



Starting primary school can be daunting and difficult for any child, but when they have additional needs it can be particularly worrying for parents to know the best way to prepare them.

Hopefully if they have been attending a preschool or nursery they will have had any special educational needs identified and there will be some handover of information about them from one setting to the next. Sometimes the pre-school setting will organise extra visits to the primary school, or prepare a transition book to help your child prepare for the move. You can make your own book about starting school if you ask if you can take some relevant photos when you visit the new school, or even use photos from the school website.

There is often a long school holiday before their first day and this will mean a complete change of routine as well as a new school. There are things you can do to prepare in the couple of weeks prior to their first day.

### **Practise, practise, practise**

Practise the walk or drive to and from school a few times, pointing out the landmarks and showing your child where they will stand in the morning and where the playground is.

Practise dressing and undressing in their new uniform. You could make a visual support for their getting dressed routine if they struggle with keeping on task or finding the correct order for clothing. If they have difficulty with particular fastenings, perhaps you can alter the clothing to substitute buttons with Velcro or a large hook and eye. If your child has sensory sensitivities to clothing, you may need to find alternatives such as seamless socks or particular fabrics that are less likely to irritate. Marks and Spencer has an Easy Dressing range of school uniform that may be helpful

<https://www.marksandspencer.com/l/kids/easy-dressing/easy-dressing-school-uniform>

Or <https://www.sensorysmart.co.uk/>

Practise wearing their new uniform around the house; especially new shoes, and make sure they can fasten and unfasten their shoes effectively.

Practise opening and closing their lunch box/bag and any other snack containers they will be using. You can have a practise picnic using their new lunch items.

### **Visual supports**

If your child is using visual supports already, prepare new ones to help them with their new routines. You could try a visual plan of the new morning routine.

Social Stories are sometimes helpful to address a particular issue or concern. They must always be personal and positive. For help with creating a Social Story there are books and other resources available from the SNAP library.

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it/>



## Communication

Ask the teacher if you can use a home/school communication book, so you can tell the teacher if there is anything that has happened at home that may affect them at school or vice versa. You could also prepare a page listing your child's likes and dislikes, or particular strategies or tools you use if they are anxious for example.

## Using the toilet

Hopefully your child will be shown where the toilets are and be able to communicate when they need to go, but make sure the school knows any specific visuals, signs or language your child uses for this purpose. You may be able to keep a spare change of clothing at school in case of accidents. If your son or daughter still needs to use pull ups you will need to check how the school will deal with this. If intimate care is needed on a regular basis the school would normally draw up an Individual Healthcare Plan.

## What to expect

Expect a change in behaviour while they settle in to the new environment and routine. They may be very tired and struggle to cope with any additional pressure.

Give them a chance to unwind in their preferred way when they get home. You'll be keen to ask lots of questions about their day, but better to save them for later or over tea time or bath time when they are more relaxed.

There may be a few bumps while you and your child get used to the new routine and while the school staff get to know your child, but with a few strategies in place and a bit of time it will start to settle down. It may help to talk to other parents who have young children with additional needs and are going through, or have been through similar experiences. SNAP can help with this and also signpost you to other local or online support groups.

## Useful websites

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/collections/starting-primary-school/1>  
<https://www.contact.org.uk/news-and-blogs/top-tips-for-starting-school/>

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