

National  
Literacy  
Trust

Changing life stories

# Time together

Fun and simple  
activities to do  
with your young  
child at home



# Welcome

Talking with your baby or young child and sharing books gives them the best start in life.

As a parent you have a special role to play. The good news is you don't need to be an expert to help your child be ready to learn.

**Did you know** that children learn lots through simple, everyday experiences with you!



## Star tips

The star tips in this book give great suggestions for how you can support your child's learning and get them ready for school.

## Small talk ideas

Use the small talk ideas to help your child build up the language they will need for school.

Try these to get you started. You can find more ideas online at [small-talk.org.uk](http://small-talk.org.uk).

### Star tip

Your child will love it when you say 'well done'! Lots of praise helps your child feel good about themselves.

### Small talk idea

Chat to your child whenever you can – walking along the road, on the bus, wherever! They can learn lots of new words from you.

# Chat, play, read

## Chatting matters!

Take turns to chat and listen with your child.

Children learn by asking questions, talking about their ideas, describing what they see and wondering out loud.

When you are chatting with your child you can have fun together. Try:

- Asking questions
- Talking about everyday experiences
- Telling jokes
- Being silly
- Playing games
- Singing songs

**Did you know** that the more you talk to your child and the more words they hear you use, the better they will do at school at age 10?



## Star tip

For more ideas visit [literacytrust.org.uk/family-zone/](http://literacytrust.org.uk/family-zone/)

## Small talk idea

Chat with your child about what you are doing as you go about everyday activities, such as sorting the washing or making dinner.

## Star tip

If play is lively or noisy, head down to your local park!

## Small talk idea

Share the story 'We're Going On A Bear Hunt' and then go on an imaginary bear hunt around your garden or local park!



## Small talk idea

Join in and get in character during your child's imaginative play! Ask them questions in character or describe what you are doing. This can give your child the opportunity to hear new words and solve problems.

# Be playful

Children learn to make sense of the world through their play!

Play is really important for children's development. Playing with other children helps them learn to communicate, take turns, share and make friends.

Children enjoy using their imagination to turn different objects into play items. You can provide dress up clothes such as adult shoes, clothes, bags or even empty containers – large boxes are great!

**Did you know** that letting your child choose what they would like to play promotes their independence and helps them get ready for school?



## Reading the signs

### Print is everywhere!

Children live in a world full of print and see messages, pictures and logos everywhere.

Recognising their favourite place to eat or the name of the supermarket are the first steps in learning to read and write.

**Did you know** that the more your child sees you read, the more they will want to read too!

### Star tip

Make sure your child sees you reading things you enjoy, such as books, magazines, comics, manuals, recipes or instructions and tell them why you are doing it.

### Small talk idea

When you are out and about with your child, look at the signs, symbols, logos and words all around you. Encourage them to show you and help them to 'read' the ones they recognise!

## Eat, sleep, move

### Feed children's growing bodies!

A mixed and varied diet with fresh fruit, vegetables and dairy is important to help bodies and bones grow healthily. Cooking from scratch can be cheaper than buying ready-made food. Dry or tinned foods like pasta, tomatoes and beans are good, cheaper cupboard staples that can make lots of different dishes.

**Did you know** that lots of supermarkets have great recipe ideas for meals that are not too expensive? Or, you could look online for other ideas:  
[goodtoknow.co.uk/food/recipe-collections](http://goodtoknow.co.uk/food/recipe-collections)

### Small talk idea

Involve your child whilst you are cooking by talking to them about what you are doing.



### Star tip

Ask friends what their children like to eat and swap recipes!

### Star tip

Ask your child's school about breakfast and lunch club options!

# Sleep well

## Rest and relax!

Having enough sleep and rest is very important for children as they are growing and developing all the time.

## Bedtime routine

A bedtime routine might look like this:

- 6.45 pm: put on pyjamas, brush teeth, go to the toilet.
- 7.15 pm: quiet time with a book, story or quiet chat.
- 7.30 pm: goodnight and lights out<sup>1</sup>

**Did you know** that soothing songs and lullabies can settle children and help restful sleep?



## Star tip

Try to reduce 'screen time' on phones, TV or computers in the hour before bedtime as it can stop children going to sleep.

For suggestions to help your child sleep, visit [sleepfoundation.org](http://sleepfoundation.org)

## Small talk idea

Instead of a book at bedtime, try making up a story using your imagination!

# Get moving

## Time to be physically active!

It is recommended that children aged up to five years have three hours of physical activity spread throughout the day<sup>2</sup>. This can include walking, jumping, running, climbing and balancing. Children's bodies are growing and developing rapidly during this time. Children like to be active, and need to keep moving to stay healthy and well.

## Activities suitable for most children who can walk on their own include:

- Active play (such as hide and seek or stuck in the mud)
- Running around
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Riding a bike
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Skipping rope
- Gymnastics<sup>3</sup>



## Star tip

Find a physical activity you enjoy (maybe dancing to music or jogging) and encourage your child to join in too!

## Small talk idea

Ask your child to tell you about an activity they did at nursery. Ask them what they liked or disliked about it - and why.



# What you can do to support your child

Research shows that there are seven things parents can do with their child to help them learn and achieve good outcomes in life<sup>4</sup>.

## Share books and stories

Looking at books together is a great way of learning from a very young age.

## Sing songs and rhymes

Singing nursery rhymes and songs is a great way to help your child learn new sounds and words through rhyme and repetition.

## Play together

Young children learn through play. Playing together helps children develop the skills they need to communicate and socialise.

## Play with letters

Playing games with the shapes and sounds of letters makes learning fun.

## Get out and about

Going for a walk or to the shops together gives you and your child new things to experience including things to see, feel, smell, taste and hear, as well as lots to chat about!

## Access to books

If a local library is open, you can borrow books for free, and attend free activities for children. Local nurseries, children's centres and schools can provide access to free books. Just ask!

## Paint and draw

Making marks and scribbles are the beginning of learning to write.

These simple activities really make a difference to how your child learns and develops their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. You can have fun together and get ready for school at the same time!





## Sharing stories

You don't always need to read the words. Looking at and talking about picture books is a great way to encourage your child to enjoy stories. If you speak another language at home, talk about the pictures and story in your own language.

When you're sharing books you can have fun together:

- Talk about the book's cover and point out the title.
- Let your child hold the book and turn the pages.
- Encourage them to talk about the pictures.
- Use different voices for different characters. Add in sound effects like splashing in puddles, beeping car horns or animal sounds.
- When the story is finished, you could ask them if they liked it and if they had a favourite character.

### Star tip

Make a den together (a cloth over a table), with space for both of you to share. You can make your den part of the story – it could be a monster's cave, a rocket ship, or a princess' tower.



**Did you know** children who were read to regularly by their parents at age five performed better in maths, vocabulary and spelling tests at age 16 than those who were not helped in this way?<sup>5</sup>

**Did you know** that children often have a favourite story they want to hear again and again? This helps them to learn the word order and link the written word to the story – which are the first steps in learning to read!

### Small talk idea

Talk to your child about what you did as a child. Involve the whole family - grandparents may have stories to share from when they were growing up!

## Singing songs and rhymes

Songs and rhymes develop children's language, vocabulary, movement and coordination if they include actions. Many also help with learning to count.

Don't worry if your singing voice is rusty or out of tune, it doesn't matter and the more you sing with your child the more confident you will become.

If you don't know the tune you can borrow CDs of rhymes from the library or look them up on YouTube. You can always make up your own songs, or just sing along to the radio together.



**Did you know** that songs and rhymes can help to teach your child about the world? You can make animal noises in *Old MacDonald Had A Farm* and count the fish in *1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Once I Caught A Fish Alive!*

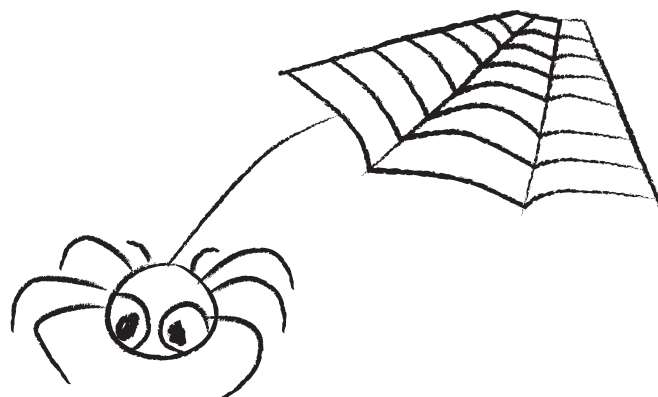


### **Incy Wincy Spider**

Act out the lyrics while you sing them, or make your own spider and drainpipe together using things like yoghurt pots, wool and kitchen roll tubes. You can find a video of the song with actions on YouTube:

[youtube.com/watch?v=m7flW0xEIak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7flW0xEIak).

*Incy Wincy Spider climbed up the water spout  
Down came the rain and washed the spider out  
Out came the sunshine and dried up all the rain  
And Incy Wincy Spider climbed up the spout again.*



### **Star tip**

If you know any songs or rhymes in another language, sing those with your child too.



## Play together

Learning to share, take turns, communicate, be comfortable and become friends with others are life-long skills but take some time to learn! You can help your child practise learning these important skills by playing together, or setting up play dates with friends or family members, either in person or via FaceTime or WhatsApp.

### Star tip

All children are different! Some are livelier and more confident than others – don't compare and don't worry – you know your child best so give them the support and encouragement they need.



**Did you know** that learning to play with others is important for children's personal, social and emotional development? You can be a great playmate for your child. Just follow their interests!



### Star tip

Encourage and reassure your child to build their confidence as they start to make their own friends.

Children play in lots of different ways:

- Playing on their own
- Watching other children play
- Playing alongside others; doing the same activity but not joining in together
- Becoming more interested in what others are playing and starting to chat together
- Playing together, usually in a small group



## Play with letters and numbers

There are all sorts of games you can play with letters and numbers, from their shape and sound to learning new words that share the same first letter. You can look out for numbers your child will recognise, such as your door number or their age, and see if you can find these numbers on buses, shops or road signs. Remember that letters and numbers are everywhere!

### Star tip

Count aloud with your child – find out how many steps you need to take to get to the front door or the number of lampposts you pass as you walk to the park!

### Small talk idea

Talk about the letters you can find in junk mail and old magazines. Cut some of the letters out and make a collage. See if you can find the first letter of your child's name. If they can't recognise the letter yet, draw it together and see if you can spot it when you're out and about.



### 'I'm going to the park'

Play a game taking turns saying what you'd take on a trip to the park. The rule is that you can only take things with a 'p' sound (for example, 'I'm going to the park and I'm going to take a picnic/parrot/pencil'). You can have more fun by changing the place you are going (for example, to the seaside, where you can only bring things beginning with 's'). Can you remember everything you are going to take?

### Plasticine or play dough letters

Have a go at making letter shapes together out of plasticine, or make your own play dough.

Mix together:

- two cups of plain flour
- ½ cup of cold water
- three tablespoons of vegetable oil
- one tablespoon lemon juice (optional)
- any food colouring or glitter you want.



### Small talk idea

To encourage your child's early reading, use letter sounds instead of alphabet letter names. Using letter sounds when you play games like 'I'm going to the park' or 'I spy' together, will help them sound out words as they learn to read.



## Get out and about

The world is full of exciting words and pictures and things to do, feel and explore, from cereal packets and street signs to splashy puddles and fallen leaves.

Encourage your child to explore the world around them.

- Go for a walk and talk about letters, words and numbers on street signs and storefronts
- When shopping for food, compare sizes, colours and smells of fruits and vegetables

**Did you know** that going out for a walk helps your child learn. Walk at your child's pace, chat and take an interest in the things they notice and ask about.



### How to make and use a picture card key ring

What you need

- Pencil and paper for your shopping list
- Pictures of fruit and vegetables
- Child-safe scissors
- Hole punch
- String or ribbon for threading through the pictures

What you do

Find a recipe and make a shopping list together by cutting out pictures of ingredients from leaflets and magazines.

Make a key ring by punching a hole in one corner of each picture and tying them together with string.

Let your child use the key ring when you go shopping. It will help them find the food by using the pictures. Talk together about what you see and count together how many you need.

### Star tip

Picture card key rings are a great way of playing with your child. Try making a key ring of pictures you might see when you're out and about.

### Small talk idea

When you are out and about with your child, listen to the sounds you can hear, including traffic noises, sirens, music, dogs barking, birds singing and aeroplanes overhead. Talk about what you hear. Try to copy the sounds – can you make the same noise?



## Access to books

Your local school, library, children's centre or nursery may be able to get you access to free children's books. Call and ask!

If your library is open, you can borrow books for free!

**Did you know** that the more children's books you have at home the more likely your child is to do well when they start school? These don't need to be books you own – in fact, the more books that are borrowed the better<sup>6</sup>.

### Star tip

Keep your child's library books to hand so that they can choose to look at one whenever they want to. Or why not keep your child's books with their toys? Teddies and dolls like to read too!

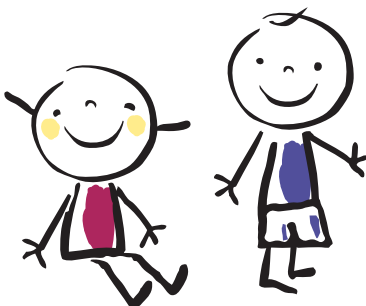
### Small talk idea

Magazines are good to share too. Chat about the different pictures and ask your child which ones they like best.

## Finding a book that's just right

Your child is much more likely to want to share a book if they have chosen it themselves. Here are some ways you can help them choose a book that they will enjoy:

- **Check out the cover**  
Can they see any books about things they like?
- **Dip in!**  
Have a look inside. Do they like the pictures?
- **Does it have characters they like?**  
Do they like monsters or teddies or aliens or trains?
- **Can either of you make noises to match the pictures?**  
Animal noises, car noises, trains or rockets.
- **Is it a story with actions?**  
Do they like to join in with these kinds of stories?
- **Are there any surprises?**  
Do they like books with pop up pictures or tabs to turn? Can you find the hidden character?





## Have fun painting and drawing

Painting and drawing help your child develop their concentration, creativity, and the skills they will need for writing.

Use different mark-making materials – chunky crayons, pencils, shaving foam and paint. It's fun to use water and a paintbrush on paving stones in the garden.

### Star tip

Be creative. Encourage your child to make marks, draw and stick in pictures made from different kinds of objects like feathers, shells or twigs.

Cut out favourite pictures from magazines and make collages.

## How to make your own memory book

### What you need

- A scrapbook
- Pens, crayons and pencils
- Photographs
- Magazines and catalogues
- Child-safe scissors
- Glue

### What you do

- Help your child decorate the front of their memory book. Write their name on it together.
- Add words or drawings about their favourite things, such as food, places or toys, or photos of your family or pets.
- Collect bus and other tickets when you're out and let your child stick them in.
- Try letting your child use glitter, paint, stickers or anything to make their memory book fun and colourful.

### Small talk idea

Talk about your child's scribbles and ask them what they have drawn. Pick out shapes and images that are recognisable and draw some yourself.



# Preparing for school

## You can prepare your child for school by:

- Playing games that involve taking turns and sharing
- Helping them to ask for what they need, if they are hungry, thirsty or tired.
- Teaching them to dress themselves, feed themselves and use the toilet on their own.

## Starting school can be a positive experience for everyone

- As parents, you are your child's first teacher.
- Find out about the school so you understand what will happen when your child starts.
- Be open to a home visit from the teacher before starting school if offered.
- Look at the school's website.

Make sure you know what to do on the first day: where to go in the morning, and where to collect your child from.



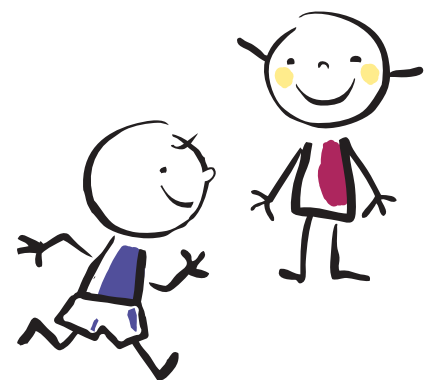
**Did you know** that the more familiar children are with their new school or nursery the quicker they will settle in?

## Read books about starting school

There are lots of different books you can share about school. This can help your child feel prepared to start or return to school.

A few books are listed below:

- *Starting School* by Janet and Allen Ahlberg
- *Topsy and Tim Start School* by Jean and Gareth Adamson
- *Going to School* by Anna Civaradi and Stephen Cartwright
- *Harry and the Dinosaurs Go To School* by Ian Whybrow
- *Come to School Too, Blue Kangaroo!* By Emma Chichester Clark
- *I Am Too Absolutely Small For School* by Lauren Child



## Practising new routines

Practise the morning routine including getting up and dressed, and having breakfast 'in time for school.' Make sure your child has plenty of sleep and is ready for school on the first day.

### Star tip

At the end of the day – greet your child with a smile and not a mobile!

### Small talk idea

Share one of the books listed. Talk about how your child is feeling about starting school.



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