

## Section 3: Information for Parents and Care Givers

If you are a parent reading this document, it is highly likely that your CYP or a CYP you know is having problems attending school or you may have been directed to this document for advice on supporting your child with starting preschool/primary school.

This section starts by explaining why schooling is important. Transitions advice is then outlined; how to talk to your child before they start in a setting and getting ready for the first day. Some tips are then provided for you as a parent to follow. You are your child's primary caregiver and first teacher after all.

Then there is a section on "What Should You Do If You Notice Signs of EBSA With Your Child". In this section, we have listed some questions to guide you when dealing with this issue and outline how your child's school can help you.

If your child is experiencing EBSA and if they are able, we advise that you consult Section 4 and complete some of the activities with your child. Remember that you can enlist other family members to help you with talking to your child and if necessary, bring them to school.

For many children nowadays preschool is your child's first experience of the education system and is a key transition phase. It is important to use this time to establish good habits that they will carry with them throughout their education journey.

Research shows that early childhood (birth-5yrs) is the most important time for child development. From the time a baby is born, the emotional and social attachment they develop with their primary carers (parents/guardians) is critical (Brazelton, 1992). During this phase, most children will begin to attend an Early Learning Service. There is a range of service types available. See Appendix 1 for more information on choosing an appropriate service for your child. Following on from this, children in Ireland enter the primary phase of schooling. During the primary school years (5-12) your child will develop core academic skills and will develop both socially and emotionally. During the post primary years your child will continue to develop academically, emotionally and socially.

## Supporting Parents/Guardians to Make Successful Transitions to Early Learning Care and School Settings

Attending preschool and school settings offers many benefits to children. It can be a great place for children to interact with peers and learn valuable life lessons such as how to share, take turns, and follow rules. It can also prepare them academically for primary school, in relation to establishing routine and socialising. Going to preschool and primary school comes with some emotions however, for both the parent and the child. For a child, entering a new preschool or school environment filled with unfamiliar educators and children, can cause both anxiety and excitement. Parents might have mixed emotions about whether their child is ready for preschool/school.

## Easing Your Child's Fears starting Pre-school and School

Spend time talking with your child about the new school year before it starts. In the months and weeks before preschool/start of primary school, gradually introduce your child to activities that often take place in a classroom/learning environment. A child who is used to scribbling with paper and crayons at home, for example, will find it comforting to discover the crayons and paper in the preschool classroom. Picking up their "rubbish" at home will prepare them for every education setting!

Attend story time in the library before entry to pre-school and/or over the summertime. This allows your child to begin mixing with others.

Visit the preschool classroom with your child a few times before school starts and attend the primary school's open night. This can ease concerns about this unfamiliar territory. Visiting is also a chance to meet your child's educator/teacher and ask questions about routines and common activities. You can introduce some of those routines and activities at home, so they become familiar.

At primary level while you're in the classroom, let your child explore and observe the class and choose whether to interact with other children. This helps familiarise children with the classroom and lets them explore the new toys/materials they will play with.

You can also ask how the educator handles the first tear-filled days. How will the first week be structured to make the transition smooth for your child?

While acknowledging the important step your child is taking and providing support, too much emphasis on the change could make any anxiety worse. Children notice their parents' nonverbal cues. When parents feel guilty or worried about leaving their child at pre-school/school, the child will probably sense that.

The calmer and more assured you are about your choice to send your child to preschool and school, the more confident your child will be.

## Here are 6 tips for helping your child adjust to school settings

### 1. Prepare Yourself

The first step is to prepare yourself to leave your child at school whether its pre-school, primary or post primary. Children have a good sense of picking up on non-verbal cues such as stress or sadness. So, try to be calm and use an encouraging tone when you are talking to your child. You should be mentally prepared for your child's first day of pre-school. This will ease the transition for both.

Going into post primary school is a very different experience as a parent and there is a view that post primary schools are "scary" places compared to primary schools. Of course, there are new challenges in a new setting but there are lots of benefits to post primary school settings. New subjects, new friends and more frequent breaks are reported by CYP as being some of the positives. Some report liking the independence from their parents! Make sure you give them positive messages about post primary school.

### 2. Have a Fixed Routine

Children need to have a consistent routine. Make sure that your child goes to bed on time to be fresh and active the next morning. Moreover, create a consistent healthy morning routine as well, which should include having breakfast, reading a book on the way to school, saying hello to the educator/teacher, and happily saying goodbye. Sometimes the child may get cranky in the morning and might even cry. Try to comfort your child and make them understand that everything will be alright. Do not yell or be harsh to your child at this point. As they get older it can be more difficult to have a routine. At this stage you might limit night-time routines to Sunday to Thursday nights (to be ready for school the next day) and allow more flexibility on Friday and Saturday nights. Management of phones and electronic device usage on school days will also positively impact on their experience of school.

### 3. Saying Goodbye

At preschool and primary level this is a very important tip that parents/guardians should do. It is essential to say goodbye to your child before leaving them at pre-school/primary, as it creates security knowing you will be back to collect them later. If you sneak out without saying goodbye, this will only make things worse as your child could feel abandoned or tricked. It will have a negative psychological effect, which you obviously don't want. At post- primary level the goodbye is still important! It conveys that message that you care about their education and want them to enjoy it.

### 4. Communicate with the Pre-School Educator/Teacher

This is a very useful tip. Talking to the educator/teacher always helps as you can familiarise them with your child's habits and needs. Educators/Teachers can be very accommodating and will pay extra attention to any special needs of your child. You should also encourage your child to talk to the

teacher to help ease any transition especially as they get older. Many schools have a tutor system. This is someone with whom your child can “check in”.

## 5. Prepare Your CYP

It is always a good idea to encourage your child to read books before starting preschool/primary school. Parents/guardians should talk to their children about preschool before it even begins. Sometimes reading books about preschool also prepares children beforehand and they don't face much trouble adjusting to the school environment. You can also get your child to try a few interactive activities such as solving puzzles or colouring. As your child gets older you can support their development by encouraging independence. You can teach them how to cook a simple meal/manage their clothes.

## 6. Have Positive Interactions

You need to ask the right questions when talking to your child about school. For example, you can ask how the day went, what did they do today, did you make any new friends, or what made you smile today. These are all interactive and positive questions.

It is understandable that the change to and between educational settings can be difficult for some parents/guardians as well as some children. There is nothing to worry about though because sooner or later, your child will adjust to the routine.



## What Should You Do If You Notice Signs of EBSA With Your CYP

The important thing to remember is that we all experience situations in life which are difficult. There will be “bumps” in the parenting journey and in your child’s educational experience. These may be caused by very “obvious” reasons such as struggling with learning, feeling a teacher doesn’t like them etc. Our job as parents is to support our children through these life issues. As a parent, don’t think you are alone. Many children have difficulties at some time attending pre-school or school. This can range from the odd Monday morning to more severe difficulties. Remember attending school is good for children but not always easy! Providing the young person with a calm listening ear, and letting them know that you understand, but that they still need to attend school, can help them to get through a difficult period.

### The following are some questions to help guide you at the early stages;

1. Have I set aside time to sit down and talk about this issue with my child?
2. Have I acknowledged their fears and concerns?
3. Have I let them know that I understand? Have I checked what the issues might be. Try not to jump to conclusions or ask leading questions.
4. Have I explained that difficulties happen in life and explained how we cope with them?
5. Have I developed a plan with my child?
6. Anticipate that this plan will probably be met with opposition by your child. Be prepared for this. Be reassuring and praise your child’s efforts. A sample plan can be found in Appendix 1.
7. What reasons might there be for my child not wanting to go to school/stay at home? Some problems in implementing the plan can be expected. Some challenges will be met along the way, such as after school holidays or after weekends. If your child misses pre-school or school, don’t be disheartened. Return to the plan.

### Next Steps

- Inform the education setting that there is a problem as soon as you feel that you need help. This is important as early intervention will prevent the behaviour associated with EBSA becoming entrenched. It will also help you to establish if there is an issue in school causing the problems. If so, this can be worked on. If there is nothing obvious but the child still feels anxious, then you will need to support them to manage (not avoid!) the anxiety.
- The school will work with you to develop a plan to facilitate your child’s return to school.
- Be supportive but firm with your child. Continue to listen to your child’s concerns but do not reinforce their fears and anxieties. You may find it helpful to use an approach such as emotion coaching. You will find some helpful videos by looking up ‘emotion coaching videos’ on the internet.



- Try to focus on being solution focused. Talk about what is going well in school rather than focusing on the problems.
- Assist with practical issues such as organisation of homework, school bag and uniform. Establish good routines for bedtime, getting up and breakfast. Make the morning as pleasant as possible.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your child and with the school.
- Read Section 5 of this pack with your child.

## What action/supports can you expect from your school?

*“Parents, our task is to work in partnership with you, as part of a whole school approach, for the ultimate well-being of your children. We are privileged to go into the future together”*

Concepta Conaty “My Child My Vision”

Your child’s education setting is available to help you. Most of them, particularly pre-school settings will have some experience of reluctant attenders and you can ask them what has worked before in their experience. Section 6 outlines how your school can help in more persistent cases. In Section 8 there is a list of services in Wexford who can help you and their referral routes. Remember however that in many cases parents themselves and parents working with their child’s educational setting hold the key to getting a child to overcome EBSA.

“ Find out if there is any underlying issue. Liaise with the school.  
Short stints if needed to reduce school day but stick with it. Going  
in for morning and home earlier helped when things were very bad.  
Get professional help if you can. Be mindful of siblings.

(Parent of child who experienced EBSA)

## Further Reading

For further information and support on Early Childhood Education, please contact Wexford County Childcare Committee CLG on 053-9237156 or visit [www.wexfordchildcare.ie](http://www.wexfordchildcare.ie)

The NCSE have developed “*Guidance for Parents of children moving from Pre-school to Primary School*”. It can be accessed at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)

A video and information leaflet can be found here about moving from primary to post primary school <https://ncse.ie/moving-from-primary-to-post-primary-school>