

Parent Power Preschool

Transforming the health &
wellbeing of our children



**Guidelines
for Parents of
Preschool Children**

Planet Youth and Parent Power

Planet Youth is an evidence-based primary prevention project that provides us with the opportunity to improve long-term health and life outcomes for our children.

Every two years, we survey the 15 and 16 year olds in all of our schools in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, and this gives us the information we need to make positive changes for the younger children coming behind them.

This Parent Power booklet has been developed to bring some of that information to parents who have children in pre-school settings.

Having good routines in place from a young age will pay off quickly, and in the years ahead will make for happier, healthier children, teenagers and young adults. We hope you find the booklet useful.

The November 2024 survey of 5,079 of our teenagers told us that:

91%
Said that it's easy to get caring and warmth from parents

80%
said it's easy to get advice on personal matters from parents

Only 73%
reported good physical health

13%
never do physical activity

65%
spend three hours or more on social media every day

36%
got their first smartphone at 11 or younger

55%
are not getting enough sleep

80%
have a phone in their bedroom at night

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Family Time and Connection

Our time is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children and setting time aside each day creates the opportunity and space to chat with them and listen to what they have to say.

Here are just a few good reasons why that is so important.

It strengthens family relationships and connection

It can help your child to do better in Preschool

It improves communication skills

It develops positive behaviours

It builds children's self-esteem

It is really good for parents too!



Connecting and Interacting

Throughout their lives, it is important that we connect with our children. Building time into each day to really listen to and notice them lets us show them that their experiences and feelings are acknowledged and understood, and builds strong relationships. Take time to cuddle and enjoy the little things together.

Stepping into their shoes and trying to see the world as they see it is a great way to do this.



Some things to do together

Doing things together doesn't have to mean spending money, some of the simplest things are the best.



Regular family meals.



Spend 10-15 mins daily doing things together.



When times are busy, use a car ride to talk.



Try finding and using traditional games and books.



Play dates help you get to know other local families.



Play alongside your child. Follow their interests, go outside, try messy play activities.

How are we doing?



What are we doing well?

What would we like to do better?



Make a list of things you enjoy doing together

For more information on Family time, explore: <https://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/relationships-are-key>

Play, Play and More Play

Play is crucial for your child's development. It is how they connect with you and with others, how they make sense of their environment, experiences and feelings, and how they develop new skills. It is how they learn and develop their imagination and confidence. Play is also an enjoyable way for children to be active and happy.



Play is important...

For children because:

- When they play with adults or other children they begin to learn basic social skills such as turn taking, sharing, and listening.
- It supports language and cognitive development, improves problem-solving skills and encourages creativity.
- It allows them time to express their feelings and can build confidence and self-esteem.
- It helps them to use their body in a coordinated way and adds to their fitness and health.

For parents because:

- Playing together benefits your child's development and strengthens your relationship.
- It provides an opportunity to enjoy your child's company and to spend time together.
- Children who have regular playtime are more likely to communicate well and to have better behaviour.
- Regular playtime and fun gives children a chance to use all that energy and they're likely to sleep better also.

Best ways to play



Slow down

When you slow down and wait for your child you give them the time to listen to what you have to say and to respond. It gives them a chance to generate their own ideas.



Comment

Notice and describe what your child is doing. This shows them you are interested and that you value their ideas. It also helps develop communication skills.



Follow their interests

Let your child choose the activity. Go slowly at your child's pace. Take a back seat and encourage your child's imagination.



Encourage

Look for all that they are doing right and point it out. Show support for their ideas and interests.

Planning playtime



Find time

15 minutes of play together every day can make a real difference, so set the time aside and plan play into your day.



One to one

Try to spend one-to-one time with each of your children. Chatting while getting dressed or spending 10 minutes reading before bedtime can make a real difference.



Good Activities

The best activities are those that let you and your child explore together and give you both time to chat.



Everyday Tasks

You can be playful in moments through the day while dressing, brushing teeth or eating breakfast.



Improvise

Play can happen anywhere and you do not need a lot of equipment, e.g. finger games, building with junk materials or playing hide and seek.



Get creative together

Children love to play creatively with their parents. Encourage them to use natural, everyday items found inside and outside the home.



For more information on Play explore:
<https://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/0-5years/>

The Great Outdoors



Playing in an outdoor environment has huge benefits for young children's learning and physical development. They are usually more active, absorbed and involved, and they see a purpose in what they are doing.

Children get more physical exercise outside through activities like running, climbing, digging and swinging. This is good for their health generally, and also helps get them lots of vitamin D from sunlight, which is vital for strong bones and teeth and a healthy immune system.

When they are outside, children have the freedom to shout and make noise, the space to be more expansive in their physical movements, and to be more imaginative. They can be messier outdoors too, which encourages them to be more creative and to experiment.

Playing outdoors doesn't have to mean lots of traveling. Try local walks, parks and playgrounds, or look for local groups and activities such as buggy buddies.



Outdoor play can involve...



Fun and enjoyment

Exploring nature and having adventures



Running, jumping and swinging

Small bruises and scrapes



Digging and planting

Building, making and breaking



Being noisy and messy

Testing abilities, taking risks, building resilience



Learning about the seasons and weather

Lifting, carrying and pouring

Getting dirty or wet

Water, mud and sand

Improving confidence and self-esteem

Learning social skills



What are we doing well?



What would we like to do better?

For more information on **Outdoor Play** explore:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality-publications/lets-play-outdoors/>

Screen Time

The amount of time that our young people report spending on screens has been increasing steadily with each of the Planet Youth surveys. Our children are also getting access to smartphones at younger ages.

All of this is a serious concern. The evidence tells us that when children spend a lot of time on screens, it harms many important aspects of their development. Things like sleep, learning, social skills development and even weight can all be impacted.

However, screens are part of all our lives now and they have many important uses. They are valuable for staying connected and can be useful for entertainment, and education also.



What is important though is that screens don't overtake family life, interfere with communication and playtime, or prevent children from being physically active during the day. Don't use screens as a tool for keeping children entertained or occupied.

Be prepared with other activities instead. Try introducing and sharing books, stories and comics with your child. Among other things, books support the development of fine motor skills and contribute greatly to language and communication skills.

Remember, the less time that children spend on screens the better their long-term physical and mental health outcomes are likely to be.

Top Screen Time Tips For Parents

Between the ages of 2 and 5 years a child should have no more than 1 hour of screen time each day. This includes all screens: smartphones, gaming devices, tablets, computers and televisions.



Lead By Example

Your own actions are the most powerful way you can influence your child's behaviour. Be mindful of your own screen use and be consistent with your behaviour.



Rules

Agree on a clear set of rules in your home about screen use and screen time.



Handing up screens

It's good to have the routine established of handing over screens every evening at a set time. Giving a 5 minute warning will make the handover easier for your child.



Screen Free Zone

Having no screens allowed in bedrooms is the best thing by far.



Parental Awareness/Controls

Ensure you have suitable and age appropriate parental controls in place. Set accounts and devices up correctly from the outset.



Join In

Watch screen content with your child or play their favourite game together. They can learn how to behave online while interacting with you.



Communal screens are better

Personal devices isolate children but watching TV together provides opportunities to talk, cuddle, ask questions, and bond.



Digital Detox

Have regular family digital detox days and plan other activities together. Local libraries have a wealth of books and toys to lend!



Use screen time agreements

As children get older consider using agreements to set sensible boundaries. Webwise have good information online about this.



Have a chat together about this

How are we doing?

What are we doing well?

What would we like to do better?



For more information on Screen Time, explore:
<https://www.webwise.ie/parents/>

Sleep and Bedtimes

Children that have regular and good quality sleep have improved attention, behaviour, learning, memory, and better overall mental and physical health.

From 2-5 years old, children typically need 11-12 hours sleep. Every child is different, some will need a nap and others may not. Try not to let your child sleep beyond late-afternoon or they may not be ready for their night-time sleep.



Bedtime routine: what works well?

A consistent bedtime routine with a regular bedtime is very important at this age. Following the same routine each night means your child will know what to expect. Begin preparation for bedtime in your child's bedroom.

For example, a child who normally goes to bed at 7.30 might have a bedtime routine that looks like this:



6.45 pm:
put on pyjamas, brush teeth, go to the toilet.



7.15 pm:
quiet time in the bedroom with a book and a bedtime story or quiet chat.



7.30 pm:
goodnight and lights out.

Adjust to your child's needs. Some children can take a longer or shorter time to prepare for bed and to get off to sleep.

Relaxing before bed

Reduce screen time and sugary foods and drinks in the hours leading up to bedtime. You can help your child settle and relax for sleep by keeping activities quiet in the hour before bed. For example, you could play gentle music or read a story together. If it is part of your child's bedtime routine, a bath can also help with relaxation.



What works well at bedtime?

What could be better?

Chat together about what could make bedtime routines better

For more information on sleep, explore:
<https://www2.hse.ie/babies-children/sleep/2-to-5-years/>



Making Changes at Home



If there are new things you'd like to introduce, or changes you'd like to make, here are some steps and tips to think about.



6 TOP TIPS



1. Keep it simple

Instead of trying to change lots of things at once, pick one thing you want to work on first.



4. Expect some resistance

Your child may not like new rules or things being different and so they may test boundaries. Understand that this is normal.



2. Involve everybody

Sit together and come up with a plan on any change you would like to make as a family.



5. Give yourself a chance

Changes take time so be patient and don't get discouraged. Keep going.



3. Set goals and write them down

Start small; you can build on these first steps over time.



6. Look for support

Making changes can be difficult, so look for help. A sibling, a friend, other parents or your child's preschool educator can give you suggestions and help provide support. Attending a parenting course is also a great resource.

“ Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life. ”

For more information on **Making Changes at Home** explore: parentpower.planetyouth.ie



The Parent Power booklet is available to view and download in a variety of languages at the Planet Youth website. There are also similar booklets for parents that have children in national school and in secondary school.



“ **At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child’s success is the positive involvement of parents.** ”

English

Irish (Íoslódáil i ngaeilge)

Arabic (تحميل باللغة العربية)

Lithuanian (Atsisiųsti lietuvių kalba)

Polish (Pobierz w języku polskim)

Portuguese (Baixar em português)

Slovak (Stiahnuť v slovenčine)

Ukrainian (Завантажити українською)

