

Helping your children to be ready for school



What does school readiness mean?

“Childcare professionals, parents and teachers...agree that the term should be defined as children who:

- have strong social skills,
- can cope emotionally with being separated from their parents,
- are relatively independent in their own personal care,
- have a curiosity about the world and a desire to learn.

...They recognise that play best supports children’s social and emotional development, as well as their creativity.”

Quote from pacey (the Professional Association for Child care and Early Years)

So what does school readiness look like?

- When we think about a child who is ready for school. We might think that they should look like this...

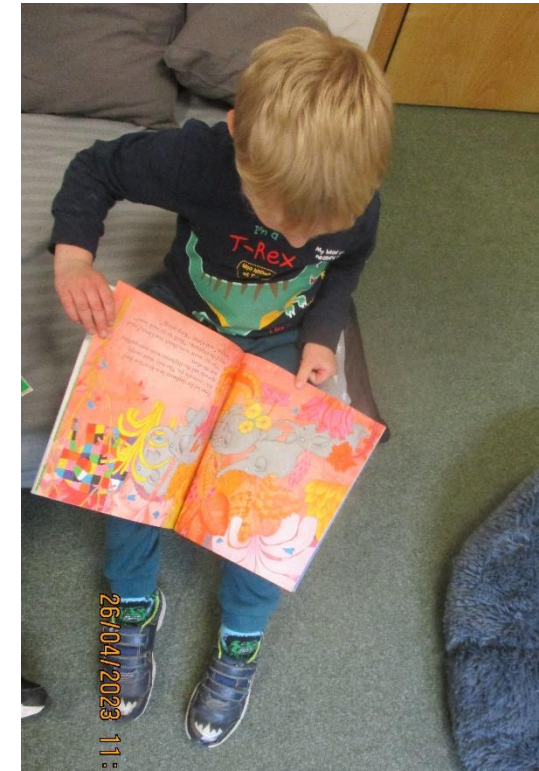


In fact it looks more like this...



- Strengthening the connection between brain and body through movement.
- Underpinning all future learning.

And this.....



Fostering a love of stories and story book language. Expressing ideas, developing social and communication skills. Building positive attachments with peers.



Developing core strength, gross and fine motor skills through pouring, lifting, digging, building, moving.



Building social and emotional skills through playing, sharing and negotiating with others and preparing for reading, writing and maths through cooking, messy play and mark making in different forms.









These photos are a great example of independent play, collaboration, discussion and sustained concentration around a joint project to make an obstacle course in the garden.







Moving, handling toys, materials and using talk to communicate ideas, instructions and negotiate.



Developing independence and the ability to negotiate with peers. Being able to use techniques (such as the sand timer) to support sharing or waiting or taking turns.

Developing the confidence and skills to be independent and to follow routines.



How can we support children to be school ready?

In the following slides we will talk about the skills and support children need to have to help them to flourish at school.

Being ready to read, write and count...

- When children start school they will begin to learn to read and write letters and numerals:
 - They will begin to learn the sounds that letters make.
 - They will begin to learn to recognise common words.
 - They will begin to form letters and numerals using taught handwriting techniques.
- Before they can do that they need us to concentrate on a vast amount of other skills which are vital in underpinning those described above.
- Often adults make the mistake of thinking that to ensure success we should teach these skills earlier and earlier.
- We must not ignore the essential building blocks of development that underpin these skills.
- We would not ask a baby to try to walk at 2 weeks!

Play is the work of children....

- It is not play OR learn, it is play IN ORDER TO learn.
- Very often their instinct for play is linked to a skill they need to master or develop – child led play is essential.
- Play helps children:
 - Increases self-awareness, self esteem and self respect.
 - Promote a sense of security and safety.
 - Develops language skills through talking and listening.
 - Teaches how to negotiate
 - Improves and maintains physical and mental health.
 - Provides the opportunity to mix with other children.
 - Increases confidence.
 - Promotes imagination, independence and creativity.
 - Provides opportunities for developing social skills and learning.
 - Promotes risk taking and problem solving.
 - Provides experiences of new and novel situations.
 - Provides opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.

From RMTi for School Readiness



When children are engrossed in their play their brain is making new synapse connections and they are making progress.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning (described below) are outlined in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. They describe the qualities that enable children to learn and make progress.

Playing and Exploring

- Finding out and exploring.
- Using what they know in their play.
- Being willing to have a go.

Active Learning

- Being involved and concentrating.
- Keeping on trying.
- Enjoy achieving what they set out to do.

Creating and thinking critically

- Having their own ideas.
- Using what they already know to learn new things.
- Choosing ways to do things.

Synapse density is greatest at around age 2 or 3

Your children's brains are working very hard!

Remember how it felt, or feels now, to master new skills and how it feels to be developing many at once.



Newborn



1 Month



9 Months



2 Years



Adult

In order to become 'school ready' children need to master many skills...

Personal, Social and Emotional

Independence

- Coping with separating from their carer.
- Dressing and undressing.
- Using the toilet.
- Ability to organise and look after their belongings.
- Feed themselves.
- Find their way around a new environment.

Confidence

- To speak to unfamiliar adults and children.
- To express their needs, feelings, thoughts and ideas.
- Having the confidence to join in, instigate and collaborate.

Social and emotional skills

- Making positive attachments.
- Sharing, coping with others.
- Negotiating with peers.
- Learning to consider that others have needs and feelings.

Communication and Language

- Children need to be able to express themselves:
 - their needs,
 - their feelings,
 - their thoughts and ideas.
- Children need to be able to listen.
- Children need to be able to understand what they hear.
- Children need to be able to follow instructions.
- They need to be given time to think and to know how to respond appropriately.

Physical Development

- Children need an efficient brain and body which works well.
- In order to build the foundations and muscle control for writing and reading and maths they need to have a full range of integrated reflexes and good postural control.
- Children need to move in different ways. They need to climb, run, swing, slide, pull, push, run, jump and have opportunities to be bare foot.
- It is interesting to note on the following 2 slides what children's brains are typically doing at different ages. *(These are taken from Carla Hanford's book, "Smart Moves" and RMTi School Readiness training with permission of Gaynor Ralls).*

It is useful to think about what the brain can do at different ages

Approx. age	Area of development	What is happening?
Conception to 15 months	Hind brain/Brain stem (Reptilian brain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic survival needs: touch, food, shelter and safety. • Sensory development starting with the vestibular system then hearing, tactile, smell, taste and finally seeing – rich sensory activation. • Motor development moving from reflexes to core muscle activation, neck muscles, arms and legs to leading to rolling over, sitting, crawling and walking – motor exploration
15 months to 4 .5 years	Limbic system/relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of self/others, self/ emotions, self/language • Emotional exploration • Language exploration/communication • Imagination • Gross motor proficiency • Memory development • Social development
4.5 to 7 years	Gestalt hemisphere Elaboration (Right)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole picture • Image/movement/rhythm/emotion/intuition • Outer speech/integrative thought

from RMTi



Approx. age	Area of development	What is happening?
7 to 9 years	Logic Hemisphere Elaboration (Left)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detail and linear processing/cognition • Refinement of elements of language • Reading and writing skills development • Technique development – music, art, sports, dance, manual training • Linear maths processing
8 years	Frontal lobe elaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine motor development – skills refinement • Inner speech – control of behavior • Fine motor eye teaming for tracking and foveal focus (2 dimensional focus)
9-12 years	Increased Corpus callosum Elaboration and Myelination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole brain processing
12-16 years	Hormonal Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about body, self, others, community and meaningful living through social consciousness
16-21 years	Refining cognitive skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole mind/body processing • Social interaction • Future planning • Play with new ideas and possibilities
21+	Elaboration and refinement of the frontal lobes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global systems thinking • High level format reasoning • Refinement of emotions – altruism, love, compassion • Insight • Refinement of fine motor skills

Becoming successful readers and writers...

- Often the most successful readers and writers have not spent their early years industriously practicing their handwriting and chanting the alphabet...they love to share books and stories.
- Do not underestimate the value of sharing stories, songs and rhymes with your children.
- It helps to develop a rich range of vocabulary, familiarizes children with language structures and the language of stories. Once upon a time...
- It can also help to strengthen attachment and a sense of being loved, snuggling up to share a book can be a precious time together.
- Audio stories are also fantastic if your children aren't yet keen to sit and focus on a book with you. Visiting a local library can help to stimulate their interest.
- Share picture books, comics, information books...Read to them, read to them and then read some more:

“From the day our children are born (yes), to the day they tell us to stop, we should read to them.” *Michael Rosen, in 'Good Ideas'*

What you can do to support your children...

Play with them...

- Make time to listen and talk to your child.
- Share activities (cooking, playdough, painting, mending, making, constructing...) together and talk about what you are doing and what you enjoy.
- Encourage your child to share and take turns, for example playing board games. Empathise that it can be a hard to do and praise their efforts.
- Sit with them whilst they play with their toys and join in with their play commenting and taking their lead.
- Share books and enjoy stories together. Try listening to stories.
- Sing nursery rhymes and songs together.
- Encourage your child to be active: running, jumping, playing with balls/bean bags, swinging, sliding, rolling.
- Encourage your children to make marks for writing, e.g. writing the shopping list with you, writing birthday cards. Value the marks that they make.
- Encourage your child to talk about patterns and amounts that you see.
- Notice the features of the things around you and talk about them.

Encourage your child to experience different things that can help them to learn to cope with changes

- Eat with other people other than family.
- Visit different toilets to try out and talk about different ways of flushing toilets, turning on taps and drying hands. Let boys experience using a urinal.
- Play with other children who they are less familiar with.
- Do things such as play at a friend's house without you.
- Talk to your child or children about how they feel about starting school.
- Reassure them by reading books about starting school and talking to them about what will happen during the first few days.
- Try to avoid using the term, 'big school' or the phrase, 'You'll have to do when you go to school' as it can make the prospect of school more daunting.

Helping your child to do as much for themselves as possible...

- Help your child to learn to dress and undress on their own.
- Help them to recognise their own clothes and belongings.
- Help them to recognise their own name when they see it.
- Practice using a knife and fork, eating packed lunches and working out how to manage tupperware and/or food wrappers.
- Help them to become more confident with wiping their bottoms after using the toilet and in washing their hands.
- Encourage them to make choices about what they want to play with or what they want to eat.

What local teachers advise...

“Playing board games with their children, which will not only support with turn taking, but also with maintaining attention and focus on an activity for a few minutes.

Teaching children to recognise their names would help with finding their pegs/ drawers/ jumpers.

Being able to hold a knife and fork, put on an apron/ jumpers themselves.

Sometimes parents worry about trying to do/prepare for phonics and we would say not to worry about this side of things as every school covers different schemes. More important is the listening and attention: singing songs, rhymes, clapping games etc. to tune into listening effectively. Also, lots of talk and encouraging language through conversation, and less through screen time!

Also, maybe worth mentioning not teaching capital letters (other than the start of their name). Some parents teach these and then it has to be un-learned for beginning writing!”

“I think playing, communication, independence, self help skills and reading...are all vital and exactly the message we would want parents getting.

For me, not feeling like they have to teach their child phonics using something like Jolly Phonics. All schools use different verified schemes, and it can be hard to un-teach actions and incorrect pronunciation! Also, they don't need to know letter names or to write in capitals!”

It's hard work!!!

- Play and learning should be fun, but it can be tiring for families.
- Children often need to 'let go' at home, where they feel safe. They may have more melt downs and tantrums as they progress and manage more challenges and big feelings out in the world. Try to take it as a compliment!
- The iceberg approach to understanding behaviour is helpful.
- Children need to rest and play at home.
- Getting enough sleep is important; somewhere between 9 and 13 hours per day.
- You need support too! Parents and carers are counsellors, play mates, health care assistants and educators and children are unique. Remember that and try to ensure that you give yourselves time to rest and recharge and to feel cared for too.
- Love, strong attachments and quality time together underpin happy children who love to learn.
- Good relationships with settings will also support children's success.

A little quote to finish...

This was shared on social media, but resonates for us as parents and practitioners and will hopefully help to remind us what matters most when rearing happy and rounded children:

“What a four year old should know...

- They should know that they are lovely wholly and unconditionally, all of the time.
- They should know that they are safe and they should know how to keep themselves safe in public, with others, and in varied situations.
- They should know that they can trust their instincts about people and that they never have to do something that doesn't feel right, no matter who is asking.
- They should know how to laugh, act silly, be goofy and use their imagination.
- They should know that it is always ok to paint the sky orange and give cats six legs.
- They should know their own interests and be encouraged to follow them. If they couldn't care less about learning numbers, their parents should realise that they'll learn them accidentally soon enough and let them immerse themselves instead in rocket ships, drawing, dinosaurs or playing in the mud.
- They should know that the world is magical and that so are they.
- They should know that they're wonderful, brilliant, creative, compassionate and marvellous.
- They should know that it's just as worthy to spend the day outside making daisy chains, mud pies and fairy houses as it is to practice phonics...



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...here's what parents need to know

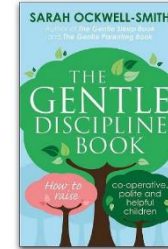
- That every child will learn to walk, talk, read and do algebra at their own pace and that it will have no bearing on how well they walk, talk, read or do algebra.
- That the single biggest predictor of high academic achievement is reading to children. Not flash cards, not workbooks, not fancy preschools, not blinking toys or computers but Mum or Dad taking the time every day and night (or both!) to read them wonderful books.
- That being the smartest or most accomplished kid in the class has never had any bearing on being the happiest. We are so caught up in trying to give our children “advantages” that we’re giving them lives as multi-tasked and stressful as ours. One of the biggest advantages we can give our children is a simple, carefree childhood.
- That our children deserve to be surrounded by books, nature, art supplies and the freedom to explore them. Most of us could get rid of 90 percent of our children’s toys and they wouldn’t be missed, but some things are important – building toys like Lego and blocks, creative toys like all types of art materials, musical instruments, dress up clothes and books, books, books..
- They need to have the freedom to explore with these things too, to play with scoops of dried beans...(supervised of course), to knead bread and make messes, to use paint and play dough and glitter at the kitchen table while we make dinner even though it gets everywhere, to have a spot in the yard where it’s absolutely fine to dig up all the grass and make a mud pit.
- They need parents who sit and listen to their days,...join in and make crafts with them,...take the time to read them stories and act silly with them. They need us to take walks with them and not mind the slow pace...They deserve to help us make dinner even though it takes twice as long and makes it twice as much work. They deserve to know that they’re a priority for us and that we truly love to be with them.
- Our children don’t need tablets/Nintendos, computers...,after school activities nearly as much as they need US.”

Useful books and websites

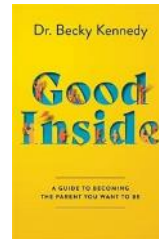
- ‘What every parent needs to know. The remarkable Effects of Love, Nurture and Play on your Child’s Development’ by Margot Sunderland



- ‘The Gentle Discipline Book’ by Sarah Ockwell Smith



- ‘Good Inside’ by Dr Becky Kennedy



- *If reading isn't your thing try audio books and podcasts.*

- [Children - The Sleep Charity](#) this is a useful resource for any sleep related concerns

- *There is more information about reflex integration and child development on the RMTi website:* www.rhythmicmovement.org

- *pacey.org.uk (Professional Association for Childcare and Early years settings) What does School ready really mean?* [Being school-ready | PACEY](#)

Remember that we're here if you'd like to talk more about helping to prepare you child for starting school.

Pop in to see us, send us an email, manager@croftplaygroup.co.uk or give us a call 01793 512882.

