



AIDE ET ACTION
**SCHOOL READINESS
TOOLKIT**
FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

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Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in Article 31: Leisure, Play and Culture

INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS TOOLKIT?

The transition from home or pre-school to primary school is one of the challenges children face in their education journey. This challenge can be removed not just by a child, but the whole community including teacher, caregiver and local authority. To assist the smooth transition for children, Aide et Action (AEA) developed a school readiness regional toolkit, and the Cambodia team contextualized it into three sets of school readiness for teacher, caregiver and local authority. This school readiness for caregiver is the last set the team developed to ease a child's transition.

Within the framework of AEA Southeast Asia's priority goal for 2019–2023, the project "Promoting Quality and Inclusive Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) and Parenting in Cambodia and Vietnam" aims to ensure access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children aged 3 to 8 years through enhanced teaching and quality of learning, responsive parenting, and local ownership.

This toolkit aims to focus on parents and caregivers in order to promote responsive parenting and promote school readiness initiatives.

The guiding principles of this toolkit include, among others:

- The UN Convention on Child Rights (CRC)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- The 1999 General Comments of UNCESCR

- The UN 2004 General Comments on ECCE
- The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)
- Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG no.4.2)

WHO IS IT FOR?

This toolkit is aimed at parents and caregivers along with wider families of children of any age from pregnancy, birth and beyond in order to support their school readiness.

This toolkit should be of particular interest to parents, caregivers and families of children aged 3 to 8 years old who fall into the following categories:

- Children who will begin a pre-school programme
- Children who are currently enrolled in a pre-school programme
- Children who will be making the transition from pre-school to primary school
- Children who will enrol to primary school without having been enrolled in a pre-school programme
- Children who are currently enrolled in a primary school
- Children who are not currently attending a school but aspire to be

Caregivers' educational goals, beliefs, attitudes and commitment are considered crucial for school success. Before entering schools, the most important development context for children is their family.

Caregivers might include biological and adoptive parents, foster parents, single parents, step-parents, older siblings, extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc and other relatives and non-relatives who play a meaningful role in a child's life.

In other words, the terms "parent" or "caregiver" can apply to an array of individuals whose presence impacts the health and well-being of children¹.

Every one of these individuals as well as their educational, socio-cultural, and economic resources and aspirations can bear an impact — negative or positive — on a child's development.

Therefore, any time the terms “parent” or “caregiver” are used herein; they apply to any individuals who share a consistent relationship with a child, as well as an interest in his/her well-being².

HOW TO USE IT?

This toolkit is divided into three main sections that are colour-coded for ease of reference. There is also an index

SECTION 1:

Introduces the concepts of SCHOOL READINESS and the key areas CHILD DEVELOPMENT and other important concepts.

You can use this section to become familiar with terms that are often used in relation to your child’s school readiness along with some of the theory behind your child’s development.

SECTION 2:

Focuses on aspects of RESPONSIVE PARENTING and the five components of NURTURING CARE.

You can use this section to learn about how you can create a supportive environment for your child at home and about your role as a caregiver in helping your child to achieve school readiness.

SECTION 3:

Provides NEED ASSESSMENT CHECKLISTS which can be used to assess the SCHOOL READINESS of your child, yourself as a caregiver or parent, your child’s teacher and your child’s school.

You can use this section to find tips on way to support school readiness.



CAREGIVERS TIPS:

This toolkit provides many tips for parents and caregivers on topics related to school readiness. In order to access the tips easily, you can use the TIPS INDEX at the back of the toolkit which lists all tips throughout the toolkit and their page numbers. All tips will be marked with the light bulb symbol support school readiness.

at the back for ease of access to information for caregivers.

It is important to note that all children learn in different ways and in order to take a truly child centered approach we must be mindful of the fact that children will reach developmental milestones at different times and should not necessarily be compared with other children.

Therefore, school readiness should be understood in a holistic way and as a continuous process during which children accumulate knowledge and build on simple skills to perform in more complex ways across different domains of development — and not only one domain.

Developing skills in each of these domains are affected by the environment in which children grow and “normal” levels of development differ across cultures, ethnic, and religious groups and even among families.

Therefore, the list of school readiness skills provided in this toolkit does not serve as a normative tool but as a general framework for the type of skills/abilities that can demonstrate children’s school readiness.



SECTION ONE: SCHOOL READINESS & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

1.1 KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Early Childhood: is defined as the period from birth to eight years old when children go through remarkable growth (height/weight) and brain development. This is a critical period during which children are highly influenced by their surrounding environment and people³.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE): forms the foundation of a lifelong learning process during which children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills are developed enabling them to become capable, caring, and responsible global citizens in future.

Child-centered: acting in the best interests of children; leading to the realisation of the child's full potential; and concerned both about the "whole" child (including their health, nutritional status, and well-being) and about what happens to children — in their families and communities— before they enter school and after they leave⁴.

Gender equality: The absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex. This can be related to authority, opportunities, allocation of resources or benefits, and access to services. It implies that society values men and women, and the varying roles that they play, equally⁵.

Gender equity: The process of being fair to women, men, boys and girls. To ensure fairness, measures must often be used to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field⁶.

Inclusive education: Every child has the right to education. That includes children with disabilities. An inclusive education system is one that accommodates all students whatever their abilities or requirements,

and at all levels – pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and life-long learning⁷.

Holistic education: A holistic education draws on principles of a whole child approach and subsequently gives equal importance to educational, emotional, social, cognitive, and moral needs of children rather than simply focusing on their academic achievement.

1.2 WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?

School Readiness: is about children entering the formal primary education having the necessary social, emotional, cognitive and language competences and skills in order to be able to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences, successfully learn and progress to later stages of learning, and become capable and responsible citizens.

In short, school readiness is about "gaining skills and competences" and "transition and continuity".

School readiness main actors: include children; families/caregivers; schools/teachers; and communities. This is shown in the Figure 1. For children to be school ready, it is necessary that caregivers, teachers, and communities collaborate to provide nurturing and enabling environments where all children can enjoy cognitive stimulation, emotional security, physical safety and health, and safely pass through the transition period between home and school.

The process of school readiness for children starts in early years and shall continue into early grades of primary school when children need to interact with their new surrounding environment, peers, and adults. However, school readiness is neither merely about academic achievement nor is it about children adapting to schools. School readiness is as much — or even more — about schools and families having the capacity and knowledge to adapt to the academic, cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical needs of children to help them learn and prosper.

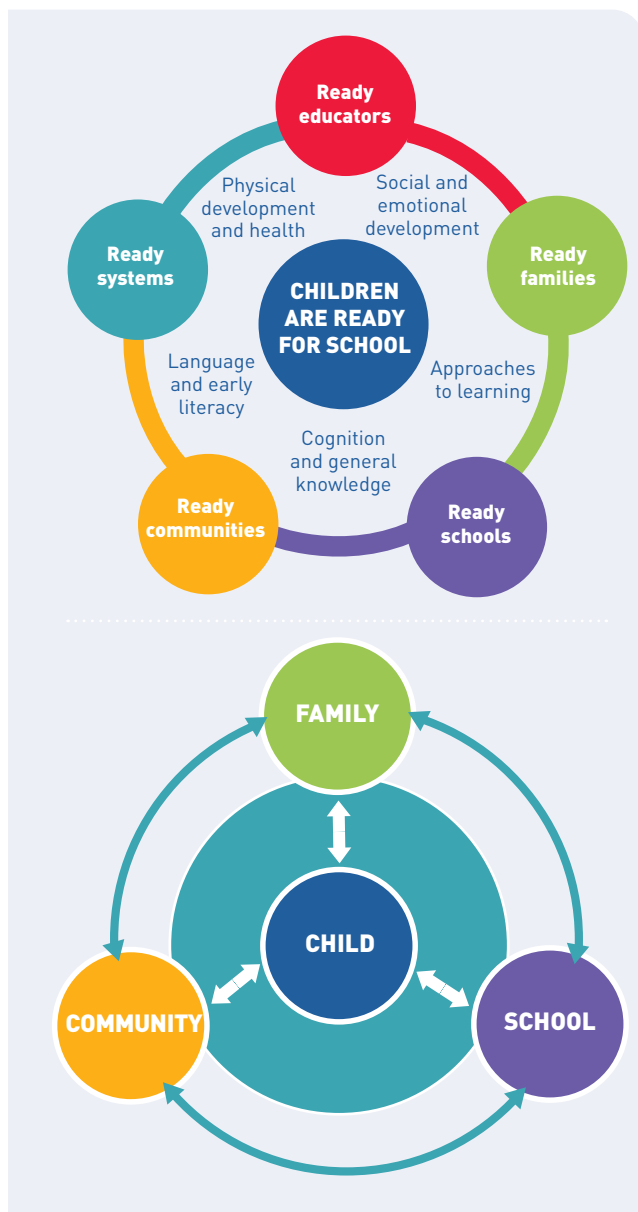


Figure 1: School Readiness Main Actors

School readiness can facilitate successful enrolment, adjustment, progress, and achievement of children — particularly those from marginalised or minority backgrounds.

Is School Readiness Important?

If your child is to reach his or her full potential and benefit from formal education, being ready is extremely important. When children are not ready, they not only don't benefit from school but often also regress. They may struggle to keep up academically, which may negatively affect their self-worth and emotional

development. They may struggle to socialize if they are not yet mature enough for the group, which has negative effects on their social development.

1.3 WHAT ARE READY CHILDREN?

Children are considered ready for school according to a range of behaviors, skills, and abilities they have when entering primary school.

School readiness shall be understood in a holistic way and as a continuous process during which children accumulate knowledge and build on simple skills to perform in more complex ways across different domains of development — and not only one domain. Developing skills in each of these domains are affected by the environment in which children grow and “normal” levels of development differ across cultures, ethnic, and religious groups and even among families. Therefore, the list of school readiness skills provided in this toolkit does not serve as a normative tool but as a general framework for the type of skills/abilities that can demonstrate children's school readiness.

1.4 KEY AREAS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

School readiness is about a combination of healthy growth and development.

Growth is normally characterized by a progressive curve indicating gain in size, height, and weight.

Child development is characterized by the process of change in four main development skills among children. All areas of child development fall under one of these categories:

- **Emotional** - abilities/skills to perceive, regulate, and integrate emotion in self-expression and thoughts;
- **Social** - abilities/skills to form healthy relations with others, to show resilience, and to be able to interact with others (adults/peers) in a non-violent manner;
- **Physical** – includes gross motor (whole body/core muscles skills) and fine motor (finger and hand skills) as well as general physical health;
- **Cognitive** - skills such as language (receptive/expressive), higher order function such as problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, planning, and anticipating.

1.5 TRANSITION AND CONTINUITY

A **transition** is something that happens when a child leaves one social context and enters another, for example from home to ECCE and from ECCE to primary education.

“Successful transitions enable children to adapt to new settings where they quickly grasp teaching and learning methods, the processes, rules and regulations which will enhance their performance in school”.⁸

Why Are Transition And Continuity Important?

As children move from the home to preschool or from preschool to primary school, many are able to easily navigate the change but for some it can be quite daunting. It is very important that we acknowledge and support these important transitions in our children’s lives for the following reasons:

A transition marks a change in the way children interact with their family, school and community.

- This experience is perceived to have long term effects on their future development and learning, extending through all subsequent levels of education.
- Coping well with the changes at this time is important since a successful start is associated with future progress and achievement.
- This period may have a lasting influence on how children view themselves, how others value them, their sense of well-being and their ability to learn.



What can you, as parents and caregivers do to support this transition?

It is widely acknowledged that families are important to their children’s transitions.

- Think about the changes that you have supported your children through so far, what approaches were helpful and what did they respond best to?
- Keep a positive attitude towards the transition and show confidence when discussing.
- If you have any stressful or negative thoughts about the process, don’t let your child know about them
- Engage your children in open and frequent family discussions about the transition.
- Listen to your children’s thoughts and if there are any concerns, address them together.

- Incorporate play-based activities to help with this transition.
- Prepare your children by talking to them about what they can expect

“Shifting to primary school not only involves the child, but requires the whole family to acknowledge the change and make adjustments”.⁹

1.6 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

“Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all”.¹⁰

All children have the right to a quality education and if you are a parent of a child who has special educational needs (either confirmed or suspected) or is the speaker of a minority language, you may have concerns about how your child will achieve this right.

For example, you may worry about whether your child with special needs will be welcome in your local school or be able to go there? Will your child need extra teaching support? Will your child be able to take care of themselves in school? Will the school be able to meet your child’s needs?

As parents of a child with special educational needs you should expect that in school:

- Your child is made to feel welcome.
- Your child’s teachers are knowledgeable about special educational needs.
- Teachers are willing to learn about your child’s particular needs.

Your child may be able to attend the local school along with other children of the same age. If your child has more complex needs, you may want to consider whether your child would be better attending a special class in the school or a special school.

You should arrange to visit your local school as soon as possible in order to meet the school principal in order to discuss your child’s needs.

If your child has been seen by any health care professionals (for example speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists or physiotherapists) they will be able to help you by outlining the type of school setting that will best suit your child.

During these discussions you should consider if the school can meet your child's needs in the following areas:

- Learning needs
- Social and communication needs
- Care needs, for example, dressing, toileting, mobility and medication needs
- Sensory needs such as over sensitivity to noise, textures, lights
- Physical needs that require environmental adaptations such as adaptations to the school building, adapted seating or other specialised equipment.
- When you have chosen the place that you believe will best meet the needs of your child, you can begin to plan with the school.



As parent, you can help the school to plan by:

- Arranging to have your child's professional reports (if your child has been assessed) forwarded to the school so that they can get a better picture of your child's needs.
- If your child attended preschool you should ask them to pass on their knowledge and information about your child to the primary school – their likes and dislikes, strengths and achievements along with what works best to support them to learn.
- You can share your own knowledge and experience of your child's strengths, abilities and difficulties and what works best in helping your child to learn. This information could be very useful to the staff in the new school to allow them to plan for your child.

Reasonable Accommodation

If your child has a disability, they should be provided with 'reasonable accommodation' from the school in order to help them have an education on an equal basis with other students¹¹.

Reasonable accommodations might include if possible, for example:

- Changing the location of a class
- Enlarging print, providing materials in an alternative format
- Providing students with a note-taker, or a language interpreter
- Allowing a student more time
- Providing alternative evaluation methods or replacing an element of curriculum by an alternative element

1.7 CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING

"Every child has the right to live free from violence, exploitation and abuse¹²."

Everyone has a responsibility to keep children safe from harm and abuse. Parents and caregivers have the primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children

No child should ever experience any kind of abuse and abuse should never be used against a child as punishment. The result of abuse against children can have serious and long lasting effects.

As a parent / caregiver you should be aware of the different forms of abuse and violence against children which include:

- **Neglect:** is harmful to the wellbeing of children as they are poorly taken care of by their caregivers. Cases of neglect can include poor hygiene, diet, being left alone at home not be taken to school or medical appointments. Parents may neglect their children for different reasons and therefore need to be trained on different forms of neglect and their impacts on children.
- **Physical abuse:** When someone deliberately hurts, hits, or injures a child.
- **Emotional abuse:** When someone shouts at, uses threats, or makes fun of a child to make the child feel frightened, worthless, or unloved. Exposure to scenes of violence between parents or other people in their home or surrounding environment can also be harmful for children.

- **Sexual abuse:** Where someone influences, involves, or forces a child to look at or take part in sexual activities. This could include encouraging unwanted touching, sexual harassment, involving a child in watching pornography or forcing a child or young person under the age of consent to have sex.



Keeping Your Child Safe

You are your child's most important protector and have the main role in keeping them safe. Here are some tips for keeping your child safe from abuse¹³:

Teach Them Early About Personal Safety

It is never too early to talk to your children about their personal safety. You can teach your children 5 basic principles:

- To trust their feelings and to distinguish between 'yes' and 'no' feelings
- To say 'no' to adults if they feel unsafe and unsure
- That they own their own bodies
- That nothing is so bad that they can't tell someone about it
- That if they feel unsafe or unsure to run and tell someone they trust.

Talk To Your Children

Encourage your children to feel comfortable telling you anything, especially if it involves another adult. Encourage your children to identify other trusted adults they can talk to in confidence.

Be Aware & Get Involved

Learn about the people with whom your child is spending time and be an active participant with your children's activities. You will have a better opportunity to observe if your child is in danger of harm or abuse.

Empower Your Children

Knowledge is power. Teach your children about their bodies. Teach them the correct language to use when describing their private parts. Emphasise that those parts are private.

Teach Them Their Rights

Teach your children that they have the right to say NO to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touch or actions by others. Teach them to tell you immediately if this happens.

Encourage Cyber-Safety

Always be aware and monitor your child's activity on a phone, tablet or computer. Teach your child never to give out their pictures, last name, address, or phone number to a person on the Internet and never to meet Internet friends in person without a parent's supervision and consent.

Child Safeguarding At School

When your child is in school, the school is responsible for keeping them safe from harm and abuse. The school should create a safe learning environment, identify students who are suffering or at risk of harm and take suitable action. The school also needs to train staff in child protection and safeguarding¹⁴.

To help protect your child, the school should have:

- Staff who are trained to identify signs of abuse including what to do if they or someone else is worried about a child
- A designated staff member responsible for dealing with child protection
- Procedures for checking staff before they work with children
- A child protection policy which includes procedures to be followed if a teacher or other member of staff is accused of harming a child

SECTION TWO: CAREGIVERS ROLE IN ACHIEVING SCHOOL READINESS

2.1 RESPONSIVE AND POSITIVE PARENTING

What Is Positive And Responsive Parenting?

Positive Parenting is defined as the continual relationship of a parent(s) and a child or children that includes caring, teaching, guiding, communicating and providing for the needs of a child consistently and unconditionally¹⁵.

It is about raising our children in a warm, loving, caring, supportive, positive environment built on the foundation of trust and respect.

Positive Parenting is based on the assumption that all children are born good, are altruistic and desire to do the right thing. Knowing that, we can teach and discipline them without breaking their spirit¹⁶.

Some characteristics of positive parenting include:

- It involves guiding, leading and teaching
- It is caring, empowering, nurturing, consistent and always non violent
- It provides regular open communication, affection, emotional security and unconditional love.
- It respects the child developmental stage
- It rewards accomplishments
- It sets boundaries
- It shows empathy
- It always supports the child's best interests¹⁷

Emphasising The Positive

The central thought behind positive and responsive parenting is to emphasise positive interactions. You recognise, reward and reinforce positive behaviours and impulses. You aim to show empathy, and offer warmth and support.

It is important to find and emphasise your child's strengths. Psychologists define a strength as something your child does well, happily and often. This can range from being a good walker or talker, to character traits such as grit, curiosity, courage, humour and kindness. Having it in your mind to encourage your child's unique personality, abilities, talents and skills can help them to flourish¹⁸.

How Can Positive Parenting Support School Readiness?

Building bonds - Strong emotional bonds help children learn how to manage their own feelings and behaviors and develop self-confidence. They help create a safe base from which they can explore, learn, and relate to others. This will help them to cope with the transition to school and be ready to learn when they enter school.

Being available - Modern life is full of things that can influence your ability to be sensitive and responsive to your child. These include competing priorities, extra work, lack of sleep, and things like mobile devices. Some experts are concerned about the effects that distracted parenting may have on emotional bonding and children's language development, social interaction, and safety. But having a parent who is "available" will help children to feel safe and be better able to manage the challenges they meet at school resulting in better learning.

"When parents engage positively with their children, teaching them the behaviors and skills that they need to cope with the world, children learn to follow rules and regulate their own feelings¹⁹."

2.2 MAINTAINING A RESPONSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD



The following are some simple and practical tips that you can do at home in order to maintain a supportive and responsive relationship with your child.

Allow For Unstructured, Uninterrupted Time With Your Child Each Day

Everybody has busy lives, but it is important to have some time with your child in which they are the main focus of your attention. Let your child be the leader in deciding what to play. Don't multi-task during this special playtime, just be there with your child one-on-one for even just a short time every day. They will feel loved and special when they have your full attention.

Let Your Child Know You Are Interested In Their Activities

Show a sincere interest in your child, whatever they are doing. Your attention is what they desire most. You can show your interest by commenting on or describing what they are doing: "You are using so many beautiful colors to make that drawing." Or, get involved by following their lead. This will also help him learn about the value and joy of back and forth play which is an important aspect of all successful relationships²⁰.

Catch Children Being Good

How often do you focus on the mealtime where your child doesn't eat, rather than the mealtime where they do? Good behaviour should not be taken for granted. Be sure to praise your child for being good and staying on track. Evidence shows young children are very responsive to praise. Rewarding them, even with a simple 'well done', has been shown to lead to fewer behavioural problems later down the line.

Encourage Children To Express Their Feelings In Age-Appropriate Ways

Forming positive, healthy relationships depends on the ability to show feelings appropriately and to recognize the feelings of others. Teach children acceptable ways to vent anger, like drawing an angry picture, running in the yard, or taking deep breaths. Label your own

feelings, "I am happy because you helped me clean up," or, "I am sad that Grandma had to go home." It is important for children to know that you have feelings too, but that there are ways to cope with them so you can feel better.

Try To Understand Your Child's Feelings

Sympathise with how your child may be feeling. Their thoughts and behaviours might seem irrational or even naughty to us on the outside. But inside they're trying to make sense of their experiences of the world and their needs. If we can take the time to understand, we can help them. Ask yourself: are they're tired? Bored? Overwhelmed?

Respect your child's feelings

This teaches your child to trust their own instincts. It can also help them to work through powerful or difficult feelings and allow them to move on. Knowing you respect their feelings teaches your child empathy and respect for others, which are important elements in any relationship. Accepting a child's feelings, without minimizing them or making fun, also increases the chances that they will share more with you as they grow.

Try Not To Let Your Children See You Angry or Stressed

It's common sense that being angry might affect your ability to positively parent in that moment but children can pick up on other emotions like stress from a young age. Your stress makes them stressed too. So try to step away for a few deep breaths, or ask family or friends for support if your emotions are building up²¹.

Provide Opportunities For Your Child To Develop Relationships With Peers

Children need practice in order to learn to share, take turns, resolve conflict, and feel the joy of friendship. It is important for children to have time with other children around their own age and developmental level.

Limit Watching TV, Phones and Other "Screen Time"

Watching screens takes time away from spending time together and building your relationship. It also takes time away from children playing, solving problems, interacting, and actively learning about the world

around them. Looking at a screen is a very passive activity and children need active experiences in order to learn. When your child does watch screens, you can enhance the experience by talking with your child about what they watched - what they thought it was about, which characters they liked and disliked, how it made them feel²². You should always monitor what your child is watching as a lot of content that is accessible to children via the internet is inappropriate at best and dangerous at worst.

2.3 NURTURING CARE AND ITS FIVE COMPONENTS:



To reach their full potential, children need the five inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care:

1. **Good health**
2. **Adequate nutrition**
3. **Safety and security**
4. **Responsive caregiving**
5. **Opportunities for learning**

In the first years of life, parents, intimate family members and caregivers are the closest to the young child and thus the best providers of Nurturing Care. When children receive adequate nurturing care, they will be on the right path for school readiness. As a parent, if you are working towards achieving nurturing care for your children from birth, you are also working towards their school readiness.

1. Good Health

Refers to the health and well-being of children and their caregivers.



What can you do, as a parent or caregiver, to help ensure the good health of your young children?

- Monitor your children's physical and emotional condition
- Give affectionate and appropriate responses to your children's daily needs
- Protect your young children from household and environmental dangers
- Keep good hygiene practices which minimize infections
- Use promotive and preventive health services
- Seek care and appropriate treatment for your children's illnesses
- Try to also keep yourself in good health and wellbeing so that you can provide the best care to your children

2. Adequate Nutrition

Refers to maternal and child nutrition.



What can you do, as a parent or caregiver, to help ensure the adequate nutrition of your young children?

- Keep good nutrition during and after pregnancy (for mothers) as this affects your health and well-being, as well as the developing child's nutrition and growth
- Try to ensure exclusive breastfeeding - from immediately after birth to the age of 6 months
- Provide skin-to-skin body contact from birth (from mother and father)
- Provide frequent and diverse complementary foods (in addition to breast milk) from the age of 6 months
- Provide supplements or treatment for malnutrition (including obesity) if a child's daily diet fails to support healthy growth (following advice from a doctor)
- Ensure food safety; safe food storage and preparation
- Ensure adequate physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep in early childhood

3. Responsive Caregiving

Refers to the ability of the parent/caregiver to notice, understand, and respond to their child's signals in a timely and appropriate manner.

Responsive caregiving includes observing and responding to children's movements, sounds and gestures and verbal requests. It is the basis for:

- Protecting children against injury and the negative effects of adversity
- Recognizing and responding to illness
- Enriched learning
- Building trust and social relationships



What can you do to ensure responsive caregiving to your children?

- Practice "modeling" with your child – mirroring their actions and encouraging them to mirror yours
- Make eye contact, smile, cuddle and praise your child
- Learn to notice your child's cues and respond appropriately (sensitivity and responsiveness) – for example signs of hunger, satiety, illness, emotional distress, interest to play, pleasure etc
- Identify and use everyday moments to communicate and play with your child (e.g., feeding, bedtime)
- Develop safe and mutually rewarding relationships with your child (e.g., enjoying spending together)

4. Security and Safety

Refers to safe and secure environments for children and their families.

Includes physical dangers, emotional stress, environmental risks (e.g., pollution), and access to food and water.

Young children cannot protect themselves and are vulnerable to unanticipated danger, physical pain and emotional stress.

Once they are mobile, they can touch and swallow objects that can harm them, or can experience extreme harm due to an unclean or unsafe environment and other potential threats. Young children can experience

extreme fear when people abandon them – or threaten to abandon or punish them.

Nurturing care includes making sure that defenceless young children feel safe and secure.



What can you, as a parent or caregiver to ensure the security and safety of your children?

- Ensure your child's birth is registered
- Ensure your child has access to clean water and nutritious food
- Ensure your child has access to clean indoor and outdoor air
- Ensure your child practices good hygiene habits
- Provide safe spaces to play
- Refrain from using physical punishment or threats and protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect.

5. Opportunities for Early Learning

Refers to any opportunity for the baby, toddler or child to interact with a person, place, or object in their environment.

Children do not start to learn only when they begin pre-school classes at the age of 3 or 4. Rather, learning is a built-in mechanism for human beings and begins at conception. All interactions help the child learn about other people.

Even very busy caregivers can develop the confidence to talk with a child during feeding, bathing, and other routine household tasks.



What can you, as a parent or caregiver to ensure opportunities for early learning for your children?

- Instigate activities that encourage your children to move their bodies, activate their five senses, hear and use language, and explore
- Use daily routines to talk to, play, and interact with your child from birth
- Tell stories and stories by family elders
- Explore books together and reading to your child often
- Talk to and with your child at every opportunity

- Smile, imitate/copy and play simple games (e.g., peek a boo)
- Instigate age-appropriate play with household objects and people²³

2.4 ENABLING A CLEAN, SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT AT HOME FOR NURTURING CARE

“Clean, safe and secure environments create the conditions for children to develop to their full potential”

Clean, safe and secure environments contribute to enabling environments for nurturing care. Clean air, safe and secure surroundings, and outlets for physical activity are essential conditions for children to survive and thrive.

How to make your home a healthy one

Our homes can make us feel safe, but they can also make us sick. Some homes may have hidden dangers and many homes have unhealthy conditions.



Below are some dangers to be aware of and some tips for you to make your home healthier:

Fire/electrical Hazards

- Beware of all electrical outlets and wires and try to keep them out of reach from children.
- Beware of the health hazards of smoking and the dangerous effects of second hand smoke to children. Try to refrain from smoking in the home.
- Beware of the dangers of cooking over an open flame and starting a fire.
- Never leave food unattended on the stove.
- Avoid wearing clothes with long, loose-fitting sleeves when cooking.
- Keep all matches and lighters out of children’s reach.
- Install smoke alarms when possible and remember to test these smoke alarms monthly and change the batteries every year.
- Have a fire extinguisher and fire blanket at home in case of fire.

Insects and Rodents

- To keep pests away, fix exterior holes, cracks, and leaks, eliminate standing water and food sources, and keep trash covered with a lid.
- Clean up clutter so insects and rodents don’t have a place to burrow.
- Seal openings to the outside and between rooms to keep pests out.
- Put away food, clean up, and cover the trash and garbage to keep pests away.
- Fix leaks and wipe up spilled water so pests have nothing to drink.

Poison Hazards

- Keep all medications away from children by locking them in a medicine cabinet and using childproof caps.
- If you have a septic tank or private well, properly maintain it to prevent illness.
- Keep all rooms well ventilated and install a carbon monoxide alarm where your child sleeps if possible.
- Use safe cleaning and pest-control products (keep them locked away from children, follow label directions, and dispose of these products safely).
- Avoid the use of lead-based paint
- Remove mold in the home as it poses a threat to the health of children

Drowning or Choking Hazards

- If your home uses a well to store water, it should be covered and children should always be supervised near it as it can be a drowning hazard.
- If your home is near a body of water such as a pond or lake, a fence or barrier should be installed to keep children safe and children should always be supervised when near.
- Keep your home free of small toys, plastic bags, balloons, and other items that could pose a choking hazard.
- Empty buckets of water when not in use and turn them over. Even one inch of water can pose a drowning risk for small children.
- Never leave a child unsupervised in the bath or near water.

Accidents

- Install safety gates at both the top and bottom of the stairs if possible.
- Keep stairs free from clutter and tripping hazards.
- Keep knives, scissors, and other sharp utensils out of children's reach.
- Keep furniture away from high windows and/or keep windows locked.
- Keep furniture edges and corners covered to prevent injuries.
- Secure large TVs and other heavy furniture with a wall strap to keep them from falling over on top of a child.

2.5 PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY AMONG CHILDREN

Every child has a right to reach their full potential, and gender inequality or inequity prevents this by limiting what they can and can't do.

How Do Gender Stereotypes Affect Children's Learning?

From birth, children learn about gender-appropriate attitudes and behaviors through interactions with their families who often provide children's first sources of information and learning about gender. They learn to "do" gender through internalising gender norms and roles as they interact with people around them. Children begin to understand and act out gender roles and stereotypes at an early age²⁵.

For example, from infancy, boys are often given more sports equipment, toy cars and tools, while girls are given more dolls, kitchen appliances and pink clothing etc. Yet infants often have equal and overlapping interests in toys and it is the gendered marketing of toys that subsequently influences their preferences as they age.

Parents often implicitly reinforce gender stereotypes, even when they intend not to. For example, parents may convey messages about gender appropriate emotions and activities when reading their children storybooks. For instance, they might label gender-neutral sad characters as girls and angry characters as boys.

This can negatively affect a child's development as children can start to believe certain activities, behaviors, or emotions are only for girls and others are only for boys. This can result in limiting the learning experiences that a child will encounter and therefore the skills and abilities they develop.

There is also a danger, especially in more traditional societies, that girls may grow up to believe that education is less important for them and that they do not deserve gender equality.



What Can Parents Do To Counteract This?

Research suggests parents can play an important role in promoting gender equality and building children's resilience to rigid gender stereotypes in early childhood²⁶.

Below are some suggestions that you can do at home:

- Become more aware of rigid gender stereotypes and consciously question their existence, necessity and impact.
- Promote gender equality by supporting a range of activities for both your sons and daughters.
- Recognise that both sexes are special. Don't show preferential behavior towards either your son or daughter or give them different treatment such as a harsher approach with boys and a softer approach with girls or vice versa.
- Engage in interactive activities like role-playing, storytelling and games that will provide opportunities for discussion of topics about gender stereotypes and equality.
- Make stereotypes less meaningful. Try choosing some toys that don't 'look' stereotypically gendered – this helps make gender less meaningful and allows kids to focus on the activity, rather than what toy or activity is 'for boys' or 'for girls.'
- Notice your body language. If your child plays with toys or games that don't sit within the stereotypes attached to their gender, check your reaction. Try to be encouraging, make eye contact, smile, nod and get excited.
- Notice which family members play with what. Encourage yourself, your child, and other family members to try new things. It doesn't always need to be the boy who plays with a football or a girl that plays with a doll.

- Challenge stereotypes that you see. While watching TV or reading books try asking questions like, 'I wonder why we never see the boy cooking?' Or 'Why do the girls always talk about clothes – what else do you think they like doing?' Or 'I notice he always decides where they go on adventures – what kind of places do you think they'd go if she was the leader sometimes?'

2.6 PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY IN CAREGIVING ROLES

All parents and caregivers regardless of gender have a major influence on their child's school readiness.

Often the large percentage of child rearing responsibilities are held by mothers or female caregivers and traditionally in many societies, a father's role in the home may not be concerned with the day to day aspects of child rearing – much of which is involved in school readiness.

Research indicates that young children whose mothers are responsive to their developing needs have a larger vocabulary and better cognitive skills, enthusiasm and persistence for learning compared to children whose mothers do not demonstrate the same degree of responsiveness²⁷.

And patterns of greater father involvement in early childhood development have been linked with children's language skills, cognition, academic achievement, and social and emotional competence²⁸.

Therefore, it is extremely important to acknowledge and recognize the importance of the both the male and female caregivers role when considering school readiness for children.

The child will always benefit most when caregiving responsibilities are shared among both parents and when parents and caregivers are working together to meet the needs of the child.



Below are some suggestions of ways that you can work together with your co-parent or co-caregiver to try to achieve gender equity in your roles:

- **Be a team:** There is no need for one parent to act as a monarch or dictator. Try to stick together and work as a team.
- **Set a good example:** Display the kind of behavior you expect from your children. As a husband and wife, co-parents or co-caregivers, you must speak to each other with respect, share the household chores, and handle other tasks together. Let your children notice that you work together as a team.
- **All household chores are equal:** Both male and female caregivers should be involved in all kinds of work in the home. This allows both you and your co-caregiver to explore every aspect of parenting, and it also shows your children to see that men and women are not defined by certain roles.
- **Shed the 'breadwinner' mentality:** There is no rule that says that the man needs to earn the money for a family and a women needs to cook meals and clean. Consider the unique situation of your family and make decisions about work, parenting and housekeeping depending on what is best for your family.
- **Give your partner grace:** It can be tempting to want to help your partner in doing things "right" because you may think you know what works best with your children. But intervening may damage your partner's confidence in parenting. With parenting there are very few things that are "right" as the key to parenting is about meeting the individual needs of your child.
- **Schedule alone time:** Equal parenting goes beyond work and child care. It's also important that you make a schedule that allows for both you and your partner to have some time for yourselves. You and your partner also need to set aside some time to spend together without the children.



2.7 LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

There is an incredible amount of play and learning ideas generated and shared through social media. This can be great for giving ideas but can also make parents feel a bit overwhelmed and as if they are not doing enough. It can also feel as though parents need to have an endless supply of materials and resources with which to play, but that is not necessary. The most important thing is to make space for play every day.

What Happens When Children Are Playing and Why Is It Important?

We know that play is a life-enhancing experience. Play builds children's capacity to thrive despite stress and adversity in their lives. "Just playing" can help build more resilient children.

- Play builds health and wellbeing – being active through play helps children physically and emotionally, contributing to their health and happiness.
- Play supports brain development and a range of learning skills.
- Play builds resilience – playing boosts children's confidence, creativity, problem-solving skills and perseverance, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.
- As they grow and develop, play offers children the opportunity to develop a range of physical, emotional and social skills, helping them make sense of the world they find themselves in.
- Play builds concentration - allowing children the time and freedom to play freely, completing their chosen activities in their own time and to their own satisfaction, and it promotes the development of concentration and attention.
- Play supports language development, problem solving, gaining perspective, representational skills, memory and creativity. Children learn to see things in different ways and from others point of view.
- Playing with arts and crafts gives children the opportunity to develop finger and hand muscles and fine motor skills required for hand-writing

The most important thing is to make space for play every day.

Playing Outside

It is important for children to go outside for some time every day. There are lots of benefits, even if it is only for a short time. Being in nature can reduce negative feelings such as anger and stress.

Being outside makes you feel better and at the same time actually contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and the production of stress hormones. It is beneficial parents as well as for the children.

Children need contact with the natural world to support their health and development and build resilience.



Some Everyday Tips For Playing Outside:

- Dress for the weather! If children can stay cool and dry they will be happier outside.
- Play games such as I spy or go on a 'bear hunt'
- Stop to look at a view or up to the sky. Take up stargazing at night time! Can you see pictures in the stars?
- Take an evening walk with the children. Some parents find an evening walk is a great way to settle down in the evening, making for a better night's sleep and chance to talk
- Children need lots of opportunities for repetition so don't be afraid to do activities more than once!



SECTION THREE: CHECKLISTS TO ASSESS YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT IN KEY AREAS

3.1 CHECKLISTS TO ASSESS YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT IN KEY AREAS

Included in this book, are a series of checklists which can be used by parents and caregivers to assess your child's development in each of the key areas of child development.

If your child is receiving a majority of "yes" answers, they are closer to being school ready. For the elements in which your child is receiving "no" answers, you can use the tips provided to work with them at home, practicing those skills in order to help them to become more school ready.

The skills and capabilities listed in the checklists can be practiced together with your child from a young age.

School Readiness is an ongoing, continuous process that needs practice and therefore there is no particular age that the skills should be achieved by. Rather, the checklists should be seen as a list of millstones that you can aim towards with your child from birth.

Note that the checklists are not exhaustive. Children can have different levels of development in each domain and their overall skills and abilities are what can make them school ready.

Children have multiple intelligences including musical/rhythmic; visual/spatial; verbal/linguistic; logical/ mathematical; interpersonal; intrapersonal; bodily/ kinesthetics; and naturalistic. This indicates that they may learn and develop differently within the contexts of their homes, schools, and communities.

A child is considered ready if they meet most/or a good part of the skills in the checklist.

1. Emotional Development

General Maturity and Self-Expression

	DOES YOUR CHILD	YES	NO
1	Separate easily from you when needed		
2	Not need to be around an adult at all times		
3	Show independence		
4	Have healthy self-esteem and feel competent		
5	Accept authority and be able to obey simple rules at home and at school		
6	Have good self-care skills – dressing, eating, going to the bathroom independently		
7	Feel comfortable to go places without you – e.g. stay over at with a close relative or visit a friend		
8	Express feelings in a healthy way		
9	Work on a task independently		
10	Work quietly and calmly		
11	Ask questions and seek help when necessary		
12	Follow home and school routines with ease		
13	Cope with disappointments in a mature way		
14	Show perseverance and determination when working on a task		

2. Social Development

Forming Healthy Relationships and Managing Conflict

	DOES YOUR CHILD	YES	NO
1	Show ability to take turns and share with others		
2	Form healthy relationships with peers		
3	Socialize with more than one peer (not only one 'special' friend)		
4	Be assertive when necessary and also be able to follow another's lead		
5	Handle conflict appropriately and independently (without always reporting to an adult)		
6	Show manners unprompted – e.g. say please, thank you and sorry		
7	Respect others' property		
8	Work cooperatively in a group		
9	Show respect and listen when someone is speaking – a peer or adult		

3. Physical and Motor Development

Gross And Fine Motor Skills and Physical Well-Being

	CAN YOUR CHILD	YES	NO
1	Run easily, climb and move with agility		
2	Balance when walking along a beam		
3	Distinguish between left and right		
4	Throw and catch a ball		
5	Walk along a straight line		
6	Hop on one leg and hop with legs together		
7	Stand on one leg for 5 seconds, maintaining balance		
8	Skip		
9	Cross the midline (hands or feet over centre of body)		
10	Hold a pencil or crayon correctly (grip)		
11	Cut along a line and control a pair of scissors		
12	Do activities that need fine motor control – e.g. pasting, tearing, cutting, threading etc		
13	Determine his or her dominant hand (let this develop naturally)		
14	Move rhythmically to music		
15	Sit at a desk for a period of time with good posture and without slouching or tiring		
16	Sit on a floor/carpet with legs crossed without flopping over		
17	Be in good health and able to attend school regularly		

4. Cognitive Development

Language, Problem Solving, Creativity and Mathematical Ability

	CAN YOUR CHILD	YES	NO
1	Recognize shapes and colours		
2	Build a jigsaw puzzle		
3	See similarities and differences in a picture		
4	Distinguish foreground from background in a picture		
5	Estimate, plan and evaluate		
6	Count with one-to-one correspondence (e.g. by touching one item at a time)		
7	Group, classify and sort objects and information		
8	Copy a simple pattern		
9	Do basic addition and subtraction (e.g. what is one more?)		
10	Use mathematical terms such as more, less, first, altogether, longer, shorter, etc		
11	Have a concept of time – weekdays, seasons, morning/afternoon/evening, etc		
12	Understand cause and effect (e.g. consequences to certain actions)		
13	Solve problems with insight		
14	Have good listening skills		
15	Be able to follow verbal instructions (at least a 2 or 3 part instruction)		
16	Listen to a story and recall the events in sequence		
17	Answer questions about a story and remember details		
18	Memorize simple songs and nursery rhymes		
19	Identify rhyming words		
20	Hear the beginning and ending sounds in 3-letter words e.g. bat		
21	Identify and discuss characters in a story		
22	Express opinions about a story		
23	Show an interest in books and reading		
24	Know the names of some of the letters		
25	Speak clearly and use grammar correctly		
26	Have a well-developed vocabulary		
27	Participate in discussions at home and at school		
28	Concentrate on a single task for at least 20 minutes		
29	Complete tasks		

3.2 SHORT CHECKLIST TO ASSESS YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL READINESS

For a full assessment of your child's development and school readiness, the previous checklists in each key area of child development should be used over periods of time to monitor progress.

For a condensed version of the previous checklists, the following one can be used to assess your child's school readiness:

	CAN YOUR CHILD	YES	NO
1	Interact with other children		
2	Demonstrate basic manners		
3	Assert themselves in situations		
4	Play independently		
5	Play with other kids		
6	Manage their emotions		
7	Cope with minimal adult contact or supervision in large groups		
8	Focus on tasks		
9	Follow directions and instructions from teachers		
10	Cope with the possible stress of a new environment		
11	Understand and follow rules		
12	Talk and listen to both adults and other kids		
13	Talk and listen to both adults and other kids		
14	Communicate their needs		
15	Speak clearly		
16	Understand stories or situations		
17	Begin to identify some letters and sounds		
18	Demonstrate basic number skills		
19	Demonstrate basic thinking skills		
20	Wait and take turns		
21	Be in general good health		
22	Demonstrate a good grasp of fine motor skills		
23	Demonstrate a good grasp of gross motor skills		
24	Manage their own basic needs such as toilet and eating etc		
25	Manage their own belongings such as clothes and bag etc		

3.3 TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT IN KEYS AREAS

If your child is not receiving “yes” in many of the categories on the checklist, you should not worry. There are many fun activities that you can do with your child in order to help them in those areas of child development and help them to become more school ready.

The suggestions below are fun activities you can do with your child which are mostly revolved around play. They don't require any fancy material and they will mostly be enjoyable for you and for your child.

All children develop at a different pace. Talk to them about what you are working on together. Let them make the choices and practice the skills they want to work on.

Independence Skills

Your child will really benefit from being as independent as possible when they start school and from having experienced being away from you for short periods of time, such as going to a friend's house to play. This will really develop their confidence and independence and stand them in good stead when it comes to saying goodbye when they go to school.



Supporting your Child's Independence Skills at Home:

- Try not to do any task the child can do for themselves even if it takes a bit of time
- Encourage and practice independent dressing. Let children dress themselves and put on their own shoes and clothes.
- Encourage and practice independent eating, ask children to help you while you prepare a meal and encourage them to clean up when finished eating. Children should try to pour their own drinks and prepare their own snack.
- Encourage and practice going to the bathroom. Children should work towards using the bathroom independently where possible; flushing the toilet, and washing and drying their hands.
- Encourage them to help you with jobs around the home.

Good jobs for children include:

- Straightening out their bed in the morning
- Getting themselves dressed and teeth brushed
- Using the shower independently
- Clearing off the table after a meal
- Putting their clothes in a laundry basket
- Folding laundry
- Helping with the washing up
- Clearing up toys when they are finished playing and helping outside²⁹

Emotional Wellbeing

Being able to handle their emotions (as best as they can for a young child) will help them when they start school and move away from the comfort of the family home. The transition to school can greatly affect the emotional wellbeing of your child so it is important to help them to build their emotional wellbeing before the time comes.



Supporting your Child's Emotional Wellbeing at Home

- Encourage your child to play as much as possible inside and outside the home
- If your child is stuck when doing something, allow them to keep trying, as this builds their perseverance and confidence. You can say something like; “ I see you are really trying to finish that, well done for trying so hard”;
- Talk about and name your child's feelings to help them regulate their emotions and deal with different feelings. Talking about and naming feelings helps children cope with all the different feeling they have. Help them name their feelings if they have difficulties expressing them. Reading picture stories about feelings is a helpful way to help your child name what they might be feeling in their bodies, how they are thinking and feeling.
- Work on kindness, talk about being kind and model kindness for them. They can practice on their siblings;
- Discuss what your child knows about school, what are they expecting it to be like, what are they looking forward to, or, what might they be nervous of? Reassure them of any fears. The way adults show upset or worry will have an impact on your

child. Remember to speak positively about the change and manage your own worries or concerns;

- Visit the school to have a look at the building/playground and talk about how your child will get to school each day;
- Show your child some photos of the school uniform and tell them about other children they may know that already attend the school.
- If your child seems overwhelmed by the thought of school, hold off on talking about it for a while, but keep working on opportunities for play and independence³⁰.

Communication and Language

Many parents worry if their child will be able to tell the teacher if they need something or if they will make friends. Good communication skills underpin these abilities. Parents can have a huge impact on their child's talking and listening development and there are many opportunities for trying out simple language boosting activities.



Supporting Your Child's Communication and Language at Home

Listening and Attention - Your child will be given many spoken instructions throughout the school day and will need to be able to shift their attention from what they are doing to listening to what the teacher is saying. A lovely activity to promote this is to go on a 'listening walk' where your child listens for all the sounds around them in the park or town centre. You could also write down all the sounds your child notices and talk about these back at home to retell the journey based on the sounds they heard.

Understanding Spoken Instructions - Classroom instructions often contain several parts for children to remember. Some simple games such as 'Simon Says' can help to support your child with this. Give your child an instruction to do, like 'Simon says put your finger on your nose' and see if they can follow your instruction. The game becomes more difficult as they are only supposed to follow your instructions if you start the sentence with 'Simon says...' Can your child listen carefully and only follow the instructions when

directed? The game can be made more challenging by building up to instructions with two or three steps, for example 'Simon says touch your nose, then clap your hands and then put on your hands on your head!'

Vocabulary Development - 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. You could play sorting games when packing a suitcase, as this is a great way to help word categorisation, which is important for vocabulary learning. Items can be sorted into different piles, such as clothing, toys and things for washing ourselves. Outdoor 'treasure hunts' work well too. Collecting objects found on walks in the areas around your home, help introduce new types of vocabulary such as describing words. Treasure can also then be used to create feely games, where objects have to be described by the way they feel before revealing what the object is.

Reading and Writing - A good foundation in sound awareness skills such as rhyming and identifying what sound a word begins with would be helpful. Sharing songs and books is a really good way to support this. You could also say the sounds that letters make, along with their names as you come across them day-to-day in a fun and playful way.

Mathematical Development

Counting verbally and one to one - Being able to count verbally to at least 20 will be of great benefit to a child starting school. Practice counting up to 20, and backwards too. One to one counting can also be done incidentally throughout the day, for example counting steps as your child climbs the stairs. You can count anything, for instance how many lampposts are on the street, how many houses have a red door, how many pieces of fruit are in the bowl (and how many did we have yesterday), how many pencils fit in the pencil case, etc. To help your child understand what numbers mean. Ask them to find the same amount of different items. For example, find 3 spoons, 3 hats or 3 socks.

Shape, Size and Quantity - You could go on a shape hunt to see how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find, for example square windows, circular plates, and rectangular posters. You could look for patterns too. Talk about the shape and size of objects, e.g. big car, little car, round ball, square table, rectangular book and ask your child questions such as 'Can you pass me the biggest box?', Or 'Which one is the smallest shoe?'. Play with blocks and encourage your child to think about size, colour and shape. Also play with containers and ask, 'How many socks can you fit in the box?', 'Which container holds the most, or the least, sand/water?', etc.

Number Recognition - A number hunt is a fun way to look for numerals on doors, on clocks, buses, cars, signs, at home, at the shops or on TV. You could also play 'I spy' but with numbers. You can also make numbers with play dough or on a whiteboard and see if your child can recognize them.



Physical and Motor Skills Development

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills involve movements of the large muscles in the arms, legs and torso. They're used for whole-body movements in everyday activities. As well as forming the basis for fine motor skills, gross motor skills development has an impact on things like balance, coordination, physical strength and reaction time.

As well as forming the basis for fine motor skills, gross motor skills development has an impact on things like balance, coordination, physical strength and reaction time. Gross motor skills can also have an impact on a child's self-esteem and how they socialise with their friends. By the time children reach school age, they'll usually already have a few key gross motor skills: the ability to stand up, walk, run and walk up stairs etc.



Building Gross Motor Skills at Home

You can help the development of your child's gross motor skills at home by encouraging all kinds of physical activity and instigating games to play with your child. Here are a few suggestions:

- Running
- Throwing or kick a ball
- Skipping
- Climbing
- Doing star jumps

Fine Motor Skills

A good foundation to being able to write is to develop your child's fine motor skills. This is because good fine motor skills enable a child to hold a pencil firmly as they are writing.



Building Fine Motor Skills at Home

Fine motor skills can be developed through basic, everyday activities. You do not need to buy any fancy equipment. Using everyday items, you can provide a wide array of fun activities that will strengthen the finger muscles.



Drawing

- Art activities are one of the best ways to develop fine motor skills. Provide your child with daily opportunities to be creative, by using different materials and mediums
- Use any other mediums you can think of. Get your child used to holding utensils of different sizes and shapes and learning to control them

Painting

- Painting is a favourite with all children. The messier the activity the better! There are many different ways to paint
- Paint on paper with different sized brushes, or using fingers, leaves, twigs or other natural materials

Cutting

- Cutting is an important skill that should be practised regularly
- Cut different types of paper (e.g. cardboard, newspaper, tissue paper, etc) with blunt-nosed scissors along lines, shapes or freely without lines

Tearing

- Tearing is an excellent activity for developing the finger muscles. Let your child tear different materials – newspaper, paper, magazine paper, cardboard, tissue paper, etc freely and get used to controlling it with their finger

Pasting

- Use glue that is safe for children and let them get messy while sticking random paper tearings or cuttings and construct with paper and boxes
- Encourage them to persist when trying to get something to stick together

Playdough

- Children love playing with playdough. Not only does it strengthen the fingers and develop motor control, but it also stimulates creativity, planning and thinking skills
- Allow lots of time for free play with playdough, without and without tools such as cups and cutters or toys etc.

Construction

- Construction is a great activity for developing both gross and fine motor skills
- This can include constructing with blocks such as lego or building with boxes and waste products

Pick-up Sticks

- Playing, gathering, counting and picking up sticks develops a child's focus, finger control and fine motor muscles
- This game can be played with straws or twigs from the garden and can be used to practice counting

3.4 CHECKLIST TO ASSESS THE READINESS OF YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL AND TEACHER

It is important that schools and ECCE services and their teachers have the ability and resources to provide the best learning experiences for your child and to suitably correspond and engage with all school readiness actors including children, caregivers, communities and local authorities.

We must try to understand that it is not for children to adapt to school but for schools, ECCE services and their personnel to adapt to children, their learning styles, and socio-emotional and cognitive needs.

The following checklists can be used to assess the school readiness of your child's school and their teacher:

	DOES MY CHILD'S SCHOOL	YES	NO
1	Provide a learning environment that is physically safe, healthy and hygienic		
2	Provide a learning environment that is emotionally safe and protective		
3	Appear to be child-friendly with accessible playground / toys / materials / furniture etc		
4	Provide an adequate curriculum and child centered teaching and learning methodologies		
5	Attempt to assist a smooth transition for my child and my family		
6	Have an adequate child safeguarding policy and an awareness of their ethical obligations and responsibilities towards children		
7	Reach out and engage with the wider community		
8	Provide an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment		
9	Have teachers who are aware of my child's individual characteristics and needs in order to help them to grow and develop		
10	Have teachers and staff who are equipped to be able to respond to any special educational needs my child may have		
11	Provide access to clean facilities such as clean water, lunchboxes, toilets etc		
12	Have accessible libraries with enough accessible storybooks/picture books for everyone		
13	Provide extra-curricular activities focusing on arts, music, group work, etc		
14	Have teachers that communicate and engage with me on a regular basis about my child's progress and to encourage me participate in school activities		
15	Have teachers that adapt their teaching and assessment practice to include the needs of my child		
16	Have teachers and staff that have received training in child centered teaching and learning methodologies / child safeguarding / child rights / child development / inclusive education etc		
17	Have teachers that can communicate effectively in the language of my child		
18	Have teachers that make my child feel well supported and encouraged.		

3.5 ENGAGING WITH TEACHERS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

It is important that you engage with your child's school, their teacher and the school management before your child starts school and throughout their school journey.

In order to fully support your child while they are at school you should aim to develop a relationship with your child's school and create a "learning link" in order to keep informed about and engaged in your child's learning experiences at school and to help to bridge the gap between school and home.



The following steps may help to establish that relationship:

Step 1: Visit Your Child's School

You may wish to arrange to visit your child's perspective school (or schools if there is more than one choice) so that you are better informed about what your child can expect when they start. Some schools hold open days that parents can attend or you could make an appointment to visit the school. It is always a good idea to have some questions written down so that you do not forget to ask a particular question during your visit.

Here are some questions that you may find it helpful to think about or ask when visiting a school:

1. Will the school have a place for my child?
2. How will the school support my child?
3. As a parent, how can I help the school to support my child?
4. How many students and teachers will be in my child's class?
5. What will my child's schedule be like?
6. What forms of home-school communication will be available?
7. Is there a specific person in the school with whom I can raise any difficulties that may arise?
8. What is the child safeguarding policy at the school?
9. How often will my child receive homework?
10. How often will my child be assessed at school?

Step 2: Share Relevant Information with the School

You should ensure that the school is aware of any important information about your child such as any medical condition or learning difficulties they may have. It is also important to share any information about your child that will help the school to support their learning such as their likes, dislikes, strengths and achievements.

Step 3: Prepare Yourself and Your Child for Change

Consider the logistical elements to your child attending school such as how are they going to get to school? Who will pick them up? What will they need each day? What food will they eat? Where will they do their homework? When all arrangements have been made you should take the time to talk to your child about what they can expect when they start school.

Step 4: Become Part of the School Community

Take every opportunity to meet with your child's teacher regularly and keep lines of communication open. Respond to letters and requests from the school, keep informed with events and activities and volunteer if there are any opportunities.



3.6 CHECKLIST TO ASSESS YOUR OWN SCHOOL READINESS AS A PARENT OR CAREGIVER

School ready families involves parental and caregivers' attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning, development and transition to school.

Supportive parenting and stimulating home environments have been shown to be among the strongest predictors of school performance and child development during ECCE and primary schooling.

Each individual caregiver to a child, as well as their educational, socio-cultural, and economic resources and aspirations can bear an impact — negative or positive — on a child's development.

Readiness among families differs based on elements mentioned above, however, generally a caregiver can use the below checklist to assess their school readiness or it can be used to assess the family as a whole.

	AS A PARENT OR CAREGIVER	YES	NO
1	Do you have the necessary knowledge and skills with regards to providing nurturing care and its 5 components?		
2	Do you have the necessary knowledge and awareness about school readiness /child development/ child safeguarding/learning through play?		
3	Do you assume your share of responsibilities with regards to preparing children for school?		
4	Do you show a commitment to ensure timely enrolment of your children in ECCE/primary schooling?		
5	Have you visited your child's school and learnt about their enrollment processes?		
6	Have you met with your child's teacher and prepared a set of questions to ask to them and to the school management?		
7	Have you participated in training that can help you with your childcare skills?		
8	Have you prepared the necessary school materials that your child will need and talked to them about what will happen when they attend school?		
9	Do you participate in parent / teacher associations, meetings, conferences and / or events?		
10	Do you organise/participate in community-based activities?		
11	Do you have the necessary means (financial, educational, literacy) to help prepare children for school tasks?		
12	Are you aware of gender norms that can undermine your children's capabilities?		
13	Do you treat and bring up your children in a gender-sensitive manner?		
14	Do you engage with your child through reading, singing songs, drawing, storytelling, and playing games?		
15	Have you assessed your child in the key areas of child development?		
16	Have you helped your child to have learning experiences at home in each of the 4 key areas of child development?		
17	Do you maintain supportive and responsive relationships with your child to help them learn, gain confidence, and gradually grow independent?		
18	Do you reach out and maintain a positive relationship with school and community to the benefit of your child's safety, security, inclusion, and wellbeing as part of the society?		

3.7 TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING JOURNEY

Reflecting on the contents of this toolkit, it is important to remember that school readiness is not something children suddenly acquire when they come of age. It begins in infancy and is an accumulation of all the learning and skills a child has picked up right from birth.

Being ready is more about general maturity and skill level, than it is about learning specific things or having certain knowledge. It also doesn't stop when your children reach primary school, it is important for parents to continue to support their children and their learning throughout their learning journey through primary school and beyond.



Your Role in Your Child's Learning

Be A Role Model For Learning

In the early years, parents are their children's first teachers - exploring nature, reading together, cooking together, and counting together. When a young child begins formal school, the parent's job is to show him how school can extend the learning you began together at home, and how exciting and meaningful this learning can be. As preschoolers transition into primary school, parents can become their children's learning coaches. Through guidance and support, parents help their child organize their time and support their desires to learn new things in and out of school.

Pay Attention To What Your Child Loves

One of the most important things a parent can do is notice their child. Do they love talking or are they shy? Find out what interests them and help them explore it. Let your child show you the way they like to learn.

Tune Into How Your Child Learns

Remember that all children learn in different ways. Many children use a combination of modalities to study and learn. Some learn visually through making and seeing pictures, others through tactile experiences, like building block towers and working with clay. Still

others are auditory learners who pay most attention to what they hear. And they may not learn the same way their siblings (or you) do. By paying attention to how your child learns, you may be able to guide their interest and explain tough topics by drawing pictures together, creating charts, building models, singing songs and even making up rhymes.

Practice What Your Child Learns At School

Many teachers encourage parents to go over what their young children are learning in a non-pressured way and to practice what they may need extra help with at home. This doesn't mean drilling them for success, but it may mean going over basic counting skills, multiplication tables or letter recognition, depending on the needs and learning level of your child. And when you do review learning at home, it should not be strict. Your child should feel as if they want to be a part of the practice.

Set Aside Time To Read Together

Read aloud regularly, even to older children. If your child is a reluctant reader, reading aloud will expose them to the structure and vocabulary of good literature and get her interested in reading more. And let children pick the books they like which will encourage their interest in reading and books in general.

Connect What Your Child Learns To Everyday Life

Make learning part of your child's everyday experience, especially when it comes out of your child's natural questions. When you are cooking, do measuring math together. When you are going on a journey, talk about what you see. When you turn on a device, explore how it works together. Have give-and-take conversations, listening to your child's ideas instead of pouring information into their heads.

Connect What Your Child Learns To The World

Find age-appropriate ways to help your child connect their school learning to world events and events and activities in your locality. Learning should be abstract, it should involve active experiences and have real life context. Start by asking questions about problems in your areas and in the world, and ask your child to offer possible solutions and suggestions to help.

Keep Screen Time To A Minimum

As mentioned above, watching a lot of TV, computers, tablets or phones does not give children the chance to develop their own interests and explore on their own, because the screen controls the agenda. However, unstructured time with books, toys, crafts and friends allows children to learn how to be in charge of their agenda, and to develop their own interests, skills, solutions and expertise³¹.

Learn Something New Yourself

Learning something new yourself is a great way to model the learning process for your child. Take up a new language or craft, or read about an unfamiliar topic. Show your child what you are learning and how you may be struggling. You'll gain a better understanding of what your child is going through and your child may learn study skills by watching you learn and being a role model for lifelong learning.



Ten Things You Can Say That Will Make All The Difference To Your Child's Learning³²:

1. Future Learning

Say to your child the word "yet" as often as you can. For example, when your child says "I can't do it", you say "you can't do it YET". Help them to see the possibility that they will be able to achieve it in the future.

2. Getting Better

Say to your child: 'you're getting better' whenever the opportunity allows. Learning is all about improvement and learning a skill needs patience and practice and more practice to improve. Your child needs lots of support along the way.

3. Learning Vs Doing

Say to your child: 'what did you learn today?' This question is a lot more specific than 'what did you do today?'

4. Encouragement

Say encouraging things as often as you can when your child is beginning to learn something new and encourage them when something still isn't perfect. Remember how much encouragement you gave them when they took their first steps? Your child needs that same encouragement.

5. Then & Now

Say things to your child to show you can see there is improvement, however small. Compare 'then' and 'now' and praise the difference. Learning is about getting better; lots of 'getting better' steps.

6. Mistakes Are OK

Say to your child: 'of course you've made a mistake but keep going, you're learning'. Every child needs to

know that making mistakes is all part of the learning process. Mistakes can be good because you can learn from them. You never really learn something well if you don't make mistakes along the way. Make sure your child knows that mistakes are OK.

7. Brilliant at Everything?

Say to your child "your brain is wired in lots of different ways, some ways are better than others. Let's try to make each part work as well as it can." Few of us will be brilliant at everything but we can all get better at everything.

8. Take a Break

Say to your child when they are tired, 'Lets take a break, do some exercise, then start learning again.' The brain needs blood, oxygen and rest to keep going. If it doesn't get them then it doesn't keep going.

9. Use a 'Hook'

Say to your child: 'If you find facts difficult to remember then its okay to use a hook to help you remember' There are just too many facts to remember so your child should only worry about remembering the ones that really matter. For those, its perfectly fine to give their brain some help if they need to. Anything to trigger the brain to remember is good.

10. Similar Struggles

Say to your child: 'I found x easy to learn, but I had to work harder at y when I was your age.' Make sure your child knows that everybody finds certain things difficult and goes through learning struggles. Show your child realistic models of learning.

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NOTES

“ I'M A FATHER TO A PRESCHOOL GIRL. EVEN THOUGH I'M BUSY AT WORK, I TAKE TIME TO AT LEAST SING A SONG WITH MY DAUGHTER FOR HER EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. ”

“ I WORK MANY HOURS AS A FACTORY WORKER BUT I ALWAYS SPEND TIME TO TEACH MY DAUGHTER AT LEAST 20 MINUTES PER DAY AT HOME DAILY USING MATERIAL HER TEACHER GAVE ME. IT GETS EASIER AND I'M PROUD TO SEE SHE LOVES LEARNING. ”


“ I TAUGHT MY CHILDREN TO BRUSH THEIR TEETH AND TAKE SHOWERS. NOW, I AM VERY HAPPY TO SEE THEM DOING IT INDEPENDENTLY. ”



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