

Starting Reception:

Why it matters

Guide for early years settings and childminders:
talking to parents about school readiness.

There is an expectation gap.

Almost 90% of parents

believe their child is ready to start Reception. Teachers know far fewer are.

94% of parents

want more information about starting Reception.

Many families don't know what starting Reception looks like or why having the right skills matters. This isn't a lack of care - it's lack of clarity.

What does it mean to be ready to start Reception?

School readiness is about life skills. The Starting Reception definition provides a list of these skills, themed under four pillars:



Growing independence
(e.g. eating, dressing, toileting)



Building relationships and communicating
(e.g. taking turns, sharing feelings and following simple instructions)



Physical development
(e.g. climbing and jumping, using scissors)



Healthy routines
(e.g. going to bed at around the same time each night and limiting screen time)



Why setting expectations with families matters

We often assume parents know more than they do.

Most haven't been to school since they were a child. Some will never have been in a school in the UK. The majority have never been told what being ready for Reception really means.

Setting clear expectations is critical. Sharing what being ready for Reception means, and what it doesn't.

- **Share the Starting Reception definition** with families so they are clear on the list of skills to practise. It can help build knowledge and confidence, as well as giving ideas for ways to help their children at home.
- **Challenge misconceptions** – starting school isn't about reading, writing or the perfect pencil case. It's about life skills.
- **Encourage parents to visit schools** – attending open days, welcome events and transition activities can help families to see what a day in Reception is like. This will help them understand why these skills matter, as they are the foundations for learning.





How to create a clear, shared understanding with families


Use parent meetings, newsletters and transition activities and communications to share key messages with parents. Start early and repeat often!

Practise skills in your setting, and tell parents about it - replicate routines, like putting on their coat to go outside and play. Tell parents what you are doing and why.

Make it real with examples

 In a busy lunch hall, children who can't eat independently may eat less at school and lack the hand strength to use a pencil correctly.

 In the classroom, there is just one teacher for every 30 children – so being able to go to the toilet and dress independently really matters.

 Sitting on the carpet to listen to a story or receive simple instructions means children won't miss out on learning.

Be honest, not alarming:

children who don't develop the key skills by age 5 are almost three times more likely to be out of education or employment at age 17. Practising these skills early really matters.

Make support visible:

encourage questions, share simple activities for home and signpost useful resources.

Work with schools that your children will attend:

work together to align expectations, share messages and identify families who may need extra support before a child starts school.