, with fingers four and five curled into the palm.

- Cutting junk mail, particularly the kind of paper used in magazine subscription cards.
- Making fringe on the edge of a piece of construction paper.
- Cutting play dough or clay with scissors.
- Cutting straws or shredded paper.
- Cutting
- Use a thick black line to guide cutting the following:
  - A fringe from a piece of paper
  - Cut off corners of a piece of paper
  - Cut along curved lines
  - Cut lines with a variety of angles
  - Cut figures with curves and angles

### Sensory Activities

The following activities ought to be done frequently to increase postural muscle strength and endurance. These activities also strengthen the child's awareness of his/her hands.



- Wheelbarrow walking, crab walking
- Clapping games (loud/quiet, on knees together, etc.)
- Catching (clapping) bubbles between hands
- Pulling off pieces of 'TheraPutty' with individual fingers and thumb
- Drawing in a tactile medium such as wet sand, salt, rice, or "gloop". Make "gloop" by adding water to cornstarch until you have a mixture similar in consistency to toothpaste. The "drag" of this mixture provides feedback to the muscle and joint receptors, thus facilitating visual motor control.
- Picking out small objects like pegs, beads, coins, etc., from a tray of salt, sand, rice, or putty. Try it with eyes closed too. This helps develop sensory awareness in the hands.

### Midline Crossing

Establishment of hand dominance is still developing at this point. The following activities will facilitate midline crossing:

- Encourage reaching across the body for materials with each hand. It may be necessary to engage the other hand in an activity to prevent switching hands at midline.
- Refrain specifically from discouraging a child from using the left hand for any activity.
- Allow for the natural development of hand dominance by presenting activities at midline, and allowing the child to choose freely.
- Start making the child aware of the left and right sides of his body through spontaneous comments like, "kick the ball with your right leg." Play imitation posture games like "Simon Says" with across the body movements.
- When painting at easel, encourage the child to paint a continuous line across the entire paper also from diagonal to diagonal.

### Activities To Develop Handwriting Skills

There are significant prerequisites for printing skills that begin in infancy and continue to emerge through the preschool years. The following activities support and promote fine motor and visual motor development:



### Body Stability

- The joints of the body need to be stable before the hands can be free to focus on specific skilled fine motor tasks.

- Wheelbarrow walking, crab walking, and wall pushups.
- Toys: Orbiter, silly putty, and monkey bars on the playground.

## Fine Motor Skills

When a certain amount of body stability has developed, the hands and fingers begin to work on movements of dexterity and isolation as well as different kinds of grasps. Children will develop fine motor skills best when they work on a VERTICAL or near vertical surface as much as possible. In particular, the wrist must be in extension. (Bent back in the direction of the hand)

- Attach a large piece of drawing paper to the wall. Have the child use a large marker and try the following exercises to develop visual motor skills: Make an outline of a one at a time. Have the child trace over your line from left to right, or from top to bottom. Trace each figure at least 10 times. Then have the child draw the figure next to your model several times.
- Play 'connect the dots'. Again make sure the child's strokes connect dots from left to right, and from top to bottom.
- Trace around stencils the non-dominant hand should hold the stencil flat and stable against the paper, while the dominant hand pushes the pencil firmly against the edge of the stencil. The stencil must be held firmly.
- Attach a large piece of felt to the wall, or use a felt board. The child can use felt shapes to make pictures. Magnetic boards can be used the same way.
- Have the child work on a chalkboard, using chalk instead of a marker. Do the same kinds of tracing and modelling activities as suggested above.
- Paint at an easel. Some of the modelling activities as suggested above can be done at the easel.
- 'Magna Doodle' turn it upside down so that the erasing lever is on the top. Experiment making vertical, horizontal, and parallel lines.

## Ocular Motor Control

This refers to the ability of the eyes to work together to follow and hold an object in the line of vision as needed.

- Use a flashlight against the ceiling. Have the child lie on his/her back or tummy and visually follow the moving light from left to right, to bottom, and diagonally.
- Find hidden pictures in books. (There are special books for this.)
- Maze activities.

## Eyehand Coordination



- This involves accuracy in placement, direction, and spatial awareness.
- Throw bean bags/koosh balls into a hula hoop placed flat on the floor. Gradually increase the distance.
- Play throw and catch with a ball. Start with a large ball and work toward a smaller ball. (Koosh balls are easier to catch than a tennis ball.)
- Practice hitting bowling pins with a ball. (You can purchase these games or make your own with pop bottles and a small ball.)
- Play "Hit the Balloon" with a mediumsized balloon.

1. Pegs: You need pegs of different sizes, clothes pegs, small bulldog clips, stationery clips etc. Get the children to use one hand only at a time. I usually get them to peg about 10 pegs of different sizes onto the sides of a gift bag. They might put them on with their left hand and take them off with their right. They can also try squeezing the pegs between the first finger and thumb (on each hand) then the middle finger and thumb and so on.

2. Elastic bands Elastic gymnastics! Start by putting 2 elastic bands (the same size) around the thumb, first and middle fingers, ask the children to open and close the fingers. Then add another 2 elastic bands and so on. The more you have on, the harder it is to move your fingers. These exercises help to develop the muscles that make the web space when writing.

3. Beads: Get beads of different sizes and thread. Ask the children to thread some beads onto their string. The smaller the hole obviously the harder it is to thread. Develops hand/eye coordination.

4. Ball bearings and tweezers: Put the ball bearings in one little box and ask the child to try and pick one ball bearing up at a time with the tweezers and place in a second small box. If this is too tricky try using 'Hama' beads and tweezers.

5. 'Floam' / Playdough: These products are great for squeezing and rolling which provides necessary sensory feedback and helps to develop hand strength. Ask the children to squeeze the dough and roll it with the palm of their hand.
6. Doodle board: The Doodleboard is just a way of children practising handwriting patterns or letters without having to commit them to paper. Provide some patterns and shapes to copy.
7. Gummed Shapes: Give the children a sheet of plain paper and ask them to make patterns or pictures with the gummed shapes. Just picking up on shape at a time, licking it and then sticking it down all help to develop hand/eye coordination and the pincer grip.
8. Hama Beads: Hama beads are good for pincer grip and hand/eye coordination. The children have patterned sheets to copy and pegboards to put them on.
9. Lacing cards: Also good for hand/eye coordination. Just give each child one card to lace.
10. Bean bags: Give a child 4 or 5 beanbags and place a container about 3 feet in front of them. Ask the child to try and get as many beanbags in the container as possible.  
(Hand/eye coordination)
11. Chalk and blackboard: If you can, try and wedge the blackboard between two tables and provide the child with a piece of chalk in each hand. Ask them to draw the same pattern with both hands at the same time on both sides of the board. This helps develop bilateral movement. Allow the children to draw patterns, shapes and letter



shapes on the blackboard. The chalk gives sensory feedback and sound simultaneously.

12. Stencils: Children can use the stencils to make a picture. Helps develop pencil control and spatial awareness among other things.

13. Feathers: Ask the children to try and balance a feather on different parts of their body. This helps to develop balance and coordination.

14. 'Handhugger' pens: Hand hugger pens are the triangular shaped pens. These help the children to establish a better pencil grip.

15. Tissue paper strips: Place the child's palm (at the wrist) on the end of a strip of tissue paper. Ask them to only use their middle finger to get the paper to scrunch up under their hand. Repeat, but this time place the side of the child's hand on one end of the tissue strip and ask them to only use their thumb to scrunch up the paper and bring it under their hand. These activities really help to develop the hand arch, web space and muscle tone of the hand.

16. Stickers: Children love stickers. Just peeling them off provides an opportunity to develop fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination.

17. Peg boards: These can be pegboards where the child has to place pegs in the holes, maybe copying patterns. They can be the boards with plastic pegs already on where they have to stretch elastic bands between them to make patterns.



These ideas are just a reminder of some of the activities that children can take part in, which eventually influence the writing process.