



Supporting children and families in the preschool years

How can parents support preterm born children before they start school?

Before your child starts attending a preschool setting

Understand the difficulties that your child may have with their development

- Be aware that your child may have some difficulties with their development as a result of their preterm birth, especially if they were born very or extremely preterm (before 32 weeks of gestation). These difficulties often start to become apparent in the preschool years, but may also emerge at school age. They might include problems with attention and concentration (such as keeping focused on completing a task or listening to a story), thinking and problem solving (such as completing a puzzle or jigsaw), moving about and handling objects (such as using cutlery or learning to dress themselves), and communicating and interacting with others. Most preterm babies will have no difficulties later in life, especially those born just a few weeks early, but for those that do, it is important to be aware of these so that any difficulties can be identified early.
- You can find helpful practical information about ways to support your preterm child's early development here on the [EiSMART website](#).

Attend healthcare appointments

- Try to attend all of your child's routine healthcare appointments, including appointments with your child's GP or health visitor, and your child's neonatal team if offered. It is important to attend these so that any difficulties your child might have can be identified quickly and support can be put in place as early as possible.

Share your concerns

- If you have any concerns about your child's health and development, share these with your child's healthcare professionals, such as their GP or health visitor. Sharing your concerns may mean that any support your child needs can be put in place as soon as possible.

Choosing a preschool setting for your child

Ask questions about how they can support your child

- When choosing a preschool setting for your child, ask if they have experience of supporting preterm born children or if their staff have received training about preterm birth. The Smallest Things charity has produced a checklist of questions for parents of prematurely born children to ask when visiting a preschool setting. You may find it helpful to take a look at this list to help you choose a setting for your child. You can access a free copy of the checklist [here](#).
- When choosing a preschool setting for your child, ask if they have the "Prem Aware Award", an award scheme run by The Smallest Things charity to recognise schools and preschool settings that are well prepared to support prematurely born children and their families. If the setting doesn't yet have the Prem Aware Award, it may be



helpful for you to tell the staff about it as they will be able to access free training in how to support preterm born children. You can [find out more about the Prem Aware Award](#).

Establish good communication from the start

- When you have chosen a preschool setting for your child, consider asking to meet your child's Key Person before your child starts. If you are comfortable to do so, tell them about your child's birth history, your family's experiences of preterm birth, and any concerns you may have about your child's health or development. This will help staff get to know you and your child better and help them plan what support your child might need. It may be helpful to tell your child's Key Person about this e-learning resource so that they can use it for free to learn more about preterm birth and how to support children in education.
- Share the results of routine assessments carried out by your child's health visitor or other healthcare professionals with staff at your child's preschool setting. If your child was offered routine follow-up by the neonatal team that looked after your baby after birth, consider sharing a copy of any letters received, including the results of any assessments, with your child's setting. These may help staff better understand your child's journey and any support needs they might have.

While your child is attending a preschool setting

Create a network around the child built on strong communication

- If your child sees any healthcare specialists, such as a paediatrician or a therapist, consider asking them if they will share their reports or letters with your child's preschool setting so that the staff have the most up to date information about your child's health and development. Some healthcare specialists may be able to make visits to your child's setting to work with your child or to give advice or training to staff.
- Try to work in partnership with your child's Key Person or other staff at your child's setting. Some tools or apps that preschool settings use to communicate with parents might be two-way. You may be able to send updates and photographs of activities that your child does at home, in the same way as the setting can send them to you. Ask your child's Key Person or other staff about ways you can support your child's development at home and share updates about how this is going.
- Consider asking your child's setting for a meeting ahead of any transitions, such as moving to a new room or setting, to share information about your child's birth history and their journey. It can be helpful to meet new staff and establish new relationships early, before your child moves on.

Transitioning to school

Ask questions about how they can support your child

- When choosing a school for your child, ask the school if they have experience of supporting preterm born children, or if their staff have received training about preterm birth. The Smallest Things charity has produced a checklist of questions for parents of preterm born children to ask when visiting a school. You may find it helpful to take a look at this list to help you choose a school for your child. You can access a free copy of the checklist [here](#).



- When choosing a school for your child, ask if the school has the "Prem Aware Award", an award scheme run by The Smallest Things charity to recognise schools and preschool settings that are well prepared to support preterm born children and their families. If the school doesn't yet have the Prem Aware Award, it may be helpful for you to tell the school about it as they will be able to access free training in how to support preterm born children. You can [find out more about the Prem Aware Award](#).

Encourage good communication between settings

- When you know which school your child will attend, ask your child's pre-school setting to share information with your child's school so that the school has the most up to date information about your child's development.

Get to know the school

- Try to attend any sessions the school offers for parents to give you the opportunity to meet your child's new teacher and for your child to become familiar with the surroundings, if they are invited too. If the school does not offer these sessions, consider asking them if you and your child are able to visit the school, or ask them to send photographs of what your child's classroom will look like and a list of the kinds of activities your child might do in a day to help you prepare your child for school.
- Parents of preterm born children often consider whether delaying their child's entry to school is appropriate, especially for children who were born in the summer months. At the moment, there is no firm evidence that delaying school entry is better for children who were born preterm. It might be best for children to enter school at the right time so that they can receive support from the earliest opportunity if they need it. However, all children are different, therefore this is an individual decision. You can find more information about starting school and delayed school entry on the website of [Bliss](#), the UK charity that supports babies born preterm and their families.