



Guidance for Parents of children moving from Pre-school to Primary School

Introduction

Moving from pre-school to primary school is a big step for young children. It is an exciting time and most will be looking forward to meeting their teacher and making new friends. It's normal for children to feel a little sad leaving their pre-school and friends, and to feel a little worried about moving to 'big school'. It means getting to know a new building, getting used to new people, new routines, new rules, and new expectations, and that can be daunting for both the children and adults!

Despite all of this, most children will settle in to primary school without difficulty and schools are there to support the children and their parents/guardians during this process. Primary school staff are looking forward to welcoming children into Junior Infants. They are also planning ways to help children settle in at their own pace. If you have any concerns about your child's needs in relation to transition, don't hesitate to contact your child's school.

1. Feeling Safe

It is normal if some children are a little worried about the move. Children feel less worried when they feel safe and protected from harm. The less worried we are, the more we are able to think, plan, and learn. The following may help your child to feel safe:

- **Routines:** Try to maintain healthy routines and schedules to help your child feel more secure and reassured.
- **Talk often to your child** about the changes ahead. Children may not talk about how they feel, but that does not mean they are not thinking about it. Ask what your child is looking forward to, what information they don't have and what concerns they have. Listen carefully.
- Where possible, **give your child simple information**, at their level of understanding, about their concerns and questions. Talking, drawing and/or using play activities about moving to primary school can provide a sense of safety and comfort.
- **Handwashing and Hygiene:** Remind your child of things they will need to know how to do, such as washing their hands and coughing/sneezing into their elbow. Singing while washing hands can make it fun. A story-based or visual approach can help children to understand new routines.
- **Having an object from home** with them can help a child feel safe in the first few days and weeks of school. A photograph or object belonging to you or a lunchbox note can feel like an invisible link between you and your child, like a kiss or a hug to keep in their pocket that reassures them that you are 'minding' them even if you are not there in person.
- If you have childcare available it can be helpful to organise times when you are away from your child so they can get used to spending time away from you but then being reunited. Saying things like "You'll have fun when I'm gone and I'm looking forward to playing when I get back" will also help.

2. Feeling Calm

Be positive and calm when talking about school. Say things like “You are going to have so much fun in big school”. If you are anxious about your child starting school, your child will pick up on it. Talk through any worries your child has with them - this will teach them to deal with their concerns calmly.

- **Talk about and name your child’s feelings** to help them understand and cope with different feelings (for example, “sounds like you are worried that...”). Reading picture stories about feelings helps children to understand that their thoughts (“I am afraid that...”) can affect the way they feel in their bodies (“I have butterflies...”).

- **Listen to them,** Acknowledge (“I know it’s scary going to new places...”) and reassure them that their feelings are ok (“Lots of boys and girls your age are feeling..., when I was your age I..., when your brother started school he...” and so on).

- **It is OK not to have all the answers.** Ask your child what they think might help and listen attentively. Taking deep breaths, thinking about nice things, getting enough sleep, eating healthily, taking physical exercise, making/doing things and having fun with friends will all help your child. Additional guidance to help children identify and manage their feelings can be found [here](#).

- **You know your child best** and you already know how they might cope with the move. Some children may like to talk about it a lot, others will not talk about it at all. Take the lead from your child.

- It is helpful if children can visit their new school. **Use photos/virtual tour** if available on the school website to show children what their new school looks like. Read storybooks or make up stories about starting primary school so they know what to expect.

- **Some children with special educational and/or additional needs can be particularly anxious** about making the change. Ask the school to send or post photos on the school website of the school, classroom, toilets, entrances, school yard, teachers, and so on. You could use this to talk with your child over the summer. The NCSE’s Starting School [booklet](#) and video [here](#) for parents/guardians of children with special educational needs may also help.

- **Sharing information with the new school** about your child’s strengths and needs, likes/dislikes, and what works best in helping them to learn is really important. You can use the Mo Scéal (My Story) [transition templates](#) developed by the NCCA. If your child received additional support in pre-school as part of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme, it would be helpful to share your child’s Access and Inclusion Profile in advance.

- **Sharing information will help ensure that supports are in place for your child in their new school.** It is important that parents/guardians of children with special educational needs link with the local [special educational needs organiser](#) (SENO), if necessary, so that supports are in place.

- **Contact your child’s school about any queries or concerns you have.** It is common for primary schools to provide guidance to parents/guardians on things such as school books, required materials, uniforms, and to make parents/guardians aware of the necessary protocols and procedures within the school. This information is also often available on the school website.

- **If your child does not have a confirmed place in a school for September 2023,** contact your [local educational welfare officer](#) (EWO) or [special educational needs organiser](#) SENO in relation to enrolment in a special school or class.

3. Feeling Able to Manage

When we believe that we can do what is needed, deal with challenges and handle tough times, we feel better. When we believe that we are supported by others who can and will help us manage if we need help, we also feel better. The following may help your child to feel supported and to feel that they can manage things:

- **Tell your child that their new teacher will help them** if they have any worries when they are at school.
- **Remind them of the friends or classmates from pre-school** that are moving to the same primary school and that they will see their older brothers/sisters/cousins there.
- If your child is going to a different school to their friends, **talk to them about ways to make new friends**. If possible, keep in touch with their pre-school friends over the summer. As a family, talk about positive memories of starting school.
- **Get your child involved in planning** for the move. You can do this by letting them choose their schoolbag, lunchbox, pencil case etc. Let them try on their new uniform. Ask your child what information he/she would like you to share with their new teacher.
- **Continue to encourage their independence**, for example, packing their own school bag, putting on and taking off their coat/jumper/shoes, opening

and closing their lunch box and drink bottle, using the toilet, washing their hands, wiping their nose with a tissue. Further information about developing your child's independence skills is available on the DCEDIY [Ready for School](#) webpage.

- **Play is very important for your child's learning** and development as well as being good for their general health and wellbeing. The [Let's Play Ireland](#) initiative has very good information about play and the DCEDIY [Ready to Play](#) webpage also has advice on developing children's play skills.
- **Let your child's new teacher know about anything they need extra help with**. This will allow the school and teacher to prepare and plan in advance, and provide additional supports if necessary. If your child is involved with HSE Primary Care or Early Intervention/Network Disability services, or has been in the past, it is important to share this information with the school (including any reports) so that they have all the information they need to best support your child.
- During this time of transition, it helps parents/guardians to talk to each other. Where possible, **get support from your family and friends**. Talk with other parents/guardians about how you are feeling and ask them what you need to organise, buy and plan for the school year.

4. Feeling Connected

This is about having relationships with others who understand and support you.

- Tell your child that pre-school is finishing. Help them to understand that it's normal to feel sad or lonely about this. A lot of pre-schools will have some 'ending' activities to mark this time. Talk to them about good times in their pre-school; things they did and learned; friends they made and things they are most proud of. You might have a folder of their work from pre-school and can spend some time looking through it together over the summer.
- Talk positively about getting to meet old friends again and making new friends, about games they might play, and new experiences they might have. Some children may feel a little shy when seeing old friends after the summer or when meeting new friends. Talk to them about what they have done before when they were feeling shy or nervous. Use stories or role play and practice to help them make friends, if you think this will help your child.

- Consider asking the new school to group and/or seat your child with a child they know well and are comfortable with.
- Encourage your child to be kind to other children during this time. If possible, try to stay connected with other children who will be going to the same school over the summer months to maintain friendships and connections.
- Develop your own connections with other parents/guardians to support your child's friendships. Get to know other families and children who may be moving to the same primary school and are in a similar situation as you.
- Children benefit enormously when parents/guardians work closely with their child's school and build positive relationships with school staff. The National Parents Council (NPC-Primary) provides information about how schools work and ways for parents to get involved.

5. Feeling Hopeful

Hope can help us cope and bounce back when things are challenging. Hope may also include a belief that others will be there to help. The following can promote a sense of hope:

- Show excitement and happiness about your child going to primary school. Ask your child to tell you about all the nice, positive things they are looking forward to (for example: new friends, new classroom, new lessons, new toys) while also letting them know how brave they are. Share family memories of times when they were brave in doing something for the first time, and how that worked out well for them.
- Talk to them about their strengths and interests and how they will use these in their new school.
- Going back to usual activities that involve separation from parents/guardians will also support them.
- Having a family celebration to celebrate a child starting 'big school' can give them pride and a sense of achievement. For example, your child could choose what special meal the family will have to celebrate their first week.
- Finally, remember that it is important for parents/guardians to say hopeful and positive things about the change and to expect all to work out well.

This guidance is underpinned by the framework developed by Hobfoll et al. (2007) for supporting resilience.

Other Resources

- See [gov.ie/let's get ready](https://www.gov.ie/let's-get-ready) for more on getting ready for school
- See the [parents centre on gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie/parents-centre) for general information