

Getting the most out of pre-school

Learning through Play

For children play is not only a source of enjoyment, it also provides wonderful learning opportunities. Through play children make sense of the world and learn about people, things and events. They learn how to be with others, play together, and use their imagination. They practise and develop their negotiating skills as they try to change their role from, for example, being the baby to being the big sister. The play based curriculum in pre-school is where STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) skills are developed, with concrete experiences in maths, science and literacy as they construct with blocks, mix ingredients to make playdough and develop their own story books. The Aistear curriculum framework focuses on the importance of play in early childhood, so expect the pre-school to provide ample opportunities for rich play experiences. When children are playing, they are learning.

Support children's learning with Aistear

Young children learn in many different ways, through their senses, through observing life around them, through watching people who are important to them and through participating and having a go. Pre-schools now use Aistear to support young children's learning. Aistear focuses on children from birth to six years old and it describes the learning that is important for babies, toddlers and young children. It helps us as parents and as pre-school practitioners to support children's sense of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking. In helping children make the transition to pre-school we are helping them have a sense of well-being (I am happy in this place), identity (this is my pre-school) and belonging (I fit in here and feel easy with the new people in this place).

Promote quality in early learning with Siolta

Pre-school provides a great opportunity for children to learn and develop at an early stage and the quality of pre-school provision makes a real difference. Siolta is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and it is designed to support the development and delivery of high quality services for children from birth to six years of age. Siolta is used by pre-school services to review and improve the ways in which they work with children and families. Siolta advises that in thinking about transitions, services should have an admission policy and should share information with parents. Services should meet and begin to build meaningful relationships with parents and children and encourage parents to settle their children in the best way possible.

Be involved in your children's learning

Parents know their children best and are powerful role models in children's lives. It stands to reason that your involvement in the pre-school years and beyond is vital. Talking with staff in the service is a good way to know what is happening, what events are up-coming and how your child is getting on, not just in terms of learning but in terms of making friends and managing in group situations. Make time and space to listen to and talk with your child, to understand what is happening for him, to address any concerns or anxieties he has, to acknowledge and affirm his successes (and near misses). He needs to know you are interested in the day to day happenings of his life outside the home. Try to make links between what is current and of interest to your child in the pre-school and your own family life. Remember, pre-school is a gentle first step on the education ladder for your child, it's a home away from home.

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'Going to Pre-School'

Making the Transition to Pre-School Tips for Parents

Change is the only constant in life and learning to manage change successfully begins in early childhood. By the time you are reading this leaflet your child has already made many changes or transitions, from cot to bed, from liquid to solid food, from crawling to walking. She may already have transitioned from home to day care or be on the cusp of becoming a proud pre-schooler. Each of these changes and transitions can cause uncertainty, moments when your child moves from the security of the home routine and the people she knows to the unknown ways of a new environment and many new faces. Naturally, change provides an emotional challenge for the child, 'who will mind me when Daddy/Mammy is gone', 'where do I fit in here?' As parents and childcare professionals we have a key role to play in helping young children develop positive attitudes to change and this leaflet is designed to support all concerned on those first steps to pre-school.



Getting ready for pre-school

In selecting the right pre-school for your child – you should:

- Choose the pre-school that you believe will work best for your child and for your family.
- Consider how you will manage the practical aspects of your new routine (dropping and collecting).
- Visit the service with your child and get a feel for the place and the people.
- Find out about the type of curriculum the service offers and the opportunities it will provide for your child’s learning.
- Book your place with the pre-school provider.
- Give all the necessary information to the manager that will help the service welcome and work with your child.
- Encourage your child to do things for themselves at home – managing buttons on clothing, using the bathroom, opening a lunch box, changing shoes/boots.
- Talk about pre-school with your child, listen to their concerns and share their excitement and anticipation.

Know about the Free Pre-School Year / ECCE Scheme

The Government introduced a new programme to provide for a free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from January 2010.

This programme provides for 15 hours per week early learning, over 38 weeks, for every child in the year before they start primary school. Almost all pre-school services (including playgroups, Montessori, day care) in community and private settings offer this ECCE programme to parents for their children.

This investment by the Government in early childhood recognises the importance of a good start in life and acknowledges the child’s right to learning opportunities outside the home.

First day

The day that you and your child have talked about and looked forward to is nearly here. It is important to plan in advance and have as much prepared as possible to minimise any stress. Being well prepared leaves you and your child free to enjoy the pre-school experience. Remember:

- Give yourselves plenty of time in the early days. Soon the new routine will become automatic, but in those first few days you need extra time.
- Choose clothing that is ‘play friendly’ and easy to move in. Young children can be anxious about getting paint, playdough, glue or mud on their clothes. Reassure them that it is ok if the clothes get dirty.
- If your child wants to bring something from home (blanket or loved toy) encourage them to keep it safe in their bag. Children often feel secure in having something from home close by.
- Arrive to the pre-school in good time (not too late or too early). Ensure you have time over the first few days in particular to settle your child. This settling in period is unique and will be different for each child. It is important that you give the time necessary in the early days to help your child be comfortable and happy in the new setting.
- On reaching the door, smile and talk with the teacher in a friendly way. Seeing Mammy or Daddy talking with the pre-school leaders will give your child a sense of ‘this is a good place to be’.
- Relax and don’t fuss. Let your child know that you’re confident that they can manage. Remember that your child is alert to the emotional messages you send out, so don’t panic and don’t let the child see you crying. (If they do, explain that you are crying because this is a happy day).
- Allow your child time to observe. He may be unused to the noise, he may feel comfortable just watching the other children for a while. Follow his cues as to whether he wants to sit and play with some toys or join in with others.
- When it is time to leave, let him know that you are going and will be back. If he gets upset take the time to reassure him and take some guidance from the pre-school leader (who is experienced in helping children to settle but of course, you know your child best).
- Finally, head out of the pre-school confident that your child will successfully manage this key transition in his life. Leaving your child, especially if he has been upset, can be emotional for you as the parent. Plan to have time in these early days, to drop and collect, to listen and talk with your child. Time invested now will settle both you and your child.
- The golden rule is to be there on time to collect your child. Being there builds your child’s trust and confidence, allowing him to get on with the business of play and learning.

Settling into pre-school

The first day is over and the chances are that your child is enthusiastic and can’t wait to go back the next day. For some children it takes longer to settle in, they need Mammy or Daddy to help them build confidence in making the transition to pre-school. The settling-in process may take days or weeks. Be patient and remember that in learning how to manage this transition your child is laying the foundations and developing coping mechanisms for the next step on the education ladder and future life events.

Getting familiar with the pre-school setting and the new routines requires energy. Expect your child to be tired as she adjusts to the demands of pre-school. She may revert to taking a nap or just taking it easy to recharge the batteries when she comes home from pre-school.

Good nutrition is vital to give her the energy she needs to play and learn. Encourage her to have a healthy breakfast and provide a wholesome lunch (many pre-schools will give guidance on what to put in the lunch box). Healthy eating habits are laid down in these early years.

Continue to link with the pre-school throughout this settling in period and beyond, ask questions and get to see the service and meet the staff. Your involvement with the pre-school helps your child’s well-being and learning.