

# Getting Ready for School



West Midlands  
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If your child is starting school in September, you will probably be thinking of ways you can get them ready for this big milestone.

But what exactly is 'school readiness'? We could say that school readiness is a child's ability to be independent and to be ready to learn.

## Why get ready?

Good communication is essential for learning. As well as being the foundation for reading and writing, it is also vital for children's social and emotional development. Most early years teachers agree that, for a child starting school, communication skills are more important than any academic skills.

Communication skills include being able to listen, follow instructions, pay attention, get their message across, interact and play. Good communication has a positive impact on behaviour too. Children who cannot communicate their wishes, feelings and concerns are more likely to become disruptive or withdrawn in the classroom.

## Key areas to get ready

- **Attention and Listening skills** - Children are given many spoken instructions throughout the school day and need to be able to shift their attention from what they are doing to listening to what the teacher is saying.
- **Interaction** – Good interaction skills are essential for children to be able to make friends. In the classroom children need to be able to share toys with their classmates and wait for their turn. Communication is a two-way process where each person takes a turn. This skill is vital for the development of social interaction skills.
- **Vocabulary** - At school, children will be expected to start extending their vocabulary, so it is a good idea to encourage your child to learn and use new words. Children with larger vocabularies are better at reading and learning.
- **Understanding Language** – Understanding is key to talking and learning. Children will need to follow classroom instructions throughout the school day. Therefore, it is vital they understand spoken language which includes increasing amounts of information.
- **Dummies and bottles** - During a baby's early months a dummy can be helpful to comfort and settle babies. However, when children use dummies too much or for too long, it can have a negative effect on their speech and language development.



## Let's get ready



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There are lots of fun things you can do at home and when you are out and about to help your child get their communication skills school ready.

**Making Choices** - Give your child lots of opportunities to make choices. Would they prefer cereal or toast for breakfast? Which toy would they like to play with? This gives them the opportunity to hear and learn more words and practice using words in a functional manner.

**Reading Together** – Research shows that children who are read to daily do better in all areas of learning. Don't limit reading to bedtime stories; magazines, websites, catalogues, signs and recipes all provide opportunities for reading. This will support your child's vocabulary development, understanding of language and attention and listening skills.

**Role Play** – Encourage role-play. Whether its fantasy dressing up, acting out real-life roles such as doctor or teacher, or small-world play with little figures. Role-play helps children develop their language and social skills, empathy, and cultural awareness.

**Playing with friends** – Spending time with friends teaches children about sharing, turn taking, cooperation and negotiation –all vital interaction skills. During the play date, you can model useful social phrases such as 'my turn please' or 'let's share'. You can join in with pretend play to start the game off and then fade out / move away as children get into character.

**Listening Walks** - go on a 'listening walk' where your child listens for all the sounds around them in the park or town centre. You could also jot down all the sounds your child notices and talk about these back at home to retell the journey based on the sounds they heard.

**Going Shopping** - Use everyday experiences as learning opportunities. For example take your child with you to the shops. They can practise their listening and memory skills and extend their vocabulary by helping you to collect named items.

**Songs and Rhymes** - Sing your child's favourite nursery rhyme with them. Try to sing it slowly to help your child listen to the words of the rhyme. If you can use actions too, this will help your child to understand the words better.

**Special Time** - Try setting aside 5 minutes every day, with the TV off, just for talking and playing together.



Dummies can provide vital support to parents and babies in the early months of development. Babies have a strong sucking reflex and a dummy or bottle can help soothe them.

However, prolonged use of a dummy and bottle can have negative impact on a child's speech and language development.

**Overuse of a dummy can have an impact on:**

- The development of babbling, an important early stage in learning to talk.
- Development of the full range of tongue movements, important for sounds like t, d and l
- Tongue position and pattern of tongue movements making speech sounds unclear, important for sounds like s and sh
- Gaps between the upper and lower front teeth which may lead to a lisp - making sounds like s, and z difficult
- Reduced desire to communicate – with a dummy in the mouth, some young children may become less likely to seek out talking activities
- Increased dribbling – some children may find it difficult to get good lip closure because of the dummy and may have more saliva dribbles and slushy sounding speech

**How can you help your child?**

Getting rid of a dummy is not easy! However, it can be more difficult to wean children off as they get older. This can result in stress for both of you.

Choose the right time for your child to give up their dummy – not when you are under pressure.

Make a clean break – throw away the dummy over a weekend, or at a time when you have support.

Most babies and toddlers will fret for no more than two or three days.

Once you have decided to give the dummy up, don't be tempted to give it back, and make sure there are none left lying around.

**Other ideas that parents have tried:**

- Lots of positive praise for your child when they do not use their dummy
- Give the dummy to Santa / Tooth Fairy
- Get your child to throw the dummy in the bin
- Swap the dummy for a gift / cuddly toy / new toothbrush

**Remember**

- Never dip your baby's dummy into anything sweet. This can cause tooth decay
- Don't allow your child to talk with a dummy in their mouth, it stops tongue and lip movement
- Whilst your child is still having a dummy, use it as little as possible and try other means of comforting such as cuddling or reading to your child at bed time