

Transitioning to Primary School: Occupational Therapy Tips and Strategies

Cork & Kerry Primary Care
Paediatric Occupational Therapy



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

We aim to provide you with tips and strategies that will help to prepare your child for their transition to Primary School.

Further strategies specific to your child's needs can be provided upon meeting with your Occupational Therapist

Content

1. Preparing your child for a new school setting
2. Dressing skills
3. Establishing a morning routine
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7. Organisational skills
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Preparing your child for a new school setting

- Photos
- Social stories

1. Preparing for a new school setting

Tips and strategies:

- Knowing what to expect can reduce worries and feelings of anxiety. Show your child pictures/photos of their new school. Drive to their new school to help them to become familiar with the setting. Use pictures from the school webpage if available.
- Show your child a photo of their new teacher or classroom if this is available.
- If transitions and changes to your child's routine creates feelings of anxiety, consider creating a story to prepare your child for events that are to happen. Social stories are discussed in detail at <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>
- Social stories help to describe an unfamiliar event to a child. A social story can break a large event, that may seem overwhelming, into smaller manageable steps. A social story can explain what is expected of the child and what behaviours are expected in a situation.



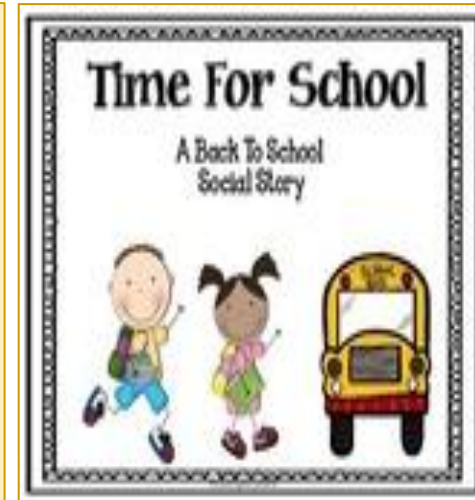
Preparing for a new school setting cont.

Tips and strategies:

- Free social stories or social story templates that relate to starting school can be easily sourced and downloaded online. Examples include;

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Social-Story-New-School-802915>

- You can also create your own social story. Include photos of your child, their school and new teacher.
- Tips when creating a social story;
 1. The story is in the present tense and from the child's perspective i.e. in the first person/use 'I'.
 2. Keep language simple and easy. Describe what to do, feelings that may be felt, what will be experienced.



My teacher is:

Name and Picture

My teacher will help me during the day. If I have a question about something I can ask my teacher.



2. Dressing skills

- Practise and Sequencing
- Skills to develop
- Sensory sensitivity/over-responsive to touch/textures

Practise and Sequencing

Tips and Strategies:

- Demonstrate and practise daily dressing tasks in advance of starting Primary School. Encourage independence and praise efforts made.
- Reduce the physical assistance you provide where possible. Provide verbal prompts/instructions.
- To help your child understand the sequence of dressing and what should go on first, take photos of each item of clothing and create a visual schedule.
- A visual schedule is a sequence of photos that helps your child to learn each step and what comes next. Photos of your child's clothes can be arranged in the order that they are put on.



Skills to develop

Tips and Strategies:

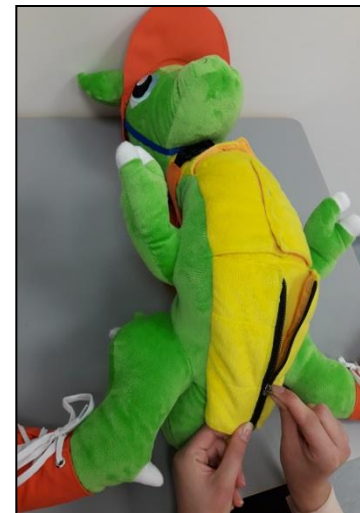
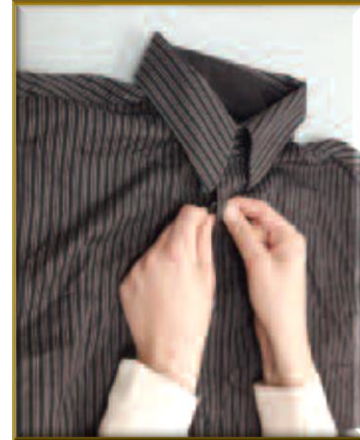
- Encourage your child to practise putting on and taking off their own coat.
- Can your child open and close the zip on their own coat?
- Can your child unfasten and fasten a button?

Please refer to the hand-out entitled fine motor skills on the HSE 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage' to learn how to develop your child's pinch grasp to help in completing these dressing tasks.

- Can your child put on their own slip-on or Velcro shoes? Can they orientate shoes correctly on the each foot.

Please refer to the handout entitled self-care skills on the 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage' for tips on how to develop these self care skills.

<http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>



The following hand-outs are available to view on our webpage <http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

What activities can I complete with my child to develop the small movements in their fingers and hands to help them to hold a pencil or fasten a button?

Fine motor skills refer to the coordinated and controlled movements the small muscles of the hand and fingers make when picking up a small object, threading a bead or placing a coin into the slot of a piggy bank box. An essential component of fine motor skills is to develop your child's pinch grasp. A pinch grasp is made up of the thumb and index/finger finger.

The following strategies are commonly used in Occupational Therapy and are recommended to develop your child's fine motor skills;

In order to develop fine motor skills your child first needs to have good core/trunk control, shoulder strength and stability, in addition to hand and pinch strength.

CORE STRENGTH: Your child's core relates to the muscles of their abdomen and back that help maintain posture and stability. Exercises that will develop your child's core strength include:

- ◆ Crab Hold: Hands are placed under the shoulders. Feet are placed under the knees. Holding for up to 30 seconds.
- ◆ Hedgehog: Arms are placed across the chest, bend knees, lift head, bring chin to chest. Holding for up to 30 seconds.
- ◆ Superman: Lie on tummy with both arms and legs out straight. Holding for up to 30 seconds.
- ◆ Counting out loud is important to ensure your child is not holding their breath.

SHOULDER STRENGTH AND STABILITY:

- ◆ Encourage your child to draw, colour, and doodle on vertical surfaces such as a free standing whiteboard or chalkboard.
- ◆ Tape a sheet of paper on the wall. Doodle. Draw shapes. Copy patterns.
- ◆ Complete a wheelbarrow walk. This involves lifting your child's legs, holding them at the knees, calves or ankles and encouraging them to walk forward on their hands. Please refer to the handout entitled *Gross Motor Skills* for further details.

HAND STRENGTH:

- ◆ Squeeze play doh or therapy putty. Therapy putty is a resistive putty that will strengthen muscles of the hand. It can be purchased in pharmacies or can be found online.
- ◆ Use spray bottles to water flowers or to clean the table after dinner.
- ◆ Use large tongs to pick up pairs of socks, bean bags or small balls.
- ◆ Use squeeze toys that involve grasping with the hand.












SELF-CARE SKILLS

Daily self-care activities can include dressing, toileting, feeding, dental hygiene and bathing. As a child grows it is important that they begin to develop independence in these tasks. It is important to remember that the development of a child's fine and gross motor skills contributes to independence in self-care tasks. For example in order to fasten a button a child needs to be able to use a pinch grasp. Please refer to the fine and gross motor handouts for tips on how to develop these skills.







The following are strategies that may help to improve your child's selfcare skills:

DRESSING SKILLS:

- ◆ Undressing is easier than dressing so start with encouraging independence in undressing tasks first.
- ◆ If there is more time at the weekend initially, work on dressing during these times.
- ◆ Sitting down when putting on pants, socks and shoes initially may be easier.
- ◆ Provide cues for front and back and left and right, lay clothes out in the order that your child will put them on.
- ◆ Use socks with coloured toes and heels.
- ◆ To help with placing shoes onto the correct feet, place half of a sticker on the inside of each shoe. When your child lines up their shoes the sticker will join together and they can easily see which shoe should be on the left or right foot. You can make your own by cutting a sticker in half. Stickers pictured are also available to purchase online (Amazon or <http://shoeezooz.com/> Educational shoe stickers for kids).
- ◆ Allow your child to complete the final step and give more opportunity to complete more of the task as confidence grows. Working step by step backwards. For example: Day 1: Pull up the pants. Day 2: Put in the right leg and pull up the pants. Day 3: Put in the left leg and right leg and pull up the pants.
- ◆ Begin with large buttons and when your child has mastered these, move onto smaller buttons. Remind the child to get their pinching fingers ready, that is, the thumb and index/pointer finger. Remind the child to tuck the other fingers away into their palm.
- ◆ Practise buttoning by placing a shirt/cardigan on the table in front of your child before practising on the body. Make a button snake. <http://mamaot.com/button-snake/>
- ◆ Remember to provide a Verbal prompt of "Pinch, Push, Pull"
- ◆ If aligning the buttons is tricky begin buttoning from the bottom up, have a mirror nearby.
- ◆ Create a picture plan of dressing tasks-take photos of your child's clothes and ask your child to put them in order e.g. what goes on first. Picture plans can be created using your own photos or can be found online.

Social stories describing the steps involved in self care tasks can also be found online at <https://learningforapurpose.com/personal-hygiene-skills-ebook/>

- ◆ Use the picture plan from day to day reducing the level of physical help being given to your child.

task into steps:

words, them, the face that goes over the right or left face (depending on the task)

make a bunny

what is happening will help

in front of the child before placing it on the face. You could start by using the following website for further ideas. www.foggin.com/shoeface

if child's shoe is too tight

use of flushable wet wipes.

put sticker on the inside of the toilet

before bed.






Skills to develop continued

Tips and Strategies:

- Practise undressing and dressing tasks at the weekends when there is more time.
- If motivation to dress independently is poor, offer support in dressing tasks but ensure your child completes the steps that they are independent in completing.
- Set up a mirror in the room that your child gets dressed. Encourage your child to look into the mirror to check their own presentation and to increase their sense of body awareness. Managing their own presentation will be important as they grow.
- Label the tag on the school jumper with your child's initials. This can be helpful if their jumper gets mixed up with another child's at school. Your child's initials or a symbol could be sewn into the label.



Sensitive/over-responsive to touch/textures

Tips and Strategies:

- Some children can be sensitive to certain textures or to the feeling of certain clothes. Their ability to process and respond appropriately to information from their senses can improve as they grow however some children need support in this area.
- Some children who are sensitive/ over-responsive to touch can find it difficult to tolerate the school uniform and may find it easier to tolerate the school tracksuit when this option is available. This can be discussed with the Class Teacher or School Principal.
- Although recognising textures that cause upset is important, it is equally important to support your child to explore textures. Incorporating more tactile play in their day is recommended. Examples of tactile play include tactile bins, baking, picking up leaves in the garden, sand, water play, digging, slime, or finger painting.



Tactile bins:
Water beads,
play sand and
brown rice

Please refer to the hand-out entitled Sensory Processing on the HSE ‘Occupational Therapy for Child and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care’ website for ideas on how to support your child who may be over-responsive to touch. Examples include engaging in messy and tactile play.

Sensory Processing Tips and Strategies

WHAT ARE THE SENSES? The five senses commonly heard about include sight (eyes), hearing (ears), taste (gustatory), smell (olfactory), and touch (skin). However there are also two other senses; the vestibular sense (information about movement and head position) and the proprioceptive sense (information about our body parts/body awareness).

WHAT IS SENSORY PROCESSING? As a child grows and begins to explore their surroundings they learn to firstly notice/register information from their senses, then process it and then respond appropriately. This is called Sensory Processing. This might include noticing and then processing the sound of the alarm clock going off in the morning and proceeding to wake up and get out of bed; or noticing and then processing the temperature and feeling of water on our bodies when having a hot shower and adjusting the temperature or force of the water as needed.

Often times we complete everyday tasks without any difficulty processing information received from our senses. For young children sometimes this information can become muddled, might appear too intense or the information is slow to be noticed/registered. These children frequently present to Occupational Therapy when the difficulties begin to have a negative impact on their participation in every-day tasks.

TYPES OF SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES: OVER-RESPONSIVE AND UNDER-RESPONSIVE

Children that present with difficulties processing information from their senses might appear over-responsive and/or under-responsive to certain types of sensory input. Over-responsive means that they are quick to notice information received from their senses or are highly aware. A little might seem like a lot to a child that is over-responsive. Under-responsive means that they do not notice and process information received from the senses as well. They often seek extra sensory input or they might need support from others to register sensory input. It is important to note that children can present differently. Some can be over-responsive to touch and avoid wearing tight clothes but they might also be under-responsive to movement and appear to be always in the go.

OVER-RESPONSIVE TO SENSORY INPUT

- Can be sensory sensitive
- Can be sensory defensive/sensory avoider

Sensory Sensitive:
Child registers information from the senses intensely but does not remove themselves from the situation. May appear easily distracted by noise, light, touch.

Sensory Avoider:
Child registers information from the senses intensely and actively avoids experiences. May avoid touch, situations with a lot going on, loud noises, textures of foods.

UNDER-RESPONSIVE TO SENSORY INPUT

- Can be sensory seeker/Always on the go
- Can be slow to register sensory information/lethargic/fatigue easily, bump into things easily

Sensory Seeker:
May appear always on the go, may chew and bite non-food items, may enjoy crashing, jumping, likely has difficulty sitting still.

Slow to register sensory input:
May have low arousal, fatigues easily, may appear slow to react and respond to information in their environment, can appear clumsy, may appear to bump into objects.

Whether your child is over-responsive and/or under-responsive to sensory input the primary goal is to support them to get through their day and develop an appropriate response to the information they receive.

<http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children>



3. Establishing a Morning Routine

- Sequencing the steps involved & staying on task

Establishing a Morning Routine



Tips and Strategies:

- A young child starting school has limited awareness of time.
- Use a sand timer to help your child become aware of the time they have to complete tasks. Sand timers also help to keep a child focused on a task. Sand timers are available to purchase online and are available with various time limits.
- A child may have limited awareness of the steps involved in getting ready for school. Create a visual schedule with your child of the basic steps included in their morning routine. Include photos or download images of each task. Be consistent in the routine to ensure success and independence.
- Limit distractions when getting dressed. Consider which room is best to get dressed in. Are there too many toys that are a distraction?
- Encourage eating breakfast at a table.
- Omit screen time where possible or until all important tasks are complete.



4. Pre-writing & Scissor Skills

- Pencil grip
- Pencil control
- Pre-writing shapes
- Scissor skills

Please refer to the hand-out entitled Pre-writing skills on the HSE ‘Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage’ for tips on how to develop pre-writing skills.

PRE-WRITING SKILLS


CORCAIGH CLARRAI
CORK KERRY
Primary Care

Pre-writing skills are the foundational skills for handwriting. These skills can be developed when drawing, colouring, copying shapes and practising picking up and holding various writing tools including pencils and crayons.

The following strategies are commonly used in Occupational Therapy and are recommended to develop your child's pre-writing skills;

- **WHEN SETTING AT THE TABLE:** Ensure the table and chair are at an appropriate height for your child. Hips and knees at 90 degree angle, feet flat on floor for support, back upright, forearm supported on desk. If feet cannot reach the floor use a foot step or provide a lower chair and table.
- **DEVELOPING SHOULDER, HAND AND WRIST STRENGTH:** Encourage your child to colour, draw and write on a variety of surfaces. Angled surfaces challenge the larger muscles of the shoulder and arm and help with strengthening. Write and draw on a chalkboard/whiteboard fitted to the wall, tape an A3/A4 piece of paper or card to the wall for drawing or colouring, use a free standing painting easel or standing whiteboard/chalkboard.

Theraputty exercises can help to strengthen the hand, wrist and pinch grasp. Theraputty offers resistance when squeezing, pinching or rolling. Theraputty comes in various colours that offer various levels of resistance. Theraputty exercises could be incorporated into a warm up before drawing and writing tasks. Theraputty can be sourced online or in some pharmacies. Soft or soft/medium resistance would be most suitable for small hands. Please refer to the handout entitled fine motor skills for further details on strengthening activities.



- **BOTH HANDS HAVE A JOB:** Encourage your child to use the non-dominant or helper hand to stabilise the paper whilst colouring, drawing, writing with the dominant/doing hand. Remind your child that the 'doing hand' holds the pencil whilst the 'helper hand' holds the paper steady.
- **FORGETTING TO USE THE HELPER HAND:** If your child forgets to use the helper hand you could ask your child to trace the helper hand on card, colour it in and cut it out and use this as a visual prompt/reminder for the child when completing writing or drawing tasks. It would also be beneficial to practise tasks where the child learns the importance of having and using the helper hand. For example holding a stencil steady whilst tracing or holding containers steady whilst opening/closing it with the doing hand. Please refer to the handout entitled Hand Dominance for further details.
- **HOW TO HOLD THE PENCIL:** Efficient pencil grasps include the tripod and quadrupod pencil grasp.
 - The Tripod Pencil Grasp:** The pencil is held by the thumb and index/pointer finger whilst the pencil rests on the middle finger. The pencil should be positioned in the webspace. The webspace is the space between your thumb and first finger.
 - A Quadrupod Pencil Grasp:** The pencil is held by the thumb, index and middle finger whilst the pencil rests on the ring finger. The pencil is positioned in the webspace. This is also an efficient grasp. Oftentimes children that present with hypermobility in their finger joints need to adopt a quadrupod grasp for more support.
- **USE A RHYME/STORY TO LEARN ABOUT PENCIL GRASP:** To help your child learn which fingers hold the pencil, make up a rhyme or story with your child. For example if your child is learning how to develop a tripod grasp: Mommy (thumb) and Daddy (index/pointer finger) hold the pencil whilst 'child's name' (middle finger) is hiding underneath.

FINGERS: A sticker or elastic band can be help remind your child where to position their fingers.

crayons or chalk to markers can be used on until pinch strength strength develops.

have developed short nail fingers and hands.





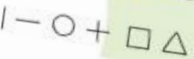



try to draw and write with the is can indicate that the writing strong enough to establish and

can make it difficult for your consider writing on angled writing and drawing tasks being developed. A slanted child to draw from top to positioned in a neutral

WRIST: Help your child to ur in, trace over, form Repeat these activities to dot patterns to help finger paint, loll pop

agonal lines, complete lines.

and writing on various per, sand paper. s. Borders can be

<http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>

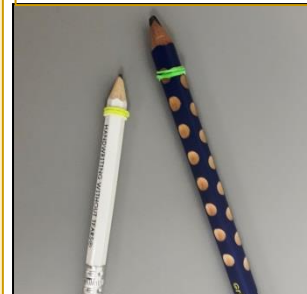
Pencil grip

Key Tips and Strategies:

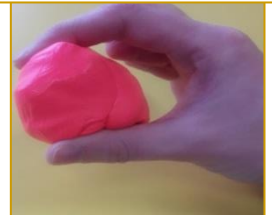
- Engage in squeezing, pinching, pushing, pulling and weight-bearing games to develop strength in the muscles of your child's shoulder, arm, wrist, hand and pinch grasp. Colour, paint, draw and write on a variety of surfaces. Strengthening the muscles of your child's arm and hand in this way will contribute to the development of an efficient pencil grasp and to endurance when holding writing tools.
- Colour using short crayons. This encourages use of a pinch grasp (the thumb and index finger). If your child tires quickly when colouring use wider crayons until strength and endurance develops.
- When drawing use triangular pencils until pinch strength develops.
- Short pencils can be used to support small hands. (Handwriting without Tears Programme-pencils for little hands).
- Consider placing a sticker or loom band on the pencil to show your child where to position their fingers. Ideally 2cm from the tip.



Large/wide
crayons and
pencils



Triangular & short
pencil with loom
band in situ



Strengthen pinch
grasp using
theraputty

Your child may be right or left hand dominant. When your child establishes hand dominance, this helps to develop strength in the writing hand due to its consistent use in daily tasks.

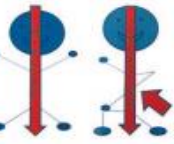

Please refer to the hand-out entitled Hand Dominance on the HSE 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage' for details on how to develop hand dominance skills.

HAND DOMINANCE

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR MY CHILD TO DEVELOP A DOMINANT HAND?
Hand dominance typically develops by the age of five. You will notice that your child may be using one hand more consistently to pick up items. The hand that is used consistently is called the dominant/doing hand. Hand dominance is an essential part of helping your child to develop pre-writing, handwriting and fine motor skills. Children that continue to switch hands and do not develop hand dominance can have difficulty building strength in the writing hand and in developing these essential skills.

THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES ARE COMMONLY USED IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND ARE RECOMMENDED TO DEVELOP YOUR CHILD'S HAND DOMINANCE:

- OBSERVE WHICH HAND IS BEING USED CONSISTENTLY:** Your child may begin to show a preference for being right or left handed from the age of two. Observe which hand your child is choosing to use to pick up a glass, pick up a spoon, brush their teeth, pick up a crayon, the hand used when toileting. The hand that is used consistently in these tasks is called the dominant/doing or preferred hand. When you are observing or exploring which hand might be your child's preferred hand it is important to make sure that the object being picked up is directly in front of the child's body and not to one side. For example, place a spoon/glass/toothbrush/crayon directly in front of their body and say pick up the spoon. If the object is not directly in front of the child they will choose to pick up the object with the hand that is closest to the object and this will not give you a true understanding of which hand is preferred/dominant.
- NAME THE DOMINANT AND NON-DOMINANT HAND:** When the dominant hand is confirmed it is important to name the dominant and non-dominant hand with your child. For example the dominant hand can be called the 'doing hand' the non-dominant hand could be called the 'helper hand'. This will help your child to understand that each hand has a job/role when completing daily tasks. For example when opening a lunch box remind your child that the helper hand must hold the lunch box steady as the doing hand opens the lid and does the important work.
- PLAY GAMES:** Put your doing hand in the air. Give me a high five with your helper hand. Wave at me with your doing hand.
- WHY ARE THEY SWITCHING HANDS?** Switching hands can occur if the dominant/doing hand lacks strength and/or if the child has not yet learned to cross their midline.
 - LACK OF STRENGTH:** A child can continue to switch hands when the dominant/doing hand is not yet strong enough to complete tasks. Please refer to the fine motor skills and pre-writing skills handout for strategies on how to strengthen the shoulder, arm and dominant hand. Continuing to switch hands should be discouraged as the dominant/doing hand will not develop enough strength to hold a pencil, colour, draw and write. As your child learns to use the doing hand more when completing tasks, strength and endurance in this hand will naturally develop overtime.
 - THEY HAVE NOT YET LEARNED TO CROSS THEIR MIDLINE:** A child can also switch hands when they have not yet learned how to cross their midline. The midline is an imaginary line down the middle of your child's body. It is important when developing hand dominance that your child learns to cross their midline with the dominant/doing hand. A child that has not learned to cross their midline will continue to switch hands.
- MIDLINE CROSSING AND SETTING UP THE ENVIRONMENT:**
 - Place objects on your child's non-dominant side to encourage your child to use their dominant/doing hand to cross their midline and pick up the object. For example when colouring or picking up crayons, place the crayons on the non-dominant side and remind your child the doing hand can only pick up the crayons. When having breakfast place the glass/cup on the non-dominant side and remind your child that the doing hand must pick up the glass/cup.
 - The Midline divides left and right side of the body.
 - Crossing the Midline: Essential when developing hand dominance.



<http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>

Establishing an efficient pencil grip

The following are examples of efficient pencil grasps.

A tripod pencil grasp:

This is where the pencil is held by the thumb and index finger and the middle finger rests underneath. The pencil is positioned in the web-space.

A quadrupod pencil grasp:

This is where the pencil is held by the thumb, index and middle finger and the ring finger rests underneath. The pencil is positioned in the web-space.



Tripod pencil
grasp



Quadrupod
pencil grasp

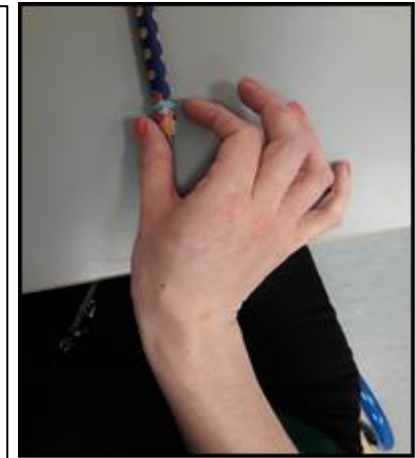
Practise pinch and flip

1. Point the tip of your pencil towards your tummy or the edge of the table.

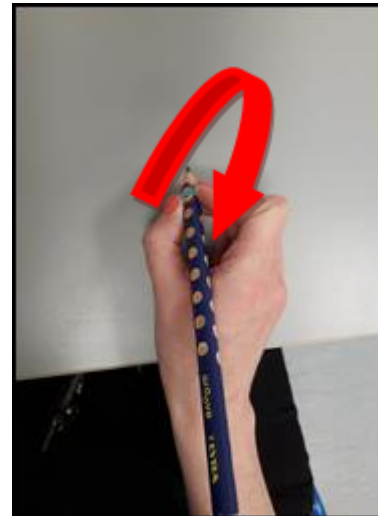


2. Get your pinching fingers ready (thumb & index/pointer finger).

Pinch the tip of the pencil.



3. Flip the pencil over until it lands in your web-space.



Pencil control

Tips and Strategies:

- Ensure your child's table and chair are the correct height. Hips and knees at 90 degrees with feet resting on the floor or on a footstep. This will facilitate sitting posture when handwriting, drawing and colouring.
- Your child must also learn to control their pencil as it moves and how to control the pressure applied to the pencil and page.
- Create mazes and drawing trails to challenge your child's pencil control. Trace over and then copy simple fluency patterns moving in different directions up and down, left to right, and circles.
- Applying the correct amount of pressure to the pencil can take time to learn. If your child is leaning too heavy, use mechanical pencils. The lead will break if too much pressure is applied. If your child is not applying enough pressure, use carbon paper. Your child will learn to apply more pressure to see their drawing being transferred to the paper underneath.



Fluency patterns

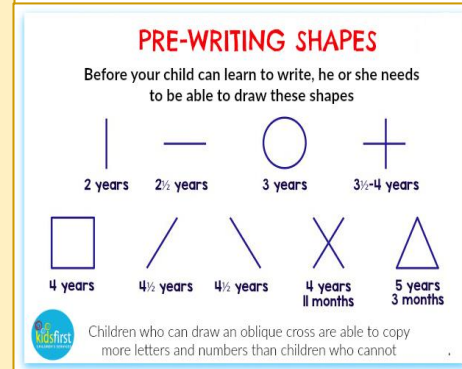


Mazes 7 Drawing trails

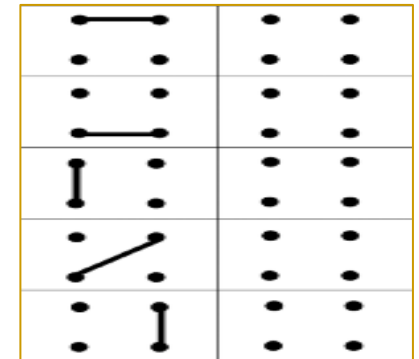
Pre-writing shapes

Tips and Strategies:

- Pre-writing shapes are made up of the pencil strokes needed for letter and number formation.
- Help your child to recognise, trace over and practise forming these shapes before your child starts school.
- Form these shapes on a chalkboard/whiteboard. Create dot to dot patterns using crayons to help your child practise vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines. Using their index/pointer finger form shapes in shaving foam, with play-doh, in sand, or using pipe cleaners.
- Form shapes on your child's back with your finger. Can they figure out what shape it is?
- Play eye spy and find similar shapes in their environment. Incorporate these shapes into drawings of a car, a house, a boat.



<https://kids-first.com.au/handwriting-pre-writing-shapes-for-preschoolers/>



Scissor skills

Tips and Strategies:

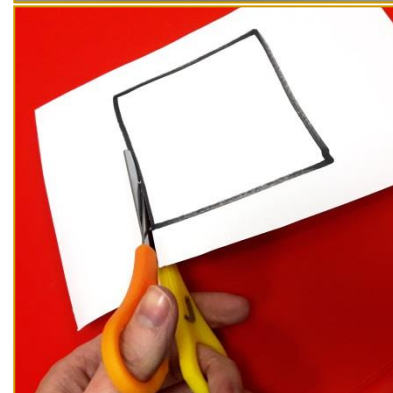
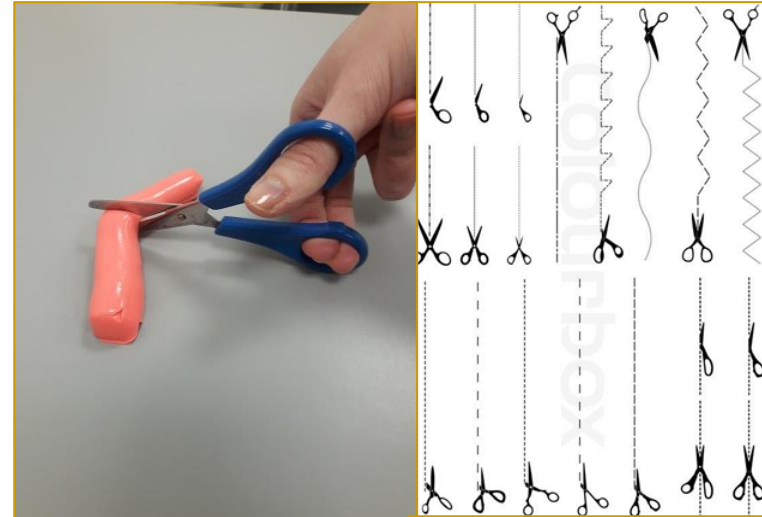
- Practise open and closing activities using the hand and fingers to help your child to learn about grasp and release motion required when using a scissors. This may include using spray bottles, tweezers, pinching clothes pegs.
- Imitate opening and closing a scissors with your fingers. Ask your child to copy you.
- Progress to picking up the scissors and positioning fingers. Remind your child that the thumbs face up/or are on top. Invest in a left hand scissors for a child that is left handed.
- A child aged 4-6 years of age will typically place their thumb in the top hole. The index and middle finger can be both placed in the bottom hole.



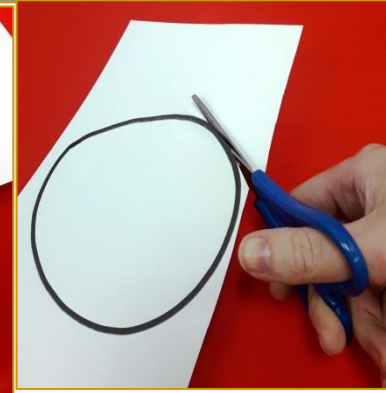
Scissor skills continued

Tips and Strategies:

- Practise cutting card before paper.
- Practise snipping play-doh, theraputty, or stems of flowers in the garden. This will help your child to continue to develop the open/close snipping action and the strength required for cutting.
- Progress to cutting along straight, curved, then zig-zag lines on card.
- Practise cutting out shapes and patterns.
- When cutting out a shape: A right-handed person will find it easier to cut in an anti-clockwise direction. A left-handed person will find it easier to cut clockwise.



Left handed



Right handed



5. Skills for School & Yard

- Toileting
- Lunch/break time
- Gross motor skills

Toileting

Tips and Strategies:

- Independence with toileting is often achieved by the age a child transitions to Primary School. In some cases this is still being developed. Inform the teacher if independence has not yet been achieved.
- Play 'feel and find' games to improve your child's range of movement and body awareness required for wiping. Place stickers on the back of their pants and see if they can reach behind to find them. Ask your child to copy you passing a bean bag around the body, through the legs, front to back or in a figure of 8 in a standing position.
- A visual schedule can be used at home to help your child learn the steps of toilet hygiene. Visuals for toileting can be found online.
- The toilet being used in school is typically the correct height for the children using it. However you can check if additional supports are required by your child such as a foot step. Contact can be made with the School's Health Nurse for guidance if there are difficulties achieving independence with toileting.

Lunch/Break time



Tips and Strategies:

- Observe your child's ease with opening and closing a lunch box before purchasing. This is something they need to be independent in completing at school.
- Chose a water bottle that can be easily managed. Practise opening bananas and yoghurt cartons prior to starting school. Consider small pieces of fruit such as grapes that are easy to manipulate
- Place a serviette/tissue/napkin into the lunch box so that your child can wipe their mouth if eating can be messy.
- Encourage your child to use a table top mirror at home when eating to bring their awareness to the need to check and wipe their mouth and face.
- Sit at the table at home for meals to prepare for lunch time at school. Ensure feet can reach the floor or use a foot step. Practise use of spoon for eating yoghurt. Spoon beads into a ice cube tray to improve coordination and use of their spoon. Remind them not to overfill their spoon to avoid spills.

Gross motor skills:

Please refer to the hand-out entitled Gross Motor Skills on the HSE 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage' for details on how to develop gross motor skills.

<http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

What are Gross motor skills? Gross Motor Skills are skills that develop using the large muscles of the body in a coordinated and controlled way. Core strength, balance, coordination of both sides of the body and body awareness are all important skills necessary for gross motor movements including running, jumping, skipping, hopping and ball games. Gross motor skills develop through practice and repetition.

The following strategies are commonly used in Occupational Therapy and are recommended to develop your child's gross motor skills:

STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE:

- Wheelbarrow Walks. This involves holding your child's legs at their knees, calves or ankles and they walk forward on their hands.
- Pushing and Pulling games: pushing each other's hands, pushing each other's feet, tug-of-war, pulling a cart.
- Animal walks: Bunny hop, duck waddle, seal, crab walk. Race and walk following simple routes around furniture, play Crab football (kick the ball with feet).
- Obstacle courses: climbing up and over, crawling through, sliding down, spinning around, running around cones and ball games.
- Playground equipment including monkey bars, climbing up ladders, pushing someone on a swing.

BALL SKILLS:

- Younger children of 3-6 years of age can start developing ball skills by practising to throw and catch a balloon with two hands. Reducing the size of the balloon overtime increases the challenge.
- Stand closer together until a two handed catch is mastered. Then increase the distance between you and your child to increase the challenge.
- A child of five or six years of age should be able to catch a balloon/bean bag/large ball with two hands without trapping it against their body.
- Catch and throw a large ball, medium sized ball, small ball.
- Develop an underarm throw with the doing/dominant hand. An underarm throw is the movement /throw used when bowling.
- Throw a bean bag or ball at, or into a target, e.g. skittles, wall target.
- Practise bowling.
- Practise catching a ball with two hands after a bounce.
- Practise throwing a large, medium, small ball off the wall and catching it with two hands after one bounce or before it bounces for an increased challenge.
- At the age of ten or eleven practise developing a one handed catch with a tennis ball.
- Tips and strategies to develop your child's ball skills can also be found online. This includes 'The Fizzy and Clever Hands programme' developed by Therapists in Kent Community NHS trust, United Kingdom. <https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/information-for-patients/patient-information-leaflets/fizzy-leaflets/>

Bilateral Co-ordination Exercises.
www.yourtherapysource.com

opposite foot in front and behind.
nd lead with the other leg.
cult your child could start
! hop! Practise hopping

to help maintain balance,
with your child. One foot

oot ten times,
thirty seconds.
on tip toes or with

standing without use of their hands.

Gross motor skills: Yard time

Tips and Strategies:

- Play outdoor games that have rules. Tag/chase, obstacle courses. Visit the local playground.
- Develop coordination by practising running, skipping, galloping, jumping jacks/star jumps (arms out/legs out, arms in/legs in).
- Depending on where the classroom is located your child may need to negotiate stairs when moving to and from yard.
- Your child may be required to stand in line at different times of the school day. This is something that could be practised at home. Play games such as follow the leader. Standing in line to brush their teeth with their siblings. Waiting in line to pay at the shop. Waiting in line to use the hand dryer in a public bathroom.





6. Listening, Attention & Concentration Skills

- Helping your child to learn to listen, attend & concentrate
- Movement breaks
- Attention and concentration toolbox

Listen, attend and concentrate



Tips and strategies :

- A child's attention span can continue to develop as they grow. The ability to listen, attend and concentrate will have an impact on your child's engagement in class tasks and learning throughout the school day.
- Engage in games that require your child to focus on a task, remain on task and complete a task prior to starting school.
- Card games such as animal snap. Memory games such as 'I went to the shop and bought a...' or 'I went to the zoo and saw a.....' Your child needs to listen and attend to remember what has been said.
- Listening games such as musical statues, musical chairs. Chinese whispers, and story time. Questions can be asked after reading a story to help your child understand the importance of listening and attending. This will be an important part of participating in circle time/story time in school.

Movement breaks

Tips and strategies:

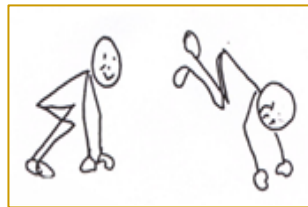
- Is a movement break required to help your child regulate and refocus on the task being completed?
- Movement can be alerting (running, jumping) or calming (pulling, pushing, heavy work, animal walks). Please refer to the hand-out entitled Sensory Processing on the HSE 'Occupational Therapy for children and young people Cork Kerry webpage' for more details about the benefits of movement for concentration and alertness. <http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>
- Does your child appear to move a lot when seated? Engage in a heavy work activity involving pushing, pulling or weight bearing through their body to help them to calm and refocus on the task to be completed? Make a note of what works.
- Does your child appear lethargic and sleepy? Alerting movement such as running, bouncing, hopping or jumping jacks can be completed.



Bear Animal Walk



Wheelbarrow Walk



Donkey Kicks

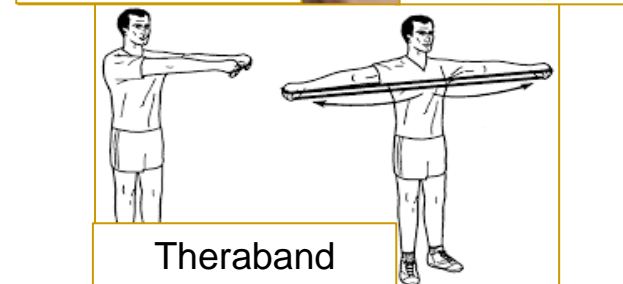


Chair lift/push up

Attention and concentration toolbox

Tips and strategies :

- Does your child concentrate better with a hand fidget? In this case a fidget box could be created with items that can be squeezed, turned, spun, or pulled. For example a squeeze ball, a soft toy, theraband or moveable pencil toppers.
- Does your child bite items, or chew excessively on their pencil. If so include more opportunities for blowing bubbles, sucking through a straw and include crunchy foods in their day.
- Provide a chew ease pencil top or chewy. Remind your child that this is ok to chew instead of their pencil or jumper sleeve. These can be sourced online from Amazon, thinkingtoys.ie, sensational-kids or Ebay.





7. Organisational skills

- Organising belongings
- Structured play activities

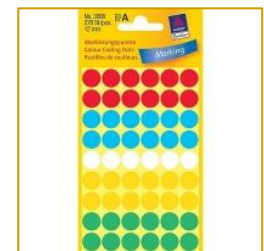
Organising belongings

Tips and Strategies:

- To locate books easily consider colour coding books and copies. Place stickers or coloured labels on the 'side' of the book to make them easier to see. Choose different colours with your child for each subject.
- Avoid covering books with brown paper. This can be torn easily.
- Consider use of a see through/transparent pencil case to enable your child find writing tools easily.
- Encourage your child to choose a routine place or pocket to store their pencil case in their school bag. Consider keeping a spare pencil case at home in case it is forgotten.
- Encourage your child to choose a routine place to store their school bag at home so this can be easily found. Place a label/photo of the school bag in this place to act as a prompt.
- Chose a location for homework to be completed. Ensure the table and chair at the correct height where feet can rest on the floor or on a foot step.



Transparent pencil case



Stickers to colour code

Structured play activities

Tips and Strategies:

- Structured play activities differ from free play. Structured play activities have an end goal, rules and teach organisational skills. These include board games, jigsaws, sorting games.
- Engage in structured play activities prior to starting school to help develop organisation and sorting skills. These skills are important throughout the school day and in managing their belongings.
- Examples of games include sorting objects by size/colour/type.
- Jigsaws, sorting shapes, sorting books by size on a bookshelf, board games, pairing socks.
- Tidy up time: Sorting toys into their correct containers. Label containers. Place photos of the toy on the outside of the container to help your child to organise and sort.



- Mini connect four.
- Animal snap card game.
- Pixy cubes.

8. Social Skills & Emotional Regulation



- Social skills: Turn taking and problem solving
- Personal space
- Social stories to teach social skills
- Emotional regulation



Turn taking & problem solving

Tips and Strategies:

- Social skills continue to develop as your child grows and matures and by the interactions they experience.
- Your child's social skills can continue to be developed through role play with parents and siblings and by using social stories.
- Engage in games that challenge team work, turn taking and sharing. Use words such as my turn, your turn. Praise good turn taking skills.
- Set up problem solving social scenarios through play. For example: Explain why you might be feeling upset when they did not wait their turn or help your child to understand how sharing their toy with you has made you feel happy.

Turn taking & problem solving continued



Tips and Strategies:

- Help your child to recognise facial expressions and discuss feelings. What does this face look like? What are they feeling? Have you ever seen this face before?
- Help your child to experience both winning and losing. Be prepared to support them when they experience losing, explain that this is ok too.
- Practise collaborative play, choosing games together and following another person's lead or choice of game. Will we play your game first or my game?
- Give your child tips relating to greeting people. Making eye contact when trying to get someone's attention or when speaking to them. How to get someone's attention when they are talking or waiting until they are finished

Personal space

Tips and Strategies:

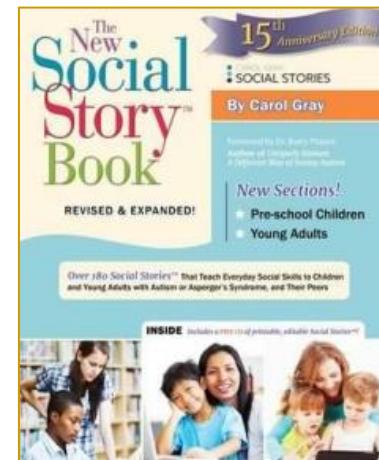
- Help your child to understand the concept of personal space when playing with other children or when talking to others. Role play too close, too far, just right. Help them to experience what too close feels like. Practise this when walking, sitting and playing. Use a hoola hoop to explain the concept of space.
- A social story as mentioned previously can be used to help your child to understand the idea of personal space.
- Downloadable personal space social stories such as the story below are available online from websites such as:
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Personal-Space-Story-and-Teaching-Tools-2957285>



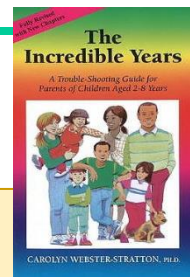
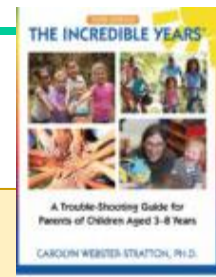
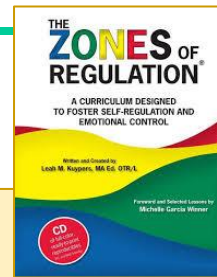
Social stories to teach social skills

Tips and Strategies:

- In addition to helping your child to prepare for events that are to happen, social stories can help to teach your child about social skill development. If there is a social skill that you would like your child to develop, social stories can be sourced and downloaded online. Examples of social stories include; Being a good friend, taking turns, sharing or when to give a hug.
- Social stories have also been developed in the new social story book by Carol Gray.
<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/>
- If you have concerns about your child's social interaction skills, it can be helpful to link in with the class teacher. Ask about how your child is interacting with other children in class and on yard. In some cases seeking a referral to gain a formal team assessment of a child's social skill development is required.



Emotional regulation



Tips and Strategies:

- Children learn to recognise emotions and how to control their emotions as they grow. Some children may need support to find appropriate ways to calm in times of frustration.
- Young children do not always use their words to express their upset and frustration. Role model what you do to remain calm. Good choices could include: Taking a deep breath, hugging a pillow tightly, going for a run or having a time out in a place they feel calm.
- The Zones of Regulation programme by Leah Kuypers is often used in primary schools. It helps children to recognise their emotions using a coloured system and to choose strategies that help to regulate their emotions.
<http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>
- The Incredible Years: A trouble shooting guide for parents of children aged 3-8years by Carolyn Webster-Stratton(1st-ed 1992 to 3rd-ed 2006) provides useful strategies to promote positive behaviour.
- Referring to a HSE Primary Care Child and Adolescent Psychologist is recommended if you have on-going concerns about your child's ability to regulate their emotions and behaviour.



9. Additional supports

- Additional support and assistance at school

Additional support and assistance at school

Tips and Strategies:

- If a child has required additional support in pre-school and if it is thought that support may also be required in primary school, it is recommended that parents arrange to speak to or meet with the School Principal in the months prior to your child transitioning to Primary School. Ideally before your child leaves their pre-school/before summer holidays begin.
- Provide copies of professional reports, if available, detailing your child's strengths and needs.
- Access to Special Education Teacher (SET) support can be discussed with the School Principal based on your child's needs.
- In some cases the school may make an application for access to a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) based on a child's additional care needs due to an underlying diagnosis



10. Online Resources

Online Resources

- Occupational Therapy for children and young people Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage, HSE
<https://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/>
- Zones of regulation:
<http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>
- Handwriting without Tears Programme
<https://www.lwtears.com/hwt>
- Social stories:
<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/>

Online Resources

- National Council for Special Education

<https://ncse.ie/online-resources-for-parents>

- Fidget toys, chew necklaces, theraputty and the 'Handwriting without Tears-pencils for little hands' are available from websites such as;

www.thinkingtoys.ie

<https://www.sensationalkids.ie/>

<http://www.lisheenmontessori.com/>

Amazon and Ebay

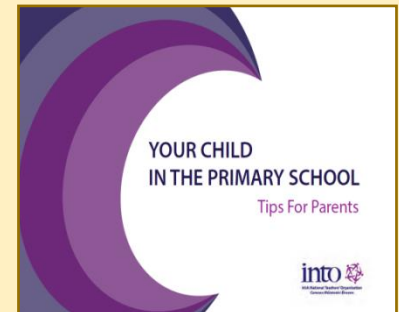
- Animal Walk movement cards can be sourced online from websites such as;

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/>

https://www.toolstogrowot.com/files/uny_Summer%20Animal%20Walks.pdf

Online Resources

- Transitioning from preschool to primary school- Information and advice for parents of children with Down Syndrome (Down Syndrome Ireland)
<https://downsyndrome.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Supporting-students-with-Down-syndrome-transition-from-Primary-to-Post-Primary-School.pdf>



- INTO Tips for parents on child starting primary school
https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/09/2019_TipsParents_ENG.pdf

Please note online links are correct at the time of publishing. Links to online information can be updated frequently. Please visit the websites homepage for up to date information if a link does not bring you directly to a document.

We hope you find these tips and strategies helpful, in supporting your child transition to Primary School.

Further strategies specific to your child's needs can be provided upon meeting with your Occupational Therapist

Graphics: istockphoto.com