

## PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR STARTING SCHOOL



START  
SCHOOL  
WITH A  
SMILE

Starting school is an exciting time for young children and their parents. It can be a daunting time, too. But with a little preparation and encouragement, most children will settle in easily at school.

PACEY childcare professionals have a great deal of experience in helping children to cope with times of transition. Here are some top tips, put together by some of our most experienced members, to help you prepare your child for starting school.

We hope they help you both start school with a smile!



## DON'T WORRY

Your child doesn't need to be able to read, write or do sums before they start school. Children start school with a wide range of abilities and their teacher will be skilled at helping children progress at their own level.

What's most important is that you and your child have fun together in those preschool months and years – sharing stories, singing songs, playing games and talking about anything and everything.

PACEY has produced four factsheets, packed with easy and enjoyable activity ideas to give your child a gentle introduction to the listening, communicating, mark-making and number work they'll do in reception. You'll find them at [www.pacey.org.uk/schoolready](http://www.pacey.org.uk/schoolready)



### LISTENING GAMES

Play some fun listening and doing games to help with following instructions. 'Simon says' or 'Can you find?' games are great for this.

## SOME THINGS TO TRY

- Chat with your child about starting school. What do they think it will be like? What are they most looking forward to? Is there anything they're unsure or worried about?
- Look at the school's brochure, prospectus or website together and talk about the pictures.
- Find photos of you and other family members at school, and chat about happy memories from your own school days.
- If possible, visit the school with your child before they start – either on formal open days, or fêtes, plays and other events.
- Read books together about starting school (see the next page).
- If your child seems anxious about school, try focusing on the things they'll like best – maybe the sandpit, playhouse or new friends. Perhaps they have some friends from preschool who will be starting reception at the same time.
- Practise the school morning routine, including getting dressed and eating breakfast in time to leave.
- Practise the school run so that you're both prepared for the school morning journey.



### THESE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT GOING TO SCHOOL MAY BE HELPFUL:

- I am too Absolutely Small for School (Charlie and Lola) by Lauren Child
- Starting School by Janet and Allen Ahlberg
- Topsy and Tim Start School by Jean and Gareth Adamson
- Harry and the Dinosaurs Go to School by Ian Whybrow and Adrian Reynolds
- Come to School too, Blue Kangaroo! by Emma Chichester Clark
- Going to School Sticker Book and Starting School Sticker Book – Usborne

## MORE THINGS TO TRY

- If your child has a particular worry – perhaps about wetting themselves, not liking the food, or feeling ill – talk about these concerns with your child and with the class teacher. Provide reassurance by discussing what to do and who to tell in these situations.
- If your child has a favourite security toy or blanket, try to get them used to being without it during the day. Talk to the class teacher to find out if your child is allowed to bring their toy or blanket and leave it in a tray or on their peg.
- If you have arranged childcare before or after school, talk this through with your child. If the childcare arrangement is new, try a settling-in period for this before the school term starts. Try putting together a wallchart of the week to help your child know what to expect.
- Have fun completing PACEY's 'getting dressed for school' activity together – it will help your child anticipate the daily routine ahead!

## ... AND SOME THINGS TO AVOID

- It's natural to feel nervous about your child starting school, but remember that your child can easily pick up on your emotions. Try to be relaxed and positive, rather than showing your own nerves.
- Try not to bombard your child with endless talk about school – treating it in a matter-of-fact way rather than focusing on the “big step ahead” will help soothe an anxious child.
- Don't over-hype school, as your little one may feel let down or mistrustful if it doesn't live up to expectations!
- Try not to make comments such as “I hated school” or “I was rubbish at school”, which might give your child a negative attitude.

PUTTING TOGETHER  
A WALLCHART OF THE  
WEEK CAN HELP  
YOUR CHILD KNOW  
WHAT TO EXPECT

## BEING PREPARED

If your child has already spent time in a childcare or preschool setting, they're probably already well on the way to having the social and practical skills they need to succeed at school. They're used to spending time apart from you, mixing with other children, taking instructions from and communicating with other adults, taking some responsibility for tidying up after themselves and looking after their own belongings.

Don't worry if your child hasn't attended a childcare setting or preschool. Playing with other children, whether friends and family members, or other children at the park or soft play area, is all good practice for forming friendships with classmates at school. Often children who don't know one another will make friends very easily, but if your child struggles, teach them some useful phrases such as "can I join in?" or "do you want to share?".

If you already know some other children who will be in your child's class, why not organise a play date or outing together? As well as being beneficial for the youngsters, it's helpful for you to be able to chat about your own feelings and anxieties with their parents, who may be feeling the same.

As the start of term approaches, try to get into the school routine, so your child gets used to getting up, going to bed, and having meals and snacks at the times they will on school days. Bath time and stories instead of TV and tablet games all help children to wind down before bedtime. Making time in the evening to chat about your day for 10 minutes can be a lovely routine for sharing fun times and any worries. Nutritious meals and plenty of sleep will help them to concentrate, learn and thrive at school.

If your child has naps, it would be wise to try phasing this out. This should be more manageable for them if they have a good bedtime routine. Maybe offer a down time after lunch rather than a nap. Some reception classes do provide a space for little ones to nap if needed, but if you can introduce the longer day before the school term starts, it should help with transition.



### CAN DO ATTITUDE

Help to develop your child's independence and a 'can do' attitude by giving them a few everyday responsibilities as they get closer to school age. Perhaps they could lay the table, feed a pet or put their own laundry away.

TEACH THEM  
SOME USEFUL  
PHRASES SUCH AS  
"CAN I JOIN IN?"  
OR "DO YOU WANT  
TO SHARE?"

## SELF-CARE

It will make life easier for your child (and school staff!) if your child can master these self-care skills before they start school:

### GOING TO THE TOILET

Support your child to be confident about getting to the loo in time and wiping properly, using toilet paper rather than moist wipes.

Do you have a different phrase for going to the toilet at home? Letting the class teacher know what this is will ensure they understand what your child is trying to ask.

### WASHING THEIR HANDS

Chat about the importance of good handwashing with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet or handling animals. A good way of showing how germs can linger is to let your child cover their hands in paint (pretend germs!) and then try to wash it all off.

### DRESSING AND UNDRESSING

Let your child practise putting on their school clothes, taking them off and folding them neatly in preparation for PE lessons, especially if there are fiddly fastenings such as shirt buttons and zips. Clothes with elastic bands and shoes with Velcro® are easier to handle for young children. Teach your child tricks such as putting labels at the back, holding cuffs to stop sleeves riding up, and wrinkling tights to put toes in first.

### FEEDING THEMSELVES

From September 2014, free school meals will be available to all children from reception to year 2, but many schools will offer the option of packed lunches, too. Children having school dinners need to be able to use a full-sized knife and fork and carry a plate or tray. If your child is taking a lunchbox, make sure they can open it as well as any containers and packets inside.

### USING A TISSUE

Introduce your child to the routine of 'catch it, bin it, kill it' - catching their sneeze or runny nose in a tissue, putting it in the bin straightaway, then washing hands to kill germs. Some children find nose-blowing difficult, so play games to practise nose control - blowing a feather into the air, for example.

### TIDYING UP

Get your child into the habit of hanging their coat up, putting their toys away, clearing the table, and so on, to prepare them for doing these things at school. Why not turn it into a game? Many schools use a piece of music to indicate tidy up time and motivate children to help. Try this at home and ask which song your child would like. 'Mission Impossible' is a popular one!



### FLIP TRICK

Have you heard of the 'flip trick' for putting a coat on?

Put your child's coat upside down on a table in front of them.

They can then put their hands in the armholes and flip the coat over their head - a handy way for your child to put their coat on by themselves!

## YOUR FIRST WEEK CHECKLIST

- Do you know exactly where you need to take your child, and at what time?
- Do you know where to collect your child, and at what time?
- Do you know what equipment they'll need for the first few days? (PE kit, book bag, spare clothes and so on)
- Do you and your child know where to hang coats and PE kits?
- Does your child know who'll be collecting them each day? If they are attending an after-school club, it could be a teacher, an assistant or a member of the after-school club. If it's your regular childminder, have you reworked your contract to include the school run details?
- Do you know if you take your child into the classroom and settle them, or are they expected to go in on their own?
- Have you put name labels on absolutely everything?! Show your child where the labels are and make sure they are sewn or stuck somewhere that's easy for them to find.



### BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

It's quite common for children's behaviour at home to change when they first start school. Don't be surprised if your little one becomes more clingy, argumentative, lethargic, excitable or prone to tantrums for a while.

## THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Many children settle into school life easily, while others take longer. Don't worry if your child is tearful and clingy for the first few days – it's quite normal. Although you might feel terrible leaving them, they will most likely be playing quite happily within a few minutes.

If your child seems exhausted at the end of the day, let them have some quiet time or even a nap when they get home. If they're starving hungry, a healthy snack and drink can help restore energy levels.

Let your child get used to school life before introducing after-school activities. It's a good idea to keep the first few weekends quiet, too, as they will likely need time to recharge, just as we do when we start a new job or a big project.

Keep talking to your child about their feelings about school, and put aside some special time to chat about their day. Some children are enthusiastic at first, but once the reality of going to school day after day sets in, they can become reluctant. If this happens with your child, use a calendar to help them understand when weekends and holidays are coming up. You might want to arrange a few treats for them to look forward to as well.

KEEP TALKING TO  
YOUR CHILD ABOUT  
THEIR FEELINGS  
ABOUT SCHOOL

## THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Establish a friendly relationship with your child's class teacher, including finding out their preferred times and means of communication. They're experts at helping young children to settle in and thrive at school, and will be able to reassure you about most issues that come up. If you do have any concerns, raise them early to prevent them from developing into bigger problems.

Summer-born children in particular, who start school soon after turning four, may need extra sensitivity and flexibility to help them settle in. If there's anything you think might help your child to feel settled, suggest it to their class teacher. Remember, you know your own child best.

For further resources on helping prepare your child for school, as well as information about childcare, go to [www.pacey.org.uk](http://www.pacey.org.uk)

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We have around 35,000 members – childminders, nannies and nursery workers – working around England and Wales.

Every day they demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards of care and help children get the best start in life.

WE WISH  
YOU AND YOUR  
CHILD HAPPY  
SCHOOL DAYS  
AHEAD!

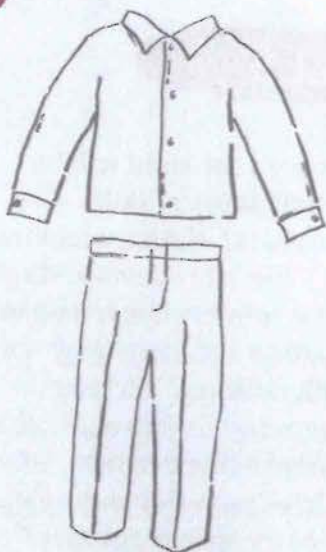




## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical development is important as part of being school ready. Here are some child development stages to think about and some ideas of things you can do with your child. This is not an exhaustive list and not a tick list either – remember that all children are unique – they will have their own interests and will develop at different rates.

### TOP TIPS



## BEGINNER PHYSICAL SKILLS

- Is your child independent using the toilet?
- Can they manage their own personal hygiene and independently wash and dry their hands?
- Why not give your child some practise sessions of getting dressed into their school uniform (if you do not have a uniform it might be a good idea to decide on what will be their 'school clothes'). This will reduce any upset and stress on your first day of going to school and also builds up your child's ability to dress and undress for when they need to do this at school for PE sessions.
- What about putting their shoes on the right feet and managing the fastenings? This is something to think about when buying their school shoes and PE pumps.
- Give your child some tube shaped dried pasta to thread onto a length of string. This develops hand eye co-ordination - a useful start to so many other skills.
- Try build a tower with blocks or stacking cups – how tall can your child build (you could also practise counting at the same time)! Who can build the highest tower? You could use empty formula milk tins (etc) if you do not have any blocks.
- Can you play cafés and give your child a small tray to carry things on – they will need this skill when it comes to school lunchtimes.
- Can your child use a knife, fork and spoon confidently?



## INTERMEDIATE PHYSICAL SKILLS



- Some of the larger physical skills are important too. Can your child ride a tricycle? Walk up the stairs using alternative feet (i.e. one foot per step). Manoeuvre around various obstacles? Run around and 'stop'? Jump landing safely on two feet? Stand on one foot? Hop? Your child needs these types of skills to be well balanced – this will help them to be able to sit still!!!
- Show your child how to swirl the ribbon around their head and round and round from their shoulder. Larger physical skills like these are also important and need to be developed/used before your child can hold a pencil using the tripod grip and start to form letters to learn to write

## ADVANCED PHYSICAL SKILLS



- Once these large movements become easy your child will be ready for the more advanced fine or small physical skills. Can your child use a pair of (child-sized) scissors? Notice when mark making how your child holds a crayon – there are several stages that they go through before they reach a comfortable tripod grip required for writing. For more information and ideas why not read the **parent factsheet about mark making?** Picking up small objects using their first two fingers and thumb also helps them to build and strengthen the muscles in their hands. You could try plastic tweezers to pick up dried peas (for example). Who can get most peas from one side of an area to another?
- Additional things can really help your child to be physically and emotionally prepared for school. Do you have a clear bedtime routine? Establishing a good routine in the weeks/months leading up to starting school will help. Your child will probably be very tired having been at school – starting a good bedtime routine before they start school will help. Also establishing (or maintaining) a good breakfast and getting dressed routine will be helpful to be organised in time to get to school. Changing routines after they start school may lead to more confusion.

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## COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

Your child does not need to know the alphabet/phonics or be able to read and write before they start school. They will learn all these things whilst at school, however, here is a list of things which will help your child to be ready for more learning at school. This is not exhaustive and not a tick list – all children are unique – they will have their own interests and will develop at different rates.



Does your child have favourite songs and rhymes?

Do they have a favourite book? Do you read on a regular basis with your child? It will be a huge boost to your child's future literacy skills if they are familiar with several stories and rhymes before they start school. If they have a favourite story can they 'tell' you the story? This is a start to reading skills. Why not read our **parent factsheet** about sharing books or use the **activity sheets** on sharing books about starting school?

Does your child understand and use prepositions (a preposition is a word used before a noun (or a pronoun) to show the relationship to the other word). For example words such as: in; on; next to; and under. You can model the use of prepositions when talking to your child. For example "can you put the cars in the box" or "it is under the table"

Can they recall an event in the correct order? E.g. "We went to the park and saw the ducks"

Is your child able to ask and answer 'what', 'who' and 'how' questions? For example "What are you doing?" "Who is jumping?" "How did the path get wet?"

Does your child speak in sentences? Typically how many words will they use in a sentence 5? 6? or more?

Can your child carry out a small task/errand? For example "can you please get me the TV remote" or "can you please tidy up your dolls?"

Can your child start a conversation? Can they join in a conversation making relevant replies or comments?

After you have read a book to your child are they able to answer simple questions? For example "who did the mouse meet first?" or "Where did Grandma go?"

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## Parent Factsheet Transitions to School

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### Introduction

This factsheet identifies what a transition is and explores the various transitions that children may go through. We also look at what you can do to help your child with their transition into school.

### Key points

The word transition (or in the plural form transitions) is a noun meaning: the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another. In this context it means children moving from being a pre-school child to being a school child. This is a transition for you as well as your child!

When your child first starts school, it may be the first time they have been away from you and it can be a stressful time for both of you. Alternatively your child may have already experienced a childcare setting. In either scenario there are things you can do to help your child with their transition into school.

There are many types of transitions in a child's life. There are big transitions such as moving house, starting childcare for the first time or starting school. Then there are smaller transitions during the day such as moving from an activity to snack or meal time. Whether big or small transitions can be stressful for children (and sometimes for you), helping your child cope with them by making transitions as smooth as possible will help their future resilience to change.

Your child may experience some level of anxiety at being separated from you. This is a normal stage of development for babies at around 8 to 14 months, but can also occur at different times in a young child's life. Your child may become distressed when you leave the room. These feelings are tied up with a very real fear that their parent or trusted adult will go away and not come back. This fear can feel like a physical pain. It is helpful to acknowledge this and provide your child with the knowledge that you will be coming back, or who will be collecting them from school each day.

All schools should have a plan for settling in new children. Good practice would mean that this gives you and your child the time you need to feel comfortable and confident in the new environment. Guidelines for The Early Years age group of children recognises the importance of transitions and supporting children through times of change.



Remember that each child is different and some will need longer to settle in. It is useful for you and your child to visit the school a few times, if possible, before your child is due to start. Ideally you would stay with your child on the first visit and then leave them with their new key person for a short period of time, to help build their confidence.

### **What does this mean for me?**

New experiences coupled with your feelings about leaving your child in a new place can be a stressful time in a family's life. As a parent it is normal and acceptable to feel anxious but it is important not to pass these feelings on to your child.

It is important time is taken to plan carefully for any transitions or changes to ensure they happen as smoothly as possible. The school may already have systems in place, for example, planned times for settling visits and a new parents information pack. If your child attends a childcare setting there may already be links with the school here too and further plans for helping your child in their transition.

Ask any questions you may have, it is important you feel confident about your transition to school. Get to know your child's key person, they will be your first point of contact at school (refer to our factsheet about the Role of the Key Person for more information).

Share information about your child with their key person before they start, the more information you can give them about your child's likes, dislikes, development and routines, the more they will be able to support your child.

See it as an opportunity for you to make new friends, talking to other parents can help you feel reassured – you can also speak to them about where they are buying their children's uniforms (etc).

### **What can you do to support your child?**

Talk about up and coming change with you child and approach transitions in a positive and exciting way. Help children express their feelings and emotions about the change and acknowledge their feelings.

Help your child celebrate memories of their current situation as well as look forward to the future.

On the Starting School Together project each child will be given a Jolfi Bear and a log book/diary for you to record what your child and Jolfi have done over the summer time. This might be your child drawing pictures, you or your child taking photographs or perhaps you capturing your child's thoughts and words by writing them down. The idea is then that your child can take Jolfi to school with them in September as a familiar item and then use the logbook to share their summer experiences with their key person in school.



A book of familiar photos that a child can take with them for the day may also help if your child is experiencing separation anxiety. Perhaps you could add laminated photos to a key ring for your child. Making a book about school on a settling visit may be possible.

It helps if you can say goodbye in a calm and brief manner and tell your child when you will be back. Never sneak out, as this can make your child feel abandoned.

Smile! You may feel like crying inside but try not to show it.

Talk about starting school in positive terms, as something exciting and enjoyable, even if your school days weren't exactly the best of your life. Don't belittle any fears your child may have, listen to them and talk to them about their feelings.

Read stories about starting school, there are many to choose from – there is a list at the end of this factsheet and you could also go to the local library and borrow books?

When choosing items of clothing or uniform for school think about clothes that are easy for them to pull on and off. Try and choose shoes with Velcro fastenings as this will make them feel more independent, as they won't need to ask for help tying the laces. If possible take your child with you when shopping for school clothes. If they have helped you to choose them they are more likely to be happy to wear them.

Your child will be staying for lunch at school. Talk about this with your child, will you be providing packed lunches or will they be having a school meal.

### **Some examples of books about starting school**

At School. From the Oxford Reading Tree First Experience Collection (this has characters that may appear in your child's school reading books if your school uses this reading scheme) by Roderick Hunt and Alex Brychta

Going to School. From the Usborne Book of First Experiences by Anne Civardi and Stephen Cartwright

Harry and the Dinosaurs go to School by Ian Whybrow and Adrian Reynolds

I am Too Absolutely Small for school by Lauren Child

I want my Mummy by Tracey Corderoy

Lucy and Tom start school by Shirley Hughes

My First Day at Nursery School by Becky Edwards



## Children's Emotional Needs

This factsheet provides information about exploring the importance of supporting children's emotional wellbeing

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### Applicable to

Early Years Practitioners, including teachers that are involved in children's transitions into school

### Key points

Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to secure 'mental health'. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development. (Laevers, F. 2005)

Children need to develop a positive sense of themselves and others and a positive disposition to learn.

Children's emotional well-being helps them to know themselves and what they can do.

Ensuring that children's well-being is supported upon their transition to school (as with other key events in their lives) is important.

### What does this mean for me?

Starting school may be the first time that a child and parent(s) are to spend a significant time away from each other. For some children it may be the first time that they are to spend time in a large group situation. For others starting school may mean them leaving their familiar childcare setting, starting school and starting a new childcare setting offering wrap around care. Whatever the child's situation may be you can help children through separation anxiety by having a key person assigned to each child/family. The EYFS (2014), p21 3.27 states that 'Each child must be assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs...' As the EYFS also includes children until they start in Year 1 at school careful thought needs to be given to these key person relationships. They will include a key person in school, this maybe the reception class teacher or other staff working in reception class. Additionally for children who attend some kind of wrap around care there will be a key person for you in that childcare setting.

Supporting both parents and children in managing their feelings about starting school. For some parents this can be an anxious time, for others not so. For some parents this might be their first child going to school, so the school build, rules and systems will be new to them. For other parents they may have been through this before with an older child. In either case parents might need your support, understanding and advice helping children settle. Remember that parents' anxiety can transfer to their child.



Understanding child development – what behaviours manifest themselves at certain ages, why and what strategies we can share with parents to help.

Supporting children to achieve a sense of self and appreciating each child as an individual.

Ensuring that transitions are managed sensitively and effectively by working with parents/carers and the school.

Ensuring that children’s familiar routines are followed to provide security and stability.

Consider providing a visual timetable for children. This will help young children to see what comes next in their day. It will also be supportive of those children with communication difficulties, additional needs or with English as an additional language.

Providing consistent boundaries and ground rules, ensuring that children know what behaviour is expected of them.

Ensuring that the environment is safe and secure but at the same time allowing the children to take small risks in a safe way to extend their development. The aim is for children to be confident to access resources as they choose. When they are in a new environment they may not feel confident to try and explore new experiences. We also aim for the children to have the confidence to ask questions – again in a new environment for some children this will be a challenge.

Providing support, encouragement and appropriate praise to support children in their play, development and learning.

Supporting children in expressing their feelings in an appropriate way e.g. it is okay to be feel sad. Talk to children why they are sad about things that can make them happier.

Supporting children to communicate and help them to develop language providing extra support for those children who have English as an Additional Language.

Understanding/learning about cultural differences so that individual support can be given to help children and families learn the British cultures and values if necessary.

Ensuring the environment is warm and accepting of everyone (Early Years Foundation Stage, Practice Guidance Cards, 2008)

### **How will you know that children’s emotional well-being is fostered?**

- Children show enjoyment, they are having fun and taking pleasure in interacting with others and in activities.
- Children show curiosity and use their senses to explore the world around them.
- The children look happy, smile or laugh easily, engage spontaneously in chatting or even singing.
- Children are relaxed with no visible signs of tension. They initiate activities, seek challenge and show a ‘can do’ attitude.
- Children have energy and vitality. Children are lively and expressive. They radiate. They move around the room with confidence.



- Children are comfortable around the adults and other children. They have a good sense of humour and will laugh and share a joke.
- Children show pride in what they have accomplished.

### **Resources to support children with their emotional development**

- Puppets
- Persona dolls. These dolls feature different personalities, features and cultural backgrounds.
- Books and stories reflecting feelings, different lifestyles, specialised subjects such as bereavement and other key events in children's lives including starting school.
- For settings helping children with their transitions to school you could try a 'school' home corner and include book bags and items of school uniform for the children to try on.

### **Reflective task**

Imagine you are a 4 year old. You have already been to two different childcare settings, most recently a nursery (which you really enjoyed) and now you are about to start school and will be leaving your nursery as they do not provide wrap around care. What would you be feeling? How could you support this child?

### **References**

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### **Additional resources**

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Bowlby, J. (1988) A Secure Base. Brunner-Routledge

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) Social and Emotional Aspects of Development, Guidance for practitioners working in the Early Years Foundation Stage DCSF

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