

A GUIDE TO *School Readiness*

Sinéad Caulfield

@couragetoachieve

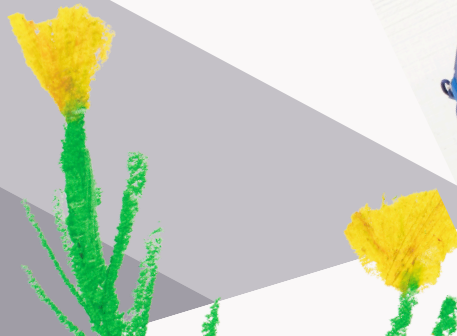
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



START-SMART

FOCUS AREA CHECKLIST

- UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL READINESS
- BUILDING DAILY ROUTINES & TRANSITIONS
- EMOTIONAL REGULATION & SEPARATION ANXIETY
- SOCIAL & PLAY SKILLS
- FINE & GROSS MOTOR SKILLS FOR SCHOOL TASKS
- COMMUNICATION & SELF-ADVOCACY





INTENTIONS

Achieve

STEP #1: YOUR WHY STATEMENT.

What made you want to prepare your child for school in this thoughtful way?

Write down what's in your heart - your hopes, your goals, and what really matters most for your family in this next chapter.

STEP #2: YOUR INTENTIONS. What do you hope your child will feel, learn, or experience as they get ready for school, and how can you support that?

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

WHAT FEELINGS DO I WANT MY CHILD TO CARRY WITH THEM

INDEPENDENCE & CONFIDENCE

WHAT EVERYDAY SKILLS OR RESPONSIBILITIES DO I HOPE THEY'LL BUILD TO FEEL CAPABLE AND PROUD?

CONNECTION & BELONGING

WHAT SOCIAL OR RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES DO I HOPE FOR, FRIENDSHIPS, FEELING INCLUDED, TRUST IN ADULTS?

LEARNING & CURIOSITY

WHAT DO I HOPE MY CHILD DISCOVERS OR BECOMES CURIOUS ABOUT DURING THIS TRANSITION?

COMMUNICATION & EXPRESSION

HOW DO I WANT TO SUPPORT MY CHILD'S ABILITY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES, ASK FOR WHAT THEY NEED, OR SHARE FEELINGS?

SUPPORTIVE HOME ENVIRONMENT

WHAT CAN I DO AS A PARENT TO NURTURE THESE EXPERIENCES—WHAT SUPPORT, ROUTINES, OR ATTITUDES CAN I OFFER?

FOCUS AREA 1

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL READINESS



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



“Being Ready” vs.

Helping the School Be Ready

We often hear the question: “Is my child ready for school?” but that puts all the pressure on the child to meet a fixed standard. In reality, school readiness is a two-way street.

A common misconception is that children must reach a certain level of maturity, learning, or behaviour before they can succeed in school.

If a child struggles with transitions or language, it’s seen as a delay or problem.
But this isn’t true.

The reality is that every child is unique and brings their own strengths, challenges, and learning styles.

Instead of asking “Is the child ready for school?” we should ask “Is the school ready to meet this child where they are?”

This idea reflects a universal design for learning (UDL) approach: making classrooms more adaptable and responsive so that all children can access education, regardless of sensory needs, language barriers, or motor challenges.

Reference:

– Graue, M. Elizabeth. (1992). “Social Interpretations of Readiness for Kindergarten.”

Holistic Readiness

More Than ABCs and 123s

School readiness is about more than just knowing letters, numbers, or how to hold a pencil. True readiness includes the whole child—their body, mind, heart, and relationships. When we view readiness holistically, we support a child's full development across four essential domains:

- Social Readiness
- Emotional Readiness
- Physical Readiness
- Cognitive Readiness

@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Emotional Readiness

A child who feels nervous at drop-off but can use a comfort object or calm-down strategy shows emotional readiness in action.

Recognising and expressing feelings appropriately.

Beginning to self-regulate when upset, overstimulated, or frustrated.

Feeling safe to separate from caregivers and adapt to new routines.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Social Readiness

A child who can work with a partner during play or tell a teacher when they need the toilet is demonstrating social readiness.

Ability to interact with peers and adults in a group setting.

Skills like turn-taking, sharing, making friends, and asking for help.

Understanding basic social rules like raising hands or waiting in line.



@couragetoachieve

achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Physical Readiness

A child who can dress themselves for outdoor play or open their snack container is building physical independence.

Developing gross motor skills (running, jumping, balancing) and fine motor skills (holding crayons, managing zippers).

Building stamina for a school day that includes movement, sitting still, and carrying a bag or lunchbox.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Cognitive Readiness

A child who asks “why?” or who can follow a two-step direction (like “get your shoes and put on your coat”) is showing emerging cognitive skills.

Engaging in thinking, problem-solving, and basic early learning skills.

Understanding cause and effect, following simple instructions, and showing curiosity.



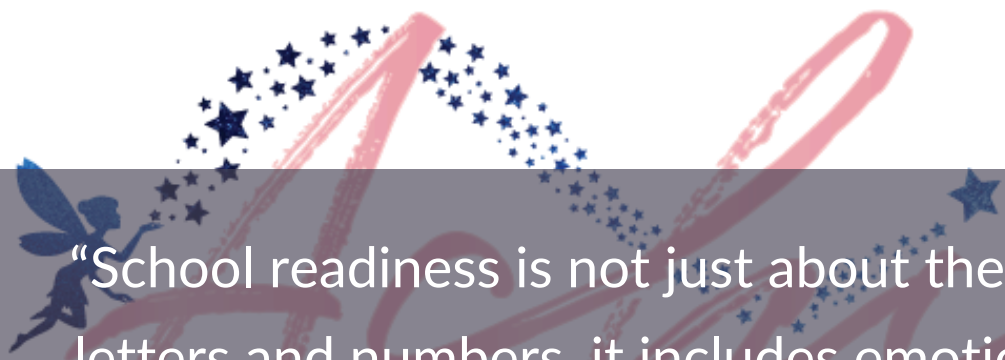
@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Key Takeaway

Each child develops at their own pace across these areas. Strengths in one domain can support growth in others. Readiness is not about ticking every box, it's about meeting each child where they are and nurturing their journey.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



“School readiness is not just about the child’s ability to learn letters and numbers, it includes emotional well-being, social competence, and motor skills.” – Snow, C. E. (2007). School readiness and the transition to kindergarten.

WHAT DAILY TASKS CAN YOUR CHILD DO INDEPENDENTLY AT HOME, AND HOW MIGHT THESE RELATE TO LIFE AT SCHOOL?

PURPOSE: HELPS PARENTS CONNECT SKILLS LIKE DRESSING, FOLLOWING ROUTINES, OR TIDYING UP TO INDEPENDENCE AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING IN THE CLASSROOM.

HOW DOES YOUR CHILD COPE WITH CHANGES, FRUSTRATION, OR BEING TOLD ‘NO’, AND WHAT HELPS THEM MANAGE THOSE MOMENTS?

PURPOSE: ENCOURAGES PARENTS TO THINK ABOUT EMOTIONAL REGULATION, FLEXIBILITY, AND RESILIENCE, WHICH ARE FOUNDATIONAL FOR CLASSROOM SUCCESS.

IN WHAT WAYS DOES YOUR CHILD INTERACT WITH OTHER CHILDREN OR ADULTS OUTSIDE THE FAMILY, WHAT STRENGTHS AND STRUGGLES DO YOU NOTICE?

PURPOSE: OPENS DISCUSSION AROUND SOCIAL SKILLS, COMMUNICATION, TURN-TAKING, AND ADAPTABILITY IN GROUP SETTINGS.

READINESS RAINBOW

Children and Adults, get creative!

Use paints, colours or playdoh to draw/colour/create a rainbow where each colour represents a skill.

Parents/Caregivers reflect on your rainbow and that of your child.

♥ RED = COMMUNICATION

USING WORDS, GESTURES, OR VISUALS TO EXPRESS NEEDS, IDEAS, AND FEELINGS.

♥ ORANGE = INDEPENDENCE

DOING THINGS ON THEIR OWN, LIKE PUTTING ON SHOES, TIDYING UP, OR MANAGING BELONGINGS.

♥ YELLOW = EMOTIONAL REGULATION

RECOGNIZING BIG FEELINGS AND USING STRATEGIES TO STAY CALM OR ASK FOR HELP.

♥ GREEN = SOCIAL SKILLS

TAKING TURNS, PLAYING WITH OTHERS, LISTENING, AND COOPERATING.

♥ BLUE = SELF-REGULATION & FOCUS

PAYING ATTENTION, FOLLOWING ROUTINES, WAITING, AND HANDLING TRANSITIONS.

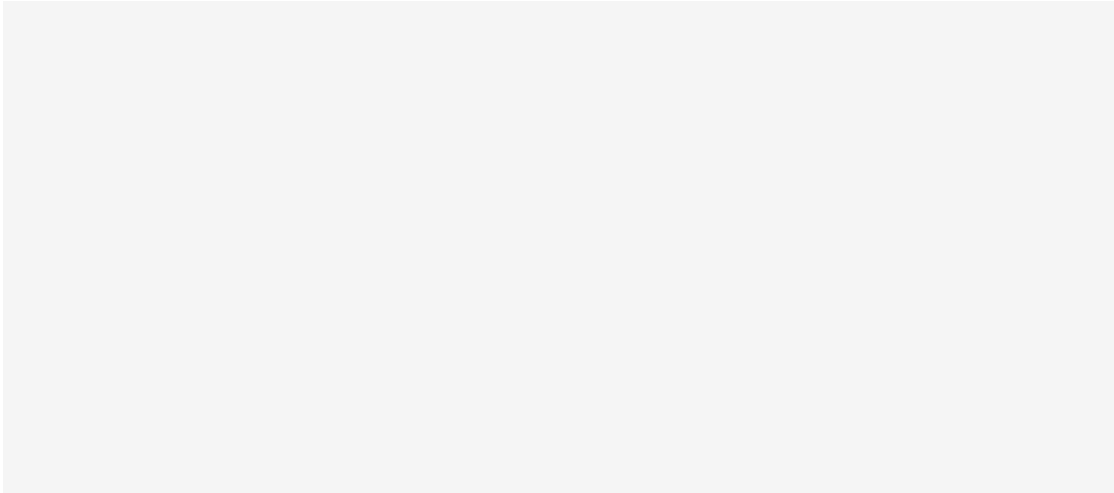
♥ PURPLE = CURIOSITY & LEARNING

ASKING QUESTIONS, BEING CURIOUS, TRYING NEW THINGS, EVEN WHEN IT'S TRICKY.

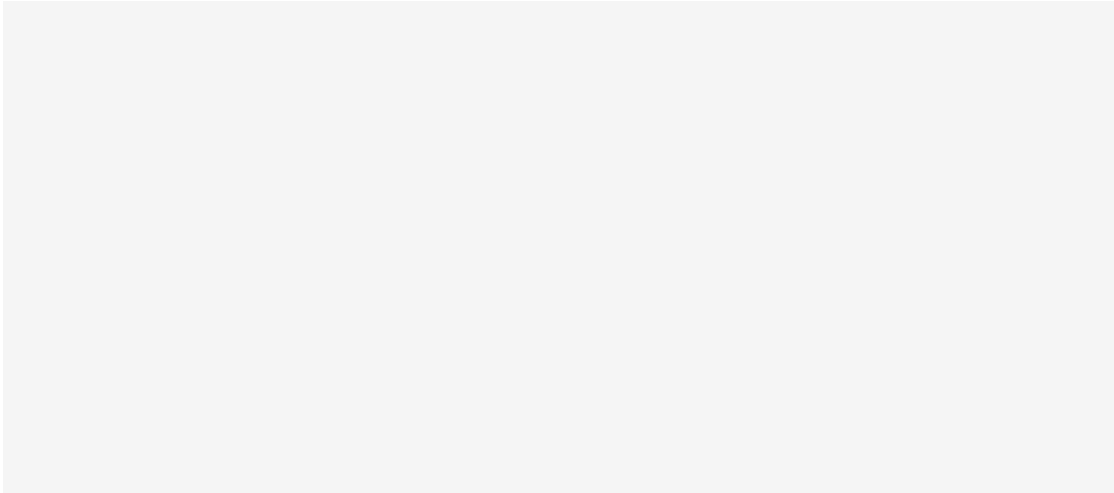
FOCUS AREA 1

REFLECTIONS

What is one small step you can take to help your child feel more ready for school?



What do you need to feel grounded and supported as a parent during this time?



FOCUS AREA 2

BUILDING DAILY ROUTINES &
TRANSITIONS



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Supporting families in creating predictable,
structured routines.

PREDICTABLE PATTERNS HELP CHILDREN FEEL
SAFE, REDUCE ANXIETY, AND SUPPORT
TRANSITIONS (LIKE GETTING DRESSED, LEAVING
THE HOUSE, OR GOING TO BED). REFLECTING ON
YOUR FAMILY'S ROUTINES HELPS YOU
UNDERSTAND WHAT'S WORKING, WHAT'S NOT,
AND WHAT COULD GENTLY SHIFT TO MAKE
DAILY LIFE SMOOTHER AND MORE SUPPORTIVE.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



ROUTINES ARE MORE THAN HABITS.

THEY'RE EMOTIONAL ANCHORS.

Myth #1: "Routines are too rigid - they take the fun and flexibility out of childhood."

Fact: Routines actually create freedom within structure. When children know what to expect, they feel safer and are more open to play, learning, and creativity.

Predictability reduces stress, not spontaneity.

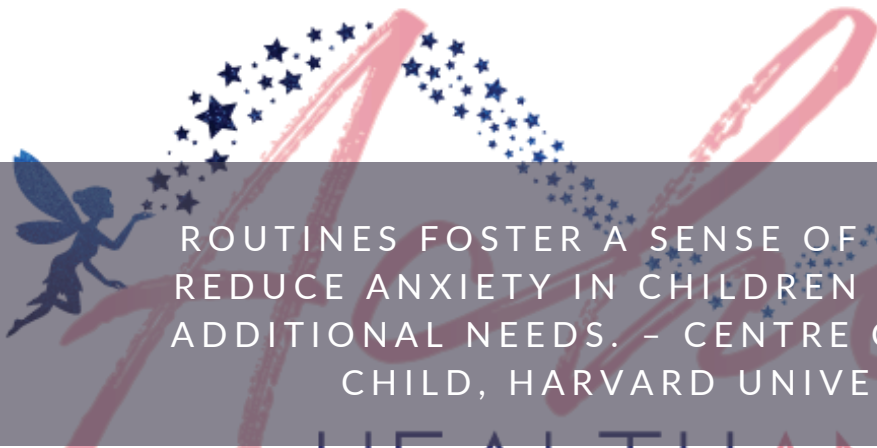


ROUTINES ARE MORE THAN HABITS.

THEY'RE EMOTIONAL ANCHORS.

Myth #2: "We're not a routine family, it's too late to start now."

Fact: It's never too late to introduce gentle routines. Even small, consistent steps (like a predictable bedtime or goodbye ritual) can make a big impact on your child's sense of security and readiness.



ROUTINES FOSTER A SENSE OF SECURITY AND HELP REDUCE ANXIETY IN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL NEEDS. - CENTRE ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, HARVARD UNIVERSITY (2011).

What parts of your day already follow a predictable routine, and how does your child respond to them?

Purpose: Helps identify existing structure and recognise the calming effect of familiar patterns.

Are there any times of day (like mornings or bedtime) that feel rushed, stressful, or unpredictable? What could help make these moments calmer?

Purpose: Encourages parents to pinpoint challenging transitions and explore gentle adjustments.

What simple routine could you introduce or strengthen this week to help your child feel more secure and prepared for school?

Purpose: Inspires intentional action - adding even one new consistent step can increase predictability and reduce anxiety.

"GETTING READY MY WAY"

Build Your Routine

What's one thing you always do every morning?

Morning Routine

- _____
- _____
- _____

Afternoon Routine

- _____
- _____
- _____

Evening Routine

- _____
- _____
- _____

How do you feel about your routine?

SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS

Here's a list of helpful supports you can introduce...

TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION...

VISUAL SUPPORTS: PICTURE SCHEDULES, PECS CARDS, "FIRST-THEN" BOARDS

COMMUNICATION BOARDS: LOW-TECH OR ELECTRONIC AAC (AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION)

EMOTION CARDS: HELP CHILDREN IDENTIFY AND EXPRESS FEELINGS WITHOUT RELYING ON VERBAL LANGUAGE

SIGN LANGUAGE BASICS: SIMPLE SIGNS FOR COMMON NEEDS (E.G., MORE, HELP, TOILET)

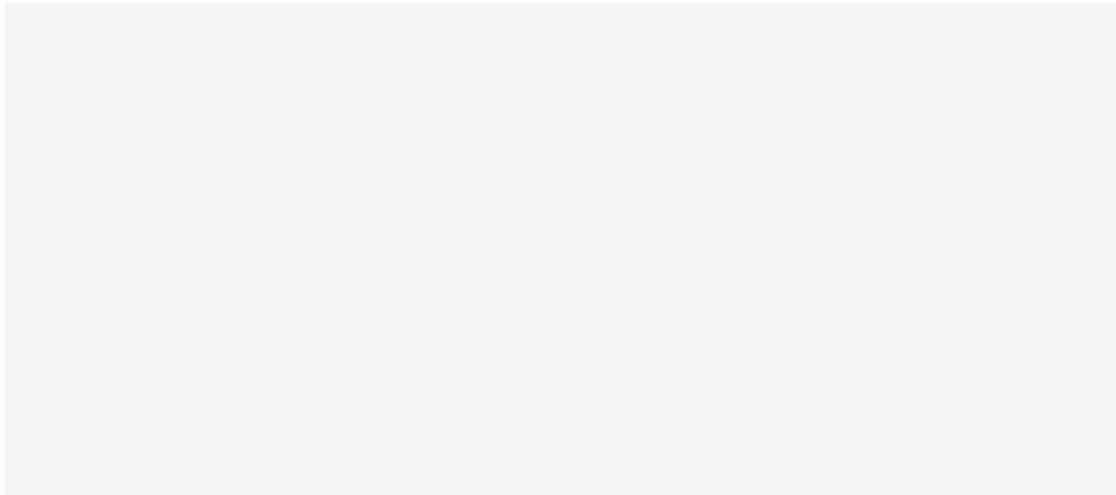
"I NEED..." PROMPTS: SENTENCE STARTERS OR BRACELETS WITH SYMBOLS FOR EXPRESSING NEEDS

•

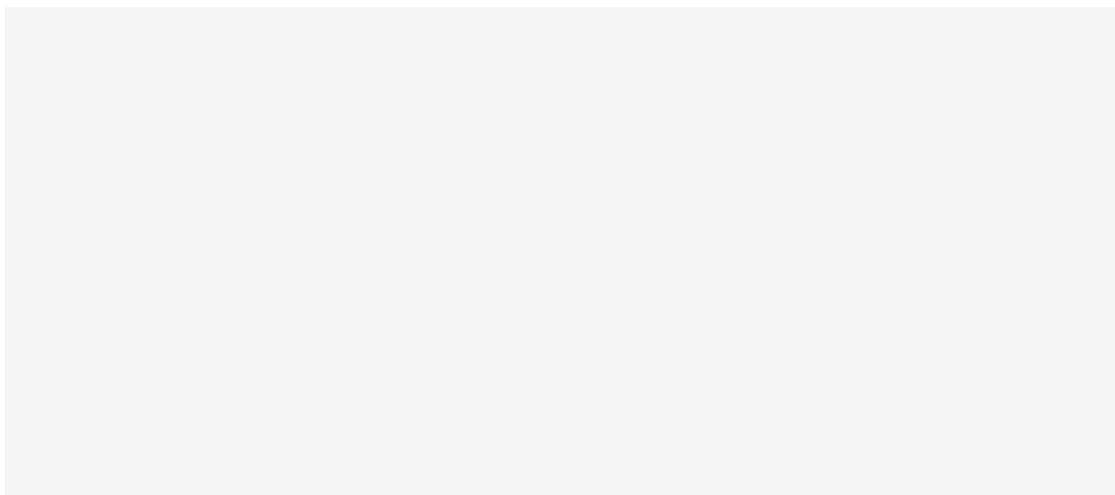
FOCUS AREA 2

REFLECTIONS

What was the most interesting or helpful thing about routines and transitions?



List 1-2 actions you are going to take to implement what you've learned.



Notes



FOCUS AREA 3

Emotional Regulation & Separation Anxiety

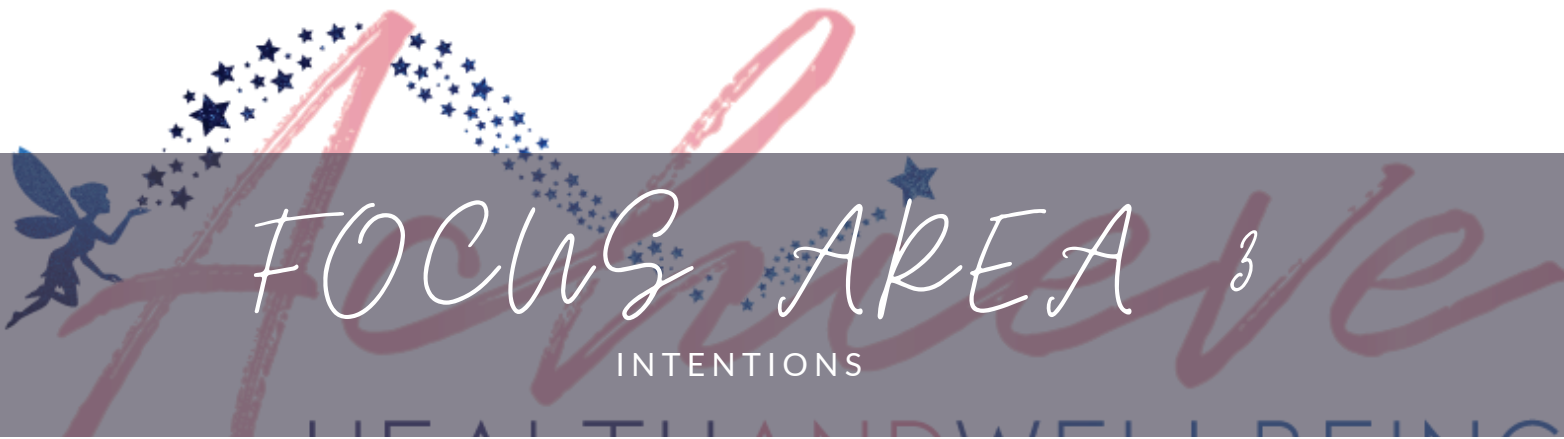
“Children learn to regulate emotions through relationships with attuned and responsive adults.”

– Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000).
From Neurons to Neighborhoods

STARTING SCHOOL IS A SIGNIFICANT EMOTIONAL TRANSITION FOR MANY CHILDREN, AND THEIR PARENTS. FEELINGS LIKE WORRY, SADNESS, EXCITEMENT, OR OVERWHELM ARE COMPLETELY NORMAL. RATHER THAN TRYING TO REMOVE THESE BIG EMOTIONS, OUR GOAL IS TO HELP CHILDREN AND PARENTS RECOGNISE, NAME, AND MANAGE THEM TOGETHER.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



What are your goals and intentions for this Focus Area?

This reflection helps you pause and set clear, thoughtful goals for supporting your child in this area. Whether it's building new routines, reducing stress, or strengthening connection, defining your intentions can guide your next steps and create a sense of direction and confidence.

What obstacles are in the way of your goals and intentions?

Identifying obstacles helps you understand what might get in the way of your progress, whether it's time, energy, routines, or emotional challenges. Naming these barriers is the first step toward finding supportive, realistic solutions that work for you and your child.

What are you going to do to reach your goals and intentions?

This question turns reflection into action. By identifying one or two small, realistic steps you can take, you move from intention to progress. Even small changes, done consistently, can have a big impact on your child's confidence, emotional regulation, and daily success.

IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS AND CO-REGULATION

KEY AREA ONE

WHY IT MATTERS

Helps lay the foundation for lifelong emotional resilience

Identifying Emotions and Co-Regulation

Children often struggle to express their feelings verbally. They show it through behaviour or clinginess, refusal, tantrums, or shutdowns.

Teaching emotional awareness (naming the feeling) and co-regulation (soothing with a trusted adult) lays the foundation for lifelong emotional resilience.

PARENT TIP:

Model emotion language daily: "I'm feeling a bit worried today too. Let's take a deep breath together."

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES:

~ Feelings Chart
~ Emotion Thermometer
~ Co-regulation Tools

Emotional coaching by parents improves children's ability to manage stress and reduces behavioural issues.

– *Gottman, J., Katz, L., & Hooven, C. (1997). Meta-Emotion Philosophy and the Emotional Life of Families.*



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

SEPARATION RITUALS AND MANAGING DROP-OFFS

KEY AREA TWO

W H Y I T M A T T E R S

Gentle, consistent routines help children transition more smoothly.

■ Separation Rituals and
Managing Drop-Offs

Predictable rituals reduce anxiety by giving children a clear start and end to goodbyes. For children with sensory sensitivities or attachment anxiety, drop-offs can feel abrupt and unsafe. Gentle, consistent routines help them transition more smoothly.

PARENT TIP

Keep goodbyes short and confident, even if your child cries. Lingering increases anxiety and uncertainty.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

~ Goodbye Rituals-
Secret Handshake/Hug
~ Transition Object-
Photo, Stone
~ Predictable
Language- Same,
Short, Warm Goodbye

Consistent routines and transitional objects have been shown to support secure attachment and reduce school-related anxiety.

– Bowlby, J. (1988). A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

PARENT-CHILD EMOTIONAL COACHING

KEY AREA THREE

W H Y I T M A T T E R S

:
To teach emotional intelligence in real time

■ Parent-Child Emotional Coaching

Children develop emotional regulation by watching and practicing with their caregivers.

When parents stay regulated, label emotions, and validate their child's experience, they teach emotional intelligence in real time.

PARENT TIP

Be curious, not corrective. Big feelings are a chance to connect, not control.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

~Name It to Tame It
~Validate First, Then Guide
~Practice Scripts

Children whose parents practice emotion coaching have better friendships, fewer behaviour problems, and stronger stress management skills.

– Denham, S. A. (2006). Social-emotional competence as support for school readiness.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

Key Area 1

Practical Strategies:

Feelings Check-In Chart: Use visuals or faces to help children show how they feel.

Emotion Thermometers: Colour-coded zones to help children track rising emotions.

Co-regulation Tools: Deep breathing, rhythm games, hugs, calming voice tones.

Key Area 2

Practical Strategies:

Goodbye Rituals: A special handshake, hug, or mantra (e.g., “You go, I go, we both grow”).

Transition Object: Let your child bring a small item from home (e.g., a photo, heart stone, worry doll).

Predictable Language: Use the same short, warm goodbye every time (e.g., “I love you, I’ll see you after lunch”).

Key Area 3

Practical Strategies:

Name It to Tame It: Help your child name the emotion they’re feeling, this alone reduces its intensity.

Validate First, Then Guide: “It’s okay to feel nervous. Lots of kids do. Let’s talk about what helps you feel braver.”

Practice Scripts: Teach your child simple ways to ask for help at school or express how they feel.

SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS

FLEXIBLE SEATING: CUSHIONS, STANDING DESKS, BEANBAGS AND CHOICE EMPOWERS LEARNERS

HAVE A CALM-DOWN KIT: CHEWY TUBES, WEIGHTED TOYS, SCENTED DOUGH.

MULTI-SENSORY LEARNING: COMBINE TOUCH, SOUND, MOVEMENT, AND VISUALS IN ACTIVITIES

SCAFFOLDED TRANSITIONS: USE CLEAR, REPEATED CUES (VISUALS, TIMERS, SONGS) BEFORE MOVING TO A NEW TASK

ROUTINE VISUALS: HELP REDUCE ANXIETY AND INCREASE PREDICTABILITY

CREATE A "KISS & CUDDLE" TOKEN OR BRACELET THAT STAYS WITH THE CHILD AFTER DROP OFF.

💡 REMEMBER:

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH DIVERSE NEEDS ISN'T ABOUT "FIXING" THEM.

IT'S ABOUT ADJUSTING THE ENVIRONMENT TO INCLUDE THEM. WHEN WE PROVIDE TOOLS THAT REDUCE FRUSTRATION AND INCREASE CONFIDENCE, WE'RE HELPING ALL CHILDREN ACCESS LEARNING IN WAYS THAT SUIT THEM.

FOCUS AREA 3

REFLECTIONS

What insight or idea from this Focus Area felt most useful or meaningful to you?

List 1-2 actions you are going to take to implement what you've learned.



Notes

it's okay to feel




your feelings

FOCUS AREA 4

SOCIAL & PLAY SKILLS

HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP THE SOCIAL
FOUNDATIONS FOR GROUP LEARNING, COOPERATION,
AND EARLY FRIENDSHIPS.

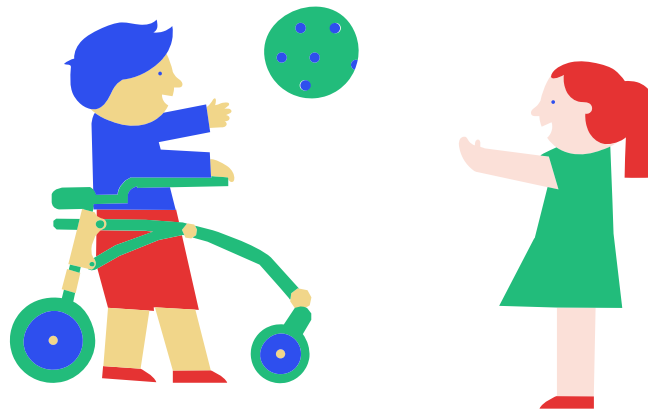
@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



In the early years, play is the primary way children learn how to connect with others. Through playing side-by-side, sharing ideas, waiting their turn, and solving problems, children build skills that prepare them for the collaborative nature of school life.

SOCIAL PLAY HELPS DEVELOP:

- ~ LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION
- ~ SELF-REGULATION
- ~ EMPATHY AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- ~ RESILIENCE AND NEGOTIATION



PEER PLAY INTERACTIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
ARE FOUNDATIONAL FOR LATER SCHOOL SUCCESS.

– COPLAN, R. J., & ARBEAU, K. A. (2008). PEER
INTERACTIONS AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE



One way I can help my child practice social skills this week is:

This might help them feel:

What types of play or social situations would I like to help my child feel more confident in?

How can I support my child in learning social skills through everyday play?



Early language skills are the single best predictor of later reading and academic success.”

— Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

WHY EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT MATTERS:

LANGUAGE IS THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL CONNECTION. IT HELPS CHILDREN EXPRESS NEEDS, SHARE IDEAS, ASK FOR HELP, AND UNDERSTAND OTHERS. EVEN CHILDREN WHO ARE NON-VERBAL OR MINIMALLY VERBAL BENEFIT FROM COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS.



STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS TO PROMOTE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT:

- ~ MODEL SOCIAL LANGUAGE: USE PHRASES LIKE “CAN I PLAY?”, “THAT WAS FUN!”, OR “I NEED A TURN.”
- ~ NARRATE PLAY: DESCRIBE WHAT YOUR CHILD IS DOING AND WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING: “YOU’RE BUILDING A TOWER. LOOK, SAM IS BUILDING ONE TOO!”
- ~ PAUSE TO LISTEN: GIVE YOUR CHILD TIME TO RESPOND—COUNT SILENTLY TO 5 BEFORE JUMPING IN.
- ~ USE VISUALS: PICTURE CARDS OR “FIRST-THEN” BOARDS HELP CHILDREN WHO PROCESS VISUALLY OR NEED SUPPORT WITH EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE.
- ~ READ INTERACTIVE BOOKS: PAUSE TO ASK QUESTIONS LIKE “WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN NEXT?” OR “HOW DOES THE BUNNY FEEL?”



Children develop self-regulation through consistent support
from emotionally available adults.”

– Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University
(2011)

WHY SELF REGULATION MATTERS:

SELF-REGULATION IS THE ABILITY TO MANAGE BIG FEELINGS,
FOLLOW DIRECTIONS, AND STAY CALM ENOUGH TO PARTICIPATE
IN PLAY OR LEARNING. IT DOESN'T MEAN BEING PERFECTLY CALM—
IT MEANS KNOWING HOW TO COME BACK TO CALM WITH
SUPPORT.



STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS FOR PROMOTING SELF REGULATION

~ NAME EMOTIONS:

“I SEE YOU’RE FRUSTRATED. THAT MAKES SENSE—IT’S HARD TO WAIT.”

~ CO-REGULATE FIRST: STAY CALM AND OFFER YOUR PRESENCE. “LET’S TAKE SOME BELLY BREATHS TOGETHER.”

~ USE VISUAL SUPPORTS: TRY ZONES OF REGULATION, COLOUR EMOTION CHARTS, OR FEELINGS WHEELS.

~ CREATE A CALMING SPACE: A QUIET CORNER WITH SENSORY TOOLS (E.G., WEIGHTED BLANKET, SQUEEZE BALL, CHEW NECKLACE).

~ PRACTICE IN CALM MOMENTS: TEACH BREATHING OR GROUNDING GAMES WHEN YOUR CHILD ISN’T UPSET SO THEY CAN ACCESS THEM WHEN NEEDED.



Children who can take another's perspective are more likely to show cooperative and prosocial behaviours.

— Eisenberg, N., & Spinrad, T. L. (2004)

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

WHY EMPATHY AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING MATTERS:

EMPATHY HELPS CHILDREN UNDERSTAND HOW OTHERS FEEL AND RESPOND WITH CARE. PERSPECTIVE-TAKING IS ABOUT SEEING THAT OTHERS MAY THINK, FEEL, OR WANT SOMETHING DIFFERENT. THESE SKILLS LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR FRIENDSHIP, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT.



**STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS PROMOTE EMPATHY AND
PERSPECTIVE-TAKING:**

- ~ USE EVERYDAY MOMENTS: "HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR FRIEND FELT WHEN THAT HAPPENED?"
- ~ TALK ABOUT FEELINGS IN STORIES: "WHY DO YOU THINK THE BEAR WAS SAD?"
- ~ MODEL KINDNESS: LET YOUR CHILD SEE YOU CHECKING IN ON OTHERS, SAYING SORRY, OR NOTICING EMOTIONS.
- ~ PLAY ROLE-REVERSAL GAMES: "WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE TEACHER?"
- ~ USE MIRROR PLAY OR PUPPETS TO ACT OUT EMOTIONAL SCENARIOS AND RESPONSES.



Resilience is shaped not just by temperament, but by supportive relationships and opportunities to practise coping skills.

— Masten, A. S. (2014). Ordinary Magic

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

WHY RESILIENCE AND NEGOTIATION MATTERS:

RESILIENCE IS THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE BACK FROM CHALLENGES AND KEEP TRYING. NEGOTIATION INVOLVES PROBLEM-SOLVING IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS, FIGURING OUT HOW TO SHARE, TAKE TURNS, OR RESOLVE DISAGREEMENTS. THESE SKILLS ARE CRUCIAL FOR GROUP LEARNING AND BUILDING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS.



STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS TO PROMOTE RESILIENCE AND

NEGOTIATION:

- ~ LET CHILDREN SOLVE SMALL PROBLEMS: "YOU BOTH WANT THE SAME TOY, WHAT'S A FAIR SOLUTION?"
- ~ USE "TRY AGAIN" LANGUAGE: "THAT DIDN'T WORK, WHAT ELSE COULD YOU TRY?"
- ~ PRAISE EFFORT, NOT OUTCOME: "YOU KEPT TRYING EVEN WHEN IT WAS HARD. THAT'S BEING RESILIENT."
- ~ MODEL NEGOTIATION AT HOME: LET CHILDREN HEAR YOU SAY THINGS LIKE, "LET'S FIND SOMETHING THAT WORKS FOR BOTH OF US."
- ~ ROLE-PLAY CHALLENGES: PRACTICE SHARING, TURN-TAKING, AND ASKING FOR HELP THROUGH PRETEND PLAY.

FOCUS AREA 4

REFLECTIONS

What social or emotional skill does my child naturally show strength in—and how can I celebrate and build on that?

Purpose: Encourages parents to start from a strengths-based perspective, reinforcing what's already going well.

When my child struggles with turn-taking, big emotions, or friendships, how do I usually respond and what helps me stay calm and supportive in those moments?

When my child struggles with turn-taking, big emotions, or friendships, how do I usually respond, and what helps me stay calm and supportive in those moments?



Notes



FOCUS AREA 5

FINE & GROSS MOTOR SKILLS FOR
SCHOOL TASKS



One school-related physical task I want to help my child feel more confident with is...

Purpose: Encourages parents to identify a specific skill (e.g., zipping a coat, using scissors, sitting for storytime) that matters to their child's success and confidence.

To support my child's movement and independence, I will try this activity or routine at home...

Purpose: Invites parents to choose a practical action, like a morning stretch, play-based fine motor game, or involving their child in dressing and packing.

What I want my child to feel as they build these physical skills is...

Purpose: Connects skill development to emotional wellbeing, e.g., "proud," "strong," "capable," or "ready", reinforcing the importance of the why behind the task.



WHY MOTOR SKILLS MATTER

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN EVERYDAY SCHOOL TASKS, FROM SITTING ON THE CARPET AND HOLDING A PENCIL, TO OPENING LUNCHBOXES, NAVIGATING STAIRS, AND DRESSING FOR OUTDOOR PLAY.

CHILDREN WITH UNDERDEVELOPED MOTOR SKILLS MAY STRUGGLE WITH:

~ WRITING FATIGUE

~ FIDGETING DURING SEATED TASKS

~ DIFFICULTY WITH SELF-CARE ROUTINES

~ LOW CONFIDENCE WHEN COMPARING THEMSELVES TO PEERS



Motor proficiency is linked to both academic and behavioral performance.

— Piek, J. P. et al. (2008). Motor coordination and academic achievement in children.

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT:

FINE MOTOR SKILLS INVOLVE SMALL MUSCLE MOVEMENTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE HANDS AND FINGERS. THESE ARE CRUCIAL FOR:

- ~ HOLDING PENCILS
- ~ CUTTING WITH SCISSORS
- ~ BUTTONING CLOTHES
- ~ MANAGING ZIPPERS, LUNCHBOXES, AND SNACK WRAPPERS



- ~ PLAY-BASED PRACTICE: THREAD BEADS, USE PLAYDOUGH, SQUIRT WATER BOTTLES, OR STICKER CHARTS.
- ~ USE ADAPTED TOOLS: PENCIL GRIPS, LOOP SCISSORS, SLANT BOARDS.
- ~ LET CHILDREN HELP: INVOLVE THEM IN OPENING CONTAINERS, FOLDING CLOTHES, AND PEELING STICKERS.

TIP: AVOID CORRECTING GRIP IMMEDIATELY BUT ENCOURAGE A FUNCTIONAL HOLD AND BUILD HAND STRENGTH GRADUALLY.



Motor proficiency is linked to both academic and behavioral performance.

— Piek, J. P. et al. (2008). Motor coordination and academic achievement in children.

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT:

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS INVOLVE LARGE MUSCLE MOVEMENTS AND CORE STRENGTH. THESE SUPPORT:

- ~ SITTING UPRIGHT FOR LONG PERIODS
- ~ CARRYING A BACKPACK
- ~ CLIMBING STAIRS OR PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT
- ~ BALANCE AND COORDINATION



GROSS MOTOR STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- ~ CORE PLAY: CRAB WALKS, WHEELBARROW WALKING, CRAWLING THROUGH TUNNELS, YOGA FOR KIDS.
 - ~ BALANCE GAMES: STANDING ON ONE FOOT, HOPPING, BALANCE BEAMS.
 - ~ WHOLE-BODY MOVEMENT: DANCING, OUTDOOR PLAY, CLIMBING AT THE PLAYGROUND.
- TIP: CHILDREN WHO SLUMP OR LIE DOWN DURING FLOOR TIME MAY NEED MORE CORE STRENGTH BEFORE THEY CAN FOCUS ON FINE MOTOR TASKS.

SCHOOL SKILLS OBSTACLE COURSE

Set up a simple “Ready-for-School” obstacle course at home or in the classroom. Include stations such as:

- ~ Putting on and zipping a coat
- ~ Carrying and unpacking a backpack
- ~ Opening a snack container
 - ~ Cutting along a line
 - ~ Balancing on one foot or walking a tape “balance beam”

 You can even create a “School Day Hero” certificate to celebrate participation!

MORNING MOVEMENT WARM-UPS

Gentle movement before school helps wake up the body and regulate the nervous system, especially for children who are under- or over-responsive to sensory input.

Try:

- ~ 3 jumping jacks
- ~ Arm circles
- ~ Deep breathing
- ~ Wall pushes
- ~ Animal walks (bear, frog, crab)

 These can also become part of a predictable pre-school routine.

SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS

Here's a list of helpful supports you can introduce...

TO SUPPORT FINE AND GROSS MOTOR..

FIDGET TOOLS: TANGLE TOYS, STRESS BALLS, POP-ITS TO SUPPORT ATTENTION AND REGULATION

WOBBLE CUSHIONS / WIGGLE SEATS: HELP WITH POSTURE AND SENSORY NEEDS WHILE SITTING

SLANT BOARDS OR CLIPBOARD SUPPORTS: TO EASE WRITING AND DRAWING

ADAPTIVE TOOLS: PENCIL GRIPS, LOOP SCISSORS, VELCRO FASTENERS ON CLOTHES AND BAGS

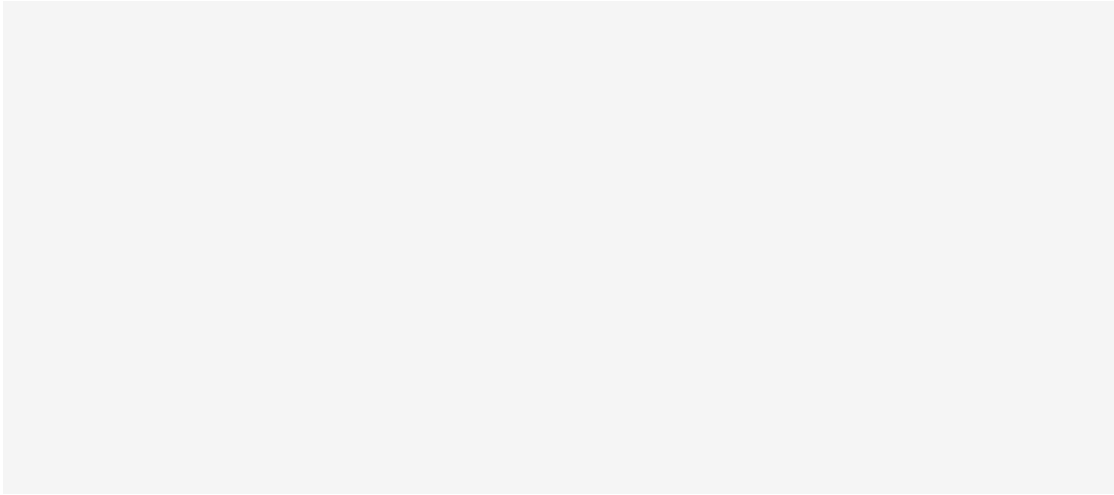
MOTOR BREAK CARDS: VISUAL PROMPTS FOR BODY MOVEMENT OR SENSORY BREAKS

REMEMBER: ALWAYS INTRODUCE ONE NEW TOOL AT A TIME WHERE IT IS SAFE TO DO SO AND OBSERVE YOUR CHILD'S RESPONSE.

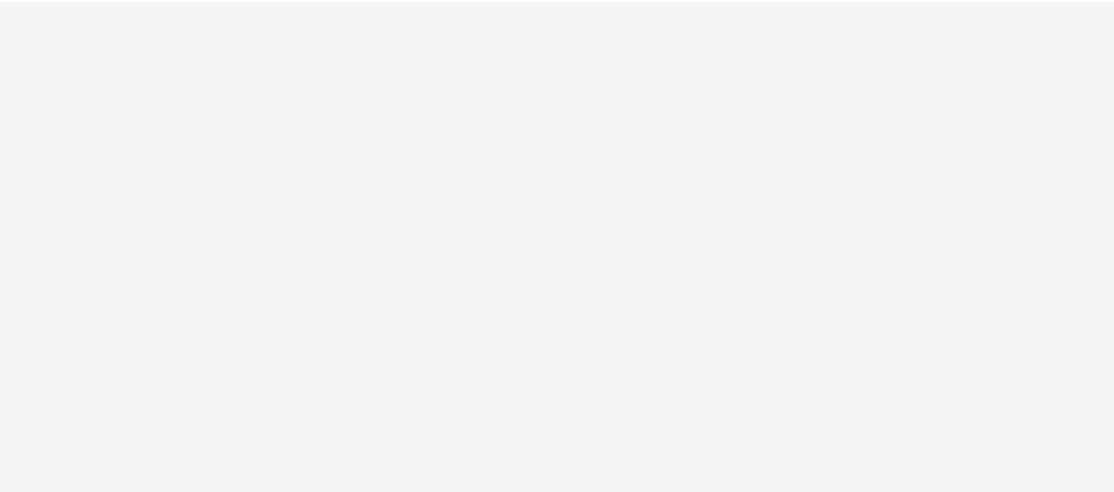
FOCUS AREA 5

REFLECTIONS

Which everyday school tasks does my child already do confidently?



What physical skill would I like to help them strengthen before school starts?



Notes



FOCUS AREA 6

COMMUNICATION & SELF-ADVOCACY

@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com

GOAL

SUPPORT CHILDREN IN EXPRESSING
NEEDS, ASKING FOR HELP,
UNDERSTANDING OTHERS, AND
BUILDING THE CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK
UP FOR THEMSELVES IN EVERYDAY
SITUATIONS.



@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com



"FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION IS A CRITICAL
COMPONENT OF SCHOOL READINESS, ESPECIALLY FOR
CHILDREN WITH LANGUAGE DELAYS."

– WETHERBY, A. M., & PRIZANT, B. M. (2000).

Communication is more than just talking, it's the foundation of learning, social connection, and emotional wellbeing. For young children, especially those with additional needs or developing language skills, learning how to ask for help, express emotions, and make choices is key to participating in school life.

Self-advocacy is the skill of recognising your own needs and confidently communicating them to others. This skill empowers children to speak up, seek support, and begin to build independence in school.



One way I will support my child's communication and confidence this week is:

This will help them feel:

How does my child currently communicate when they're overwhelmed, confused, or need help?

How can I promote self expression

What am I going to do to reach your goals and intentions?



Expressing Needs & Asking for Help

Children who can communicate when they're confused, frustrated, or unsure are better able to cope with challenges. This includes:

- ~ Asking for help
- ~ Saying "I don't understand"
- ~ Requesting a break



*Strategies to teach a child to
express their needs:*

- ~ Teach scripts: Practice simple phrases like “Can you help me?”, “I need a break,” or “I’m not ready.”
- ~ Role-play situations: Act out common school scenarios like needing help with a coat or asking to use the toilet.
- ~ Visual supports: Use PECS-style cards or First-Then boards for children who are non-verbal or developing speech.
- ~ Create a “Help Me” signal: A hand sign or token your child can use when overwhelmed.



“SELF-ADVOCACY BEGINS WHEN YOUNG CHILDREN ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPRESS THEIR NEEDS, CHOICES, AND PREFERENCES IN WAYS THAT ARE UNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS.”

– DECI & RYAN, 2000. SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY.

Understanding and Following Instructions

Following instructions supports listening skills and helps children feel successful in classroom routines.

~ Practice at home: Use games like “Simon Says” or “Follow the Leader.”

~ Break instructions down: Use one or two steps at a time. E.g., “Get your shoes and put them by the door.”

~ Use visual cues: Combine spoken language with gestures, pictures, or routine charts.



True self-advocacy starts with confidence in being seen, heard, and understood—especially during transitions or challenges.

~ Create a “My Voice” card: Include a child’s name, what helps them, what they like/dislike, and how they communicate.

~ Talk about body awareness: Help children recognise hunger, tiredness, or sensory needs.

~ Normalize asking for help: Model it as a strength, not a weakness.



“GIVING CHILDREN CHOICES SUPPORTS AUTONOMY AND BUILDS THE MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE AND COMMUNICATE.”
– DECI, E.L., & RYAN, R.M. (2000). SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND THE FACILITATION OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION.

Making Choices and Using Their Voice

Choice-making builds autonomy and confidence. It teaches children that their voice matters.

~ Offer limited, structured choices: “Do you want your red or blue jumper today?”

~ Use visual choice boards: Great for morning routines, snacks, or sensory activities.

~ Celebrate attempts at communication: Whether verbal, signed, or visual—acknowledge all efforts.

My SUPERPOWER VOICE

CHILDREN DECORATE A "SUPERPOWER VOICE" BADGE OR CARD AND PRACTICE USING PHRASES LIKE:

"I NEED HELP."

"I DON'T LIKE LOUD SOUNDS."

"I'M READY!"

"CAN I HAVE A TURN?"

~ PAIR WITH A MIRROR OR PUPPET TO PRACTICE VOICE AND CONFIDENCE.~

FOCUS AREA 6


REFLECTIONS

What small step can I take to encourage my child to advocate for themselves in daily routines?

What strategies can I use to support and celebrate my child's voice and communication style?



TOOLS AND SUPPORTS

- 
- ~ VISUAL CHOICE BOARDS
 - ~ EMOTION WHEELS
 - ~ BREAK CARDS
 - ~ PICTURE SCHEDULES
 - ~ VOICE BUTTONS (FOR AAC PRACTICE)

Notes



REFLECTIONS

Take a moment to reflect on how you and your child have grown since beginning this school readiness journey.

What have you learned about yourself as a parent?

What changes, big or small, have helped your family feel more prepared, connected, or confident?



I'm not here to change anyone's nature.
I'm here to help people who experience
the world differently find ways to live
with less distress and more joy, on their
own terms.

Sinéad Caulfield,
Achieve Health and Wellbeing

@couragetoachieve
achievehealthandwellbeing.com