

# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Personal, Social and Emotional Skills



This sheet is part of a series of Information Sheets designed to provide parents / carers with advice and information on supporting children with Special Educational Needs and / or a Disability with their Personal, Social and Emotional Development in preparation for Nursery or Reception class at school.

Helping your child on their journey to be ready for starting school can raise lots of worries and anxieties along the way. This can be because changes can be stressful for some children with SEND, particularly if they may have difficulty:

- \* Separating from you.
- \* Settling into new environments.
- \* Managing change or transitions.
- \* Making relationships with new people.
- \* Managing their emotions and behaviour.

*Transition activities for each school may vary e.g. some schools may be holding virtual visits and others may be face to face.*

*If you have concerns be sure to share these with the school SENCO and/or Class Teacher.*

With all this in mind, knowing where to start in helping your child to get ready for school may feel confusing.



### You may not be alone in thinking about:

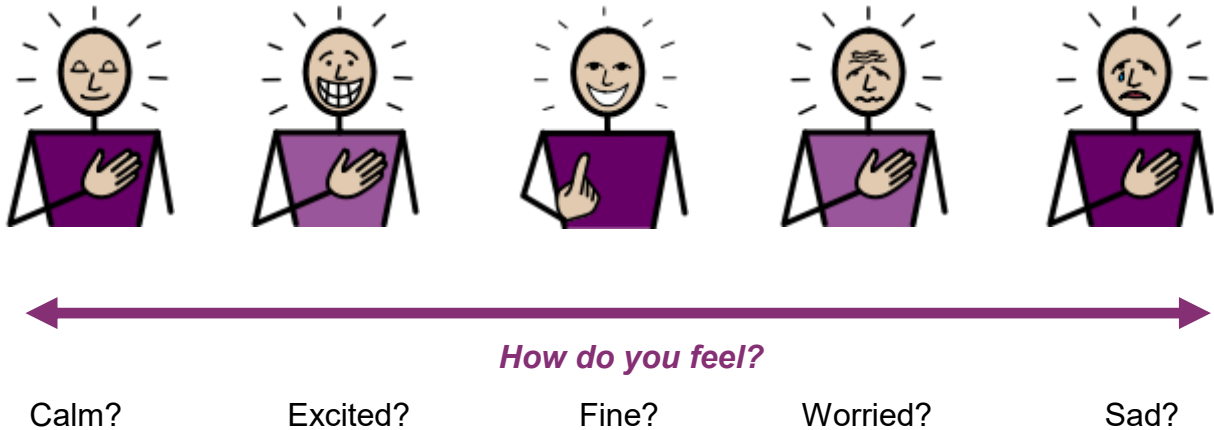
- \* How your child will settle in at school and what might happen if they take a very long time to settle.
- \* Whether you will be able to stay with them on the first day.
- \* Who you can talk to at school about your child's needs.
- \* Whether anyone will understand your child and be able to help them.
- \* If your child's Class Teacher will know how to calm your child when they are upset.
- \* Whether your child will respond to the Class Teacher's attempts to help them.
- \* How your child will relate to other children and manage their frustrations.



*This list is likely to go on. This information sheet will provide you with some advice or suggestions or how to support your child to be emotionally ready for starting school.*

# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## How do you feel about the transition to school?



Before you start to think about your child's Personal, Social and Emotional needs, it is important for you to think about how you are feeling about your child moving to school. You might feel all of the above at different times leading up to your child's transition to school. After all, it is natural to feel nervous or worried about your child starting school, as it is a big step in their lifelong journey of learning. It is important to try and take time for yourself to address any worries you may have so that you can be in a position to support your child to experience the transition as a smooth one.

Children can easily pick up on your emotions, so try to:

- \* Be relaxed and positive about the move.
- \* Not make negative comments about school e.g. 'I hated school'.
- \* Avoid too much talk about school ~ although it is a big step, try to avoid focusing on it too much in front of your child ~ keep your discussions about school very matter-of-fact.

***Some children with SEND can often take longer to settle and adapt to the new school environment ~ You know your child best and will know how they are likely to settle in and what might help them to manage to do this smoothly.***

If it helps to talk through how you are feeling with someone that can sometimes help.

You could try to talk to the school or a professional who knows your child.






# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Personal, Social and Emotional Development



Different aspects of your child's Personal, Social and Emotional Development can shape their transition to school. The following areas might be helpful to look at to consider which your child may need help with.

<b>Sense of Self</b> 	<b>Understanding Emotions</b> 	<b>Making Relationships</b> 
<p>How your child :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Separates from you.</li> <li>* Settles in new environments or with new people.</li> <li>* Copes with changes to routines &amp; transitions.</li> <li>* Explores the new environment and how secure they feel in doing this.</li> </ul>	<p>Your child's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Knowledge of emotions.</li> <li>* How they express their feelings.</li> <li>* Triggers that might cause them distress or frustration e.g. not being able to make their needs known / not understanding instructions / sensory overload / social situations such as turn taking.</li> </ul>	<p>Your child's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Interest in their peers and their ability to interact with others / say hello.</li> <li>* Eye contact and interest in others.</li> <li>* Ability to play co-operatively with others in a simple back and forth activity ~ turn taking with others.</li> <li>* Ability to show concern for others.</li> </ul>

*Changes can be unsettling and can test a child's Personal, Social and Emotional development. Some children may need a gentle settle in process and others may settle without any issue at all ~ you know your child best and will know how they will be likely to settle at school. Your knowledge will be very helpful to share with the school.*



Consistency, routine and keeping things the same can often be an important factor in meeting the needs of children with SEND. Introducing changes may need to happen gradually and at your child's pace and in a way that they are prepared for the changes. Using your knowledge of your child, you will be key to supporting them to experience a smooth transition.



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Personal, Social and Emotional Skills ~ Useful Questions

### Useful Questions to ask the school and helpful information to share.

A good starting point in helping you to think about your how to help your child to be emotionally ready for school will be to think about talking to the school about your child's personal, social and emotional needs. This discussion can be very helpful for the school in preparation for your child starting and might help to ease some of your worries. Below there are some suggestions of questions relating to the key issues around long with who would be the

#### Questions for the SENCO:

What support is there for children with SEND who might find it hard to separate or settle?

What strategies would you suggest or have used to help children with SEND to settle at school?

Can my child bring in a transition toy to help them settle?

#### Questions for the Class Teacher:

Will I be able to stay with my child on the first day?

Will my child be expected to go in on their own?

Can I take my child in to the class to settle them?

Will someone let me know if they are very upset and not settling?

#### Useful things to share with the SENCO / Class Teacher:

How your child manages separation from you.

Any potential triggers that cause your child to feel upset / angry or distressed.

Strategies or things that help calm and settle your child.

Your child's favourite toys or activities.

How your child interacts with other children and / or adults.

Have there been any unsettling times in the family that the Class Teacher may find helpful to know about?



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Self Awareness and Self Confidence

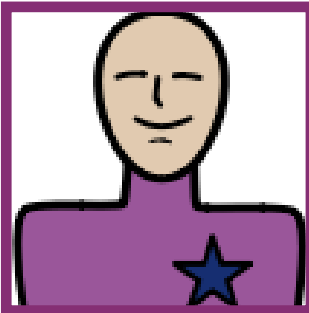
### Useful skills to teach:

If your child is not already using a Visual Timetable, it might be a good time to introduce one.

Transitions from one activity to another.

Stopping an activity ~ finishing.

Separating from you for short periods of time.



Working on the skills above will all help towards building self confidence in your child so that they are better able to separate and settle at school.

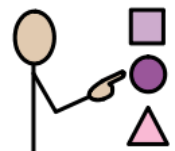
### Things to try:

- ✓ Having clear and consistent routines as they provide a sense of stability ~ use a Visual Timetable to help build structure, predictability and routine.
- ✓ Think about the new aspects of your child's school day and introduce these using pictures e.g. if they will be travelling on a bus, look at pictures of these or add the picture to a Social Story book about getting on the bus.
- ✓ If your child has a favourite comfort toy or blanket, try to get them used to being without it during the day. Practise hanging up the toy on a peg at home (like you might at school).
- ✓ You could try using a box with the word 'finished' written on it to put their toy / blanket in to and gradually teach your child to put it in the finished box. Work towards being able to leave it in there for longer and longer each time.
- ✓ Practise 'goodbyes' if you know your child does not like to be separated from you. This could be for just 30 seconds to begin with 'as you leave the room with a warm 'hello' when you return'. Gradually extend the time if you can so that your child learns that you are.
- ✓ Involve your child in the preparation for school ~ you could make a visual checklist of things your child needs and you can tick off the list as you get these items ready.

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### Ways to build confidence:

- ✓ Use positive language about your child's abilities e.g. '*you can do it*'.
- ✓ Let your child help you with small tasks to gain a sense of responsibility i.e. emptying the washing machine together.
- ✓ Where possible ~ offer your child choices when buying things for school.
- ✓ If your child is anxious about school, try focusing on the things that they will like best e.g. the sandpit, play house or new friends.
- ✓ Let your child know who will be dropping off and / or collecting them each day if it is going to be different people ~ remember a predictable routine will help.



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Managing Feelings & Behaviour ~ Skills and Strategies

### Useful skills to teach

Learning the words for feeling ~ happy, sad, angry, scared (these are feelings that children tend to learn first).

Encouraging your child to be able to name the feeling.



Learning how to respond or what to do when feeling sad, scared or angry.

**Things to try to help your child to manage their feelings & behaviour.** *These can be helpful in teaching your child skills to be able to prevent unwanted behaviour as they can support children's understanding, sense of stability and knowledge of emotions and may also give them strategies to use to help them manage their own emotions.*

### General strategies which might prevent unwanted behaviour:

- ✓ Model positive, calm behaviour especially when talking about transition or school.
- ✓ Keep your language simple and clear ~ give your child time to respond (count to 5 in your head).
- ✓ Get your child's attention before you ask them something.
- ✓ Use visuals to support your message. Show your child an object / picture or sign to help them understand e.g. 'kind hands'.
- ✓ Be specific and say / show what you want your child to do e.g. 'Shoes on' rather than 'stop running around' or 'Shoes on' rather than 'Get ready'.
- ✓ Try to keep a predictable routine ~ prepare your child for any changes or transitions coming up e.g. '2 minutes then iPad finished'.
- ✓ Encourage your child to place items into a 'finished' box if they find it difficult to cope with the end of an activity.
- ✓ Keep your child informed about what is happening e.g. 'First breakfast / then uniform'.
- ✓ Avoid too many questions, instead comment on their feelings & behaviour you want e.g. 'good turn taking'.

### Activities to support your child's understanding of and ability to express their feelings:

- ✓ Play with puppets, dolls, teddies. Make the character look sad, happy, angry or scared. Makes paper plate feelings masks & play (see resources section for ideas).
- ✓ Sit in front of a mirror with your child ~ show sad, angry, happy and scared expressions.
- ✓ Look at pictures of different feelings in books / on visuals e.g. a 'feeling fan'. These can be used to teach your child different emotions or to encourage them to tell you how they are feeling (see resources section for ideas).
- ✓ You could try a Worry Monster or worry box ~ Talk to your child about the things that worry them. Either write the worries on a piece of paper or use pictures. Place the picture / word into the Worry Monsters' mouth and zip the mouth up. The worry monster has eaten the worries, so you don't have to worry about it anymore.



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL


## Managing Feelings & Behaviour ~ Responding to Behaviour

Sometimes, your child might react to situations with behaviour and this could be because they are learning not only about boundaries and emotions but also about how to handle these emotions.



**Before you try any of the suggestions on this page, try to think about why your child might be carrying out the behaviour. Are they getting something from the behaviour or having a need met?**

**What you do when your child is experiencing a difficult time managing their feelings and behaviour will depend on the reasons for their feelings and behaviour.** In situations where your child is angry or displaying behaviour that you would like them to stop, it can be a good idea to try to reduce your own emotions first.

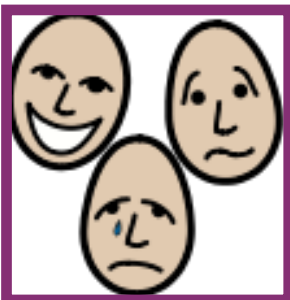
- ✓ Try to be consistent with how you respond to behaviours.
- ✓ If you are calm and in control, this will help you to be able handle with your child's behaviour.
- ✓ Try to say or show a visual of 'Stop' or 'finished' rather than 'No' ~ you could sign these to your child at the same time. 
- ✓ Say the name of the feeling ~ when your child looks sad, angry or scared name this to help them learn the name for their feeling. You can also use visuals by showing your child a picture of the feeling as you name it.
- ✓ Once you have acknowledged their feelings, you could suggest a way of dealing with it e.g. 'you're worried, It's OK, have a hug' (adapt the language based on your child's level of language understanding e.g. 'Worried? Hug').
- ✓ Offer a solution to your child e.g. 'You want water?'
- ✓ If possible and where it is safe to do so, try to give little or no reaction to behaviours which you feel able to ignore e.g. spitting. Instead, giving your attention to behaviours that you do want will be most helpful in encouraging more of those.
- ✓ Ignoring does not mean ignoring the child ~ it is about ignoring the behaviour. You can do this by distracting your child ~ this works for younger children who may be have just started an unwanted behaviour or are at the beginning of a tantrum.
- ✓ Distraction might not work, however, if your child has been having an upsetting episode such as a tantrum for a long time or is older.
- ✓ Distracting may also not always work for children who have certain needs such as sensory needs or needs linked to their development. For some children, their behaviour may be helping them to stay calm or cope with the environment e.g. repetitive jumping.
- ✓ It might not always be possible to prevent some of these behaviours, so it may be that you can try to provide your child with alternative options so that they get what they need but in a way that will help them be socially ready for school. For instance, if your child frequently likes to put things in their mouth ~ this may be because they have a sensory need and so providing them with a mouth / chew toy may be helpful as an alternative to them putting other things in their mouth.

# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

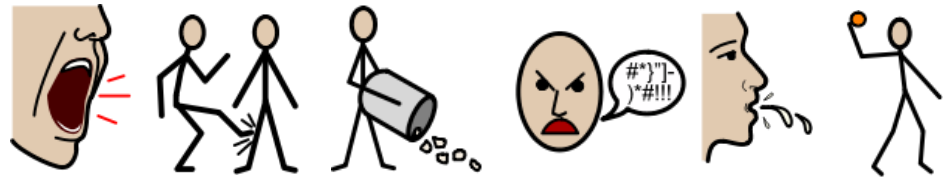
## Managing Feelings & Behaviour

**Triggers ~ to help you consider why the behaviour might have happened, think about:**

- \* Before ~ what happened immediately before the behaviour?
- \* During ~ what actually happened? How did your child react?
- \* After ~ what happened immediately afterwards?



**If you are unsure about the reasons for the behaviour, don't worry. Sometimes, it is not always easy to see what has caused the behaviour ~**



**What could your child be getting from the behaviours above?**

**Understanding your child's behaviour sometimes requires detective work. Are they:**

- \* **Trying to get something** ~ reward e.g. something they really want / attention from you or others? / a reaction / sensory input.
- \* **Trying to avoid something** ~ tidy up time / bed time / brushing teeth / the end of an activity.
- \* **Expressing how they feel because something happened to them** ~ someone took a toy? / they were in the middle of playing and had to tidy away / someone switched off the iPad?

**Some questions that you might find helpful in trying to find out a bit more about the behaviour:**

How often is the behaviour happening?

How long does it last?

How severe is it?

What time of day is it most likely to happen?

Where does it tend to happen?

Are there any physical / medical reasons that might be a factor e.g. constipation / cold / toothache etc?

Is your child sleeping and eating well?

How predictable is your child's routine on a daily basis / are there lots of changes or have there been recent changes?

How does your child communicate their needs?

Can they communicate 'yes, no, stop' to you?

Do they know how to request help / your attention / preferred food / objects / activities?

Can they let you know they need a break from something?

**Trying to work out why the behaviour is happening might help you with knowing how to try and reduce or prevent it.**



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Making Relationships

### Useful skills to teach:

Eye contact

Waiting

Turn taking

Peoples names

Play skills

Pretend play


Each of these skills may help your child at school in developing skills necessary to develop their social interactions.



Skills you work on now with your child will help them with in their future learning and not just in preparation for school.



### Things to try:

- ✓ Teaching eye contact can be helpful as a skill that can help your child with their interactions with others ~ you could play 'peek a boo' games or bubbles can be a great way of getting eye contact. It can help your child to learn that other people can be fun. 
- ✓ Practice the skill of waiting. You could introduce this throughout the day. To begin with, keep this to a minimum of a couple of seconds and then gradually increase the time they are waiting. Praise your child for 'Good waiting'
- ✓ You could use a 'wait' visual to help your child so they know you want them to wait ~ make sure you do then get to your child after you have asked them to wait to reward them for waiting.
- ✓ Practice simple turn taking with your child ~ a timer to indicate your turn or your child's turn could work or start with very simple quick turns in activities like ball runs so that your child does not have to wait very long
- ✓ You could start by introducing the names of the Class Teachers ~ look at pictures where possible (some schools have pictures on their websites of staff).
- ✓ If possible and you know other children going to the same school you could try to organise remote / video playdates with other children before the first day of school. It can help if your child knows another child going to the same school before school starts.
- ✓ Simple play skills will help your child by teaching them cause and effect, copying, interactive games and role play. These are all skills which will be needed in learning to play with other children.
- ✓ Set aside some time in the day where you give your child some time to sit and explore some toys together. If your child is not interested, try to make the play interesting ~ start with things you know they are interested in.
- ✓ You could teach your child how to ask another child to play ~ practice phrases such as 'Can I play?'
- ✓ Model 'kind' behaviours e.g. 'kind hands' or 'gentle hands'.

# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Praise

**Praise is important ~ it gives children a sense of confidence, pride a desire to try something or persevere with something.**

- ✓ Praise can be given in many ways ~ for trying something or for doing something e.g. *'Good try'* / *'Well done for putting your shoes on'*.
- ✓ Praise can also be given for 'being'. This means you are praising your child for who they are e.g. *'You have a kind heart'* / *'you're clever / smart / special'* etc.
- ✓ Praise your child immediately after they have done something.
- ✓ When praising your child, try to:
- ✓ Praise can be for big achievements as well as for small steps. Recognise small steps.
- ✓ Try to be consistent in your use of praise.
- ✓ Praise yourself in front of your child ~ this can be a good model to show your child how to be self confident.
- ✓ Praise in front of others (if your child does not mind being praised in front of others).

Keep it specific to what they have done e.g. *'Good tidying'* / *'Well done for brushing your teeth'* / *'Good sitting'*.



Make sure it is genuine ~ try not to praise overly for too many things.

Gain your child's attention ~ bend down, get down to their level with eye contact if possible. If your child does not give eye contact or finds it uncomfortable, then try offering praise by gently tapping them on the shoulder and showing them your praise through gesture.

If your child does not like you to be too near them, you can still give praise them from a distance with a warm smile and gesture such as 'thumbs up'.

Show your praise not just with what you say but your voice, gestures and facial expressions e.g. smile, warm tone of voice or *'high five'* or *'thumbs up'* to indicate praise.

**What if my child does not like to receive praise?** ~ Some children may find praise difficult to hear ~ they may cover their ears or become angry because:

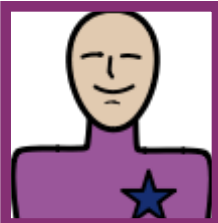
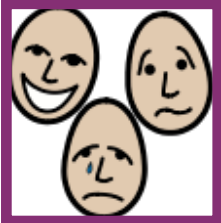


1. **They may not believe the praise** ~ *State facts rather than using praise words* e.g. *'you've finished'* / *'you put your shoes on'*. You could try saying how your child's behaviour helped others e.g. *'Mummy / daddy is happy you finished'*.
2. **They feel self conscious because the attention is on them** ~ try praising quietly / whispering / a little gesture such as 'thumbs up' or even just a smile might be enough.
3. **They feel pressure** ~ try praising for effort rather than performance e.g. rather than *'Wow you made an amazing tower'*, you could say *'good work / good building'*
4. **They do not know how to respond** ~ try modelling how to respond e.g. when someone praises you, say 'thank you'. You could teach the Makaton sign for 'Thank you' as this is a practical thing your child can do to respond to your praise. To sign, place your hand to your mouth and bring it out in front of you just a short way.



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## First Day & Beyond



The first day of school is important ~ all your efforts in getting your child ready for school will help your child. Here are some tips to help your first day start smoothly.

- ✓ Even if you're feeling sad or worried ~ try to say a calm, happy and confident goodbye to your child. Wave happily and then leave so that the goodbye is confident and not too prolonged.
- ✓ Let your child know by telling or showing them who will be collecting them each day if it different people ~ you could have a picture of who is collecting them with you as you drop them off. You could say 'first school / then [name of person collecting them]'.
- ✓ Check that you know where you have to go so that you feel calm and relaxed.
- ✓ Talk positively to your child about their feelings about school.
- ✓ Keep the after school time as consistent with your usual routine as possible ~ coming home to sameness can be soothing and calming.
- ✓ As tempting as it might be to greet your child on the first day with a treat ~ your child may learn to expect this every time so best to keep the after school as simple and relaxed as possible.

### For you...

After you have dropped off your child, do something that will help you take your mind off how they are doing.

Try to think about the preparation and support you have given to your child ~ feel reassured you have done your best.

You might find it helpful to talk to other parents ~ try to find out about activities or groups that the school run to try and feel involved.



*As your child comes home from school after their first day, feel assured that you have helped them along their journey and that you will continue to be an important part of the success of their future transitions through to their next stage of development.*

# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Visuals to support your child

Visuals can be printed, laminated (if possible) and cut out. You can use these visuals to show your child when they are experiencing the emotion to teach them the vocabulary. These can also be used to make simple games such as matching games, or posting games ~ all intended to teach your child the words to their feelings.

happy



sad



angry



scared



worried



excited



# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Visuals to support your child

These visuals might be useful to use when you want your child to be able to follow an instruction or to give them praise.

high five



well done



time



last one



stop

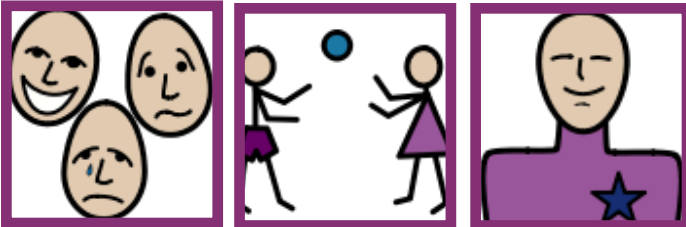


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# GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

## Resources and further useful information



The list below contains suggested further sources of information or resource ideas that you might find helpful.



You can make 'feelings' masks or puppets from paper plates and a pencil taped on. Let your child choose a mask and you can both use facial expressions and act out the feeling.



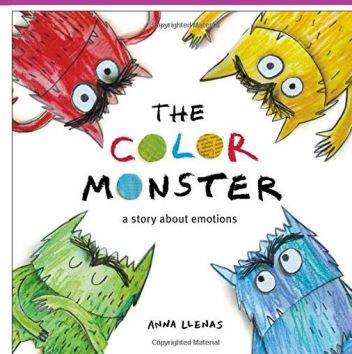
You could make a paper dice with different emotions on each side. You can stick pictures or draw simple faces. Roll the dice and act out the emotion.



Feelings fan ~ can be bought from places such as Amazon. Encourage your child to let you know how they are feeling using a feeling fan.



Worry Monster ~ can be bought from places such as Amazon. Let the worry monster eat up your child's worries. You can write the worry or put a picture of the thing that worries them.



The Color Monster is a book about emotions.



*As your child comes home from school after their first day, feel assured that you have helped them along their journey and that you will continue to be an important part of the success of their future transitions.*