Preparing for your child's first day at nursery

Deciding which nursery for your child to attend can be a huge task, and once completed you will have to start thinking about their very first day preparation. This can be very daunting for both you and your child. In order to make the process smoother, we have put together the following suggestions for you to consider:

- Where possible involve your child in the process of getting ready to start nursery. Could your child choose their own nursery items like their packed lunch box or book bag?
- Organise some transition visits: Most nurseries offer settling in visits before a child's first day. This can help with the process of getting used to their new environment at their own pace.
- Consider the environment: Is it possible for your child to have their own workstation or quiet space if needed? Think about ways you can make the environment easier to navigate.
- Think through any adjustments that might help; For example, could your child go into nursery a few minutes earlier before the setting gets busy?
- By establishing a routine in advance, you can help prepare your child for starting nursery and the likelihood that they will need to get used to a new routine. This may involve waking up earlier or eating breakfast later, and you can start to practice this routine as early as possible before their first day. Think about ways in which you can communicate this routine through tools like visuals, checklists, wall planners and Makaton.
- Creating predictability before your child starts, by meeting and taking photos of the new staff- particularly key people who will be involved with your child is key. You could also take photos of both the inside and outside of the nursery and use these in visual stories.
- Keeping the rest of your child's routine consistent will also help: Starting nursery is a big stage in your child's life, keeping everything else as familiar as possible at this time can offer security and comfort.

- Creating a portable family album so your child can look at your photos, can bring your child extra comfort and will help them to feel safe.
- Using positive language about nursery will reassure your child that nursery is a safe place where they can have fun. You could drive or walk past the nursery and point out the children having fun and playing with toys, to emphasise that nursery is an enjoyable experience.
- Discuss nursery routines with the nursery so that you are able to practice these at home, for example you can chat through the process of locating their peg and then putting their coat on it
- Some children will benefit from the use of a transition object / comforter: For some it could be a dummy while others may prefer a blanket that smells like you. You may need to communicate with the nursery the importance of this object so that they don't take it away.
- Consider the process of leaving your child in advance: While some children will need to see you actually leave the nursery, others may need time with you in that space. Discuss this in advance with nursery staff so that you all understand the plan.
- By the time your child starts nursery you will want the staff to have a good in depth understanding of your child's needs. You can help them by completing our 'All About Me Profile'. Make sure the nursery knows other key information, like how your child communicates, as this is vital to a positive experience for everyone.
- Role playing nursery activities and scenarios where you create experiences through imagination by acting out elements of the nursery day can also give confidence and provide reassurance. Include real names of children and teachers during play.
- Consider carefully when your child will attend nursery: If appropriate, book your child in for regular nursery sessions, as leaving long gaps in between nursery days can delay the settling in process.
- Remember to acknowledge your own feelings: Leaving your child for the first time can be very difficult and naturally you will feel a lot of emotions; often including anxiety and fear. Remember, it's a big change so allow yourself to feel this way.
- Keeping communication effective and consistent between yourself and the nursery staff is so important. You may want to think about setting up a communication booklet and some nurseries also use communication apps.