

# Preparing children for school



Welcome parents to the monthly 'preparing for school' letter. This month we will focus on how your child is developing their **concentration skills** during the month.

We plan to work on new skills each month through the year, consolidating learning and introducing new skills such as –

- Listening to a book all the way through without shouting out
- Watching a short nature programme
- Completing a game with a friend
- Listening to a short musical clip
- Answering questions about something they have done at the weekend at home

We will use the **Characteristic of Effective Learning** to support children's concentration skills. As we discussed last month **playing and exploring** describes children's **engagement** in their learning and asks us to consider how well we support children to...

- Have an 'I can do it' attitude to their learning
- Accept and step up to challenge
- Be curious and interested to learn new things
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This links closely to children's concentration – they will not be curious, interested, involved and challenged if they are unable to sit quietly without disturbing others and listen to what is happening around them.

**Throughout the month you will also be working on –**

**Alphabet** – letters I, J, K, L and M (5 week month)

**Maths** –

- Activities - making comparisons – high and low; recognising numerals
- Songs - 2 little dickie birds; 1 little elephant balancing

And... more activity ideas across the 7 areas of learning.

Dear parents,

we hope your child enjoyed some of the independence activities we suggested last month. Please let us have lots of feedback about what they are doing and saying at home so we can support their learning while they are here! We are consistently promoting a 'can do' attitude to learning and you might hear your child saying 'yes I can' and 'I can do it' at home as they are encouraged to try to do things by themselves.

During November and over the coming months we will be working towards developing your child's **concentration skills**. Most 2 year olds have the concentration span of a butterfly, fluttering from one activity to the next and leaving chaos in their wake. As they get older and they are involved in activities to support their learning here and at home, you will notice that they start to enjoy sitting and listening and learning for slightly longer periods of time, as long as their needs have been met and they are not hungry or tired.

In school children need to be able to sit and listen and learn. Ofsted expect early years providers to increase the number of adult led and guided activities as children move towards being ready for school, planning sessions that focus on each child's current learning outcomes – the things we are working on with them – to give them the best opportunities to succeed when they start school.

Therefore, during November and in the months to come your child will be involved in daily...

- Craft and creative activities such as drawing, cutting, using glue and making and playing with playdough – with an adult who sits and chats and creates with them.
- Singing and dancing sessions that involve sitting, listening to and following instructions.
- Reading books and telling stories with puppets that follow their interests and support their learning.
- Listening games using our 'Toddler Talk' cards and Letters and Sounds phase 1 activities.

We will turn off background noise, put the toys away and sit and play individual and group games with your child every day! We will play games and talk to them about something they are interested in ... we will listen to them and we will plan activities linked to what they are telling us. Why not plan a quiet session to chat at home every day? Your child will enjoy playing word games such as 'Simon says' and 'I spy' ... and they will love it when you join in their role play, making you cups of tea or involving you in their games.

Please let us have lots of feedback so we can use their home interests in our planning. Thank you!

**Early Years Outcomes is Ofsted's tracker of choice:** we use it to make 'best fit' judgements about the progress children are making through the prime and specific areas of learning.

Communication and language – listening and attention – gives us the 'best fit' judgements we need to observe, assess and plan for children's concentration development because each age range contains a short statement about how the child might be concentrating.

The statements are an explanation of the journey a baby takes from being unable to focus on anything for more than a few seconds to being ready to start school, demonstrating the ability to stay at a task for longer periods.

**Age range - 0 – 11 months –**

**Typical behaviour** - Fleeting attention – not under child's control, new stimuli takes whole attention.

**What does it mean?** We observe the baby looking from one thing to the next, unable to concentrate on anything that is happening, especially if something new attracts their attention. The child has no ability to deal with distractions and has to look or listen when disturbed. For example, they will watch a toy or we singing to them but if they hear the door banging they will turn to look.

**To support their learning** – (individual planning) we will chat to them and play listening games with voices and musical instruments



**Age range - 8 – 20 months –**

**Typical behaviour** - Pays attention to dominant stimulus – easily distracted by noises or other people talking.

**What does it mean?** The toddler will sort of listen to you – until something more exciting comes along. Toddlers are rarely able to sit still and concentrate for more than a few seconds at a time because the world is full of too other exciting things for them to look at, listen to and do.

**To support their learning** (individual planning) we will provide lots of opportunities for toddlers to engage with us as well as ensuring their natural motivation to explore treasure baskets (for example) is supported.



**Age range - 16 – 26 months**

**Typical behaviour** - Rigid attention – may appear not to hear.

**What does it mean?** We observe the child totally transfixed by what they are doing to the exclusion of everything else around them. For example, we call them to do something else and they appear to ignore us – they are not being rude: they are simply completely engrossed in what they are doing. It is how they learn at this age.

**To support their learning** (individual planning) we will use their name before saying something to them to catch their attention.

**Age range** - 22 – 36 months

**Typical behaviour** - Single channeled attention - can shift to a different task if attention fully obtained – using child’s name helps focus.

**What does it mean?** At around the age of 2.5 – 3 years, children’s levels of concentration start to change. They can sit for longer when reading books or singing songs and, as long as you have their full attention, they will look at us and listen more carefully to what we are saying. However, they will still struggle to pay attention to other stimuli (auditory or visual) from different sources at the same time and we will often need to work hard to hold their attention.

**To support their learning** (individual planning) we will use puppets when reading and singing to help them to stay focused.



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**Age range** - 30 – 50 months

**Typical behaviour** - Focusing attention – still listen or do, but can shift own attention.

**What does it mean?** We observe the child concentrating on whatever they are doing, but they are able to move on and try other things if they hear us asking them. They are more likely to hear us because they are less focussed on what they are doing and more aware of others around them.

**To support their learning** (individual planning) we will plan short group learning sessions about things they know and enjoy and new things to broaden their horizons... because this new ability helps us to teach them to share their time between different learning experiences.

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**Age range** - 40 – 60+ months

**Typical behaviour** - Two-channeled attention – can listen & do for short span.

**What does it mean?** Also known as ‘integrated attention’ this describes when children are more able to stay at one task for longer – auditory and visual - but still only for short periods of time (depending on the child). For example, they can listen to instructions about what to do next ... and do it when asked.

**To support their learning** (individual planning) we will ensure our curriculum contains lots of activities to stimulate and encourage learning.



## Games to help develop concentration

To help develop your child's concentration we will be introducing some new games for them to play over the coming months. The games will encourage listening skills, engage your child in group learning and be fun!

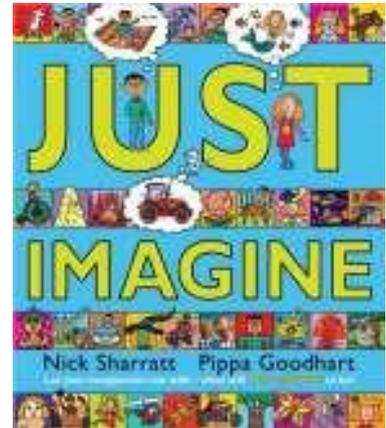
### Our games include...

- **Quiet mouse, still mouse** – just like the busy bags we offer children during transition times, this game encourages children to wait between activities. Every child is challenged to be a quiet mouse and a still mouse – they learn to put their fingers on their lips for short periods and to sit with 'school legs' (crossed). We put on some background music for them to listen to and we use the instruments later to make lots of movement and noise! Children who sit quietly and still are praised for 'good sitting' and 'good listening'.
- **Simon Says** – we love this game – the children get it wrong at this age but we make it fun for them and laugh a lot. We include loud activities such as 'stamp like an elephant'... 'roar like a bear' and quiet activities such as 'squeak like a mouse' ... 'say shhh' etc.
  - **Musical statues** – we play this game to encourage children to listen carefully to the music and stop when the music stops. Musical bumps – where the children sit down when the music stops – is also a favourite.
  - **Feely bag** – we put different objects into a bag and the children try and tell us what they can feel. Sometimes we use toys – other times shapes or numbers – fruit and vegetables – whatever we have been talking about. The activity encourages concentration as the children feel what the object is and conversation as they tell their friends what they can feel.
  - **Pass the sound** – this game is a bit like Chinese whispers. The children sit in a circle and pass a sound from one to the next – a series of claps, a shaker shake or 2 stamps of their feet, for example. They are encouraged to listen carefully to the sound before passing it on so the next person gets it right.
  - **What's missing** – we put some toys on a tray, talk about them briefly and then cover the tray. We remove one of the toys and see if the children can spot what's missing. It can be very hard for some children to see what is missing and not shout out – this is something we are practicing with them. As they get better at the game we use different objects and add a few more into the mix.
  - **Our favourites** – we often talk about 'favourites' to help us get to know your child's likes, dislikes and interests. This game encourages the children to listen to each other and share their ideas with the group. They have to concentrate because we later ask them to remember, for example, who said they like cars best... or who said their favourite fruit is a pear?

## Literacy focus - I is for...

**Insect** – what type of insects do the children like / dislike? We will put lots of insects in the messy tray and make a habitat for them with leaf litter, sand, water, soil etc. What do insects like to eat? Where do they live / sleep? We will find out from books at the library.

**Imagine** – We will read the book 'Just Imagine' by Nick Sharratt and Pippa Goodhart. Talk about each page in turn, asking the children to imagine themselves in the various pictures – what do they want to be? Where do they want to live?



**India** – We will find the country on a world map and talk about the lives of children who live there, focussing on similarities and differences.

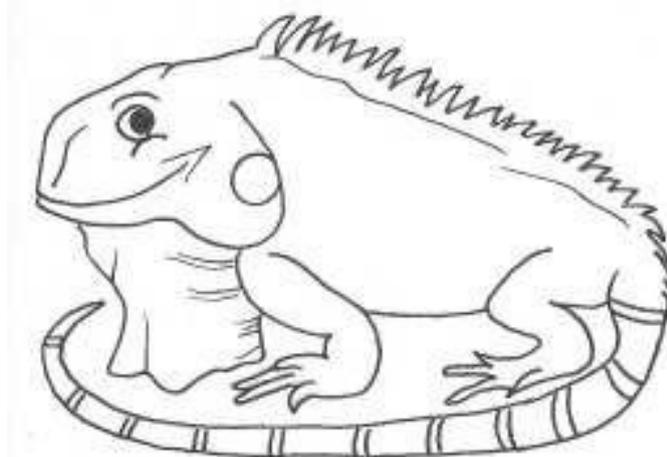
We will learn about Indian hand dancing – We will try an Indian curry – We will do some hand painting...

### Focus – i is for iguana

An iguana is a plant eating cold blooded lizard. It lives in North and South America and we can buy iguanas to live in cages. Iguana colours vary – they can be yellow, green or brown, blending into their surroundings.

### Activity ideas include –

- We will draw or paint iguanas with the children
- We will talk about where they live and what they eat
- We will ring our local pet shops and find out if they have any iguanas in stock so you can go and visit one
- We will borrow a book about looking after iguanas from the library



## Literacy focus - J is for...

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**Jelly** – We will read 'Don't put your finger in the jelly Nelly' by Nick Sharratt. We will make different coloured jelly.

**Jigsaw** - alphabet / phonics jigsaws.

**Jump** – how many jumps can you do? We will sing some jumping songs to support learning –

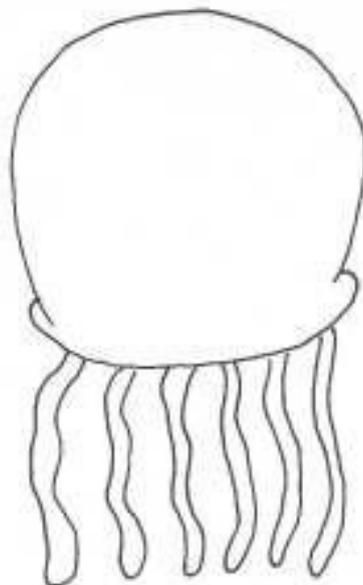
- Jump, jump went the little green frog
- Sleeping rabbits
- 5 little monkeys jumping on the bed etc...

**Focus – j is for jellyfish**

**Activity ideas include –**

- We will make some dangling jellyfish with the children. We will give them googly eyes and lots of tentacles which the children can fold so they bounce up and down.
- We will look at jellyfish on YouTube – they come in different shapes and sizes and some are very colourful
- We will find out about the dangers of jellyfish – some have a very nasty sting
- We will eat some ... jelly!
- We will pretend to be wobbly jellyfish in the garden.

**Literacy focus - L is for...**



## Literacy focus - K is for...

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**Kite** – We will make some kites and go out onto a big field to fly them. We will sing – ‘let’s go fly a kite, up to the highest height, let’s go fly a kite and send it soaring...’

**Keys** – We will give the children 3 keys and 3 locks – can they work out which key fits which lock and open them all? Talk about keys – are they light or heavy – are they cold or warm – what do the children think they are made of? Compare keys – are they bigger or smaller – wider or thinner – longer or shorter?

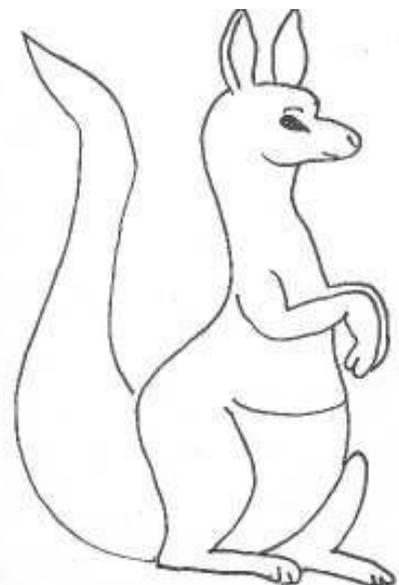
**Supporting home learning** – We will suggest parents show their children keys at home and discuss the various locks they fit into.

**Kitten** – We will explain to the children that there are 2 sounds which are the same – ‘c’ and ‘k’. You could look at ‘c’ is for ‘cat’ and ‘k’ is for ‘kitten’ with the older children to help them understand the difference. We will make some kitten masks with the children – little pointed ears and a twitchy nose.

### Focus – k is for kangaroo

#### Activity ideas include –

- We will do the children know any stories about kangaroos? ‘I Love You, Blue Kangaroo!’ by Emma Chichester Clark is a lovely one – you will find a copy in the library
- Kangaroos – and koalas of course – live in Australia. We will find out about Australia – the weather, children who live there, other animals and birds etc
- Kangaroos have a very strong kick – hop around the garden and kick like a kangaroo
- We will make a paper craft kangaroo puppet – stick it onto a cardboard roll and bounce it around
- We will sing ‘Tie me kangaroo down sport’ – a traditional Australian song.



## Literacy focus - L is for...

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**Leaf** – We will collect leaves in the garden and see if we can match them to the trees... We will make some leaf shapes by cutting paper and practice scissor skills... We will rub leaves and look at the veins... We will comment on how leaves are symmetrical.

**Ladybird** – We will make some counting ladybirds with the children on paper plates. We will add different numbers of dots and count them – one side + the other side = add them together. We will read 'The bad tempered ladybird' by Eric Carle and plan some craft activities linked to the children's favourite bits of the story.

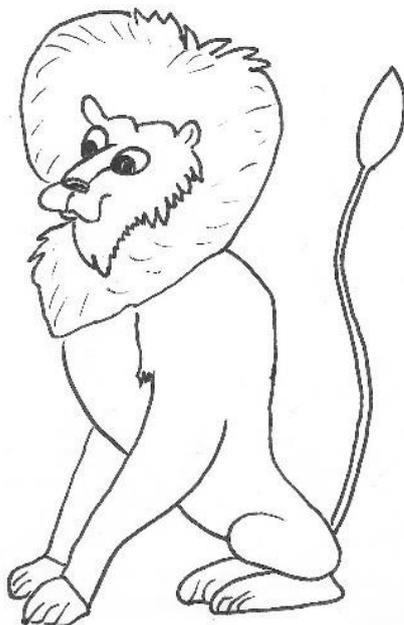
**Lego** – who can make the biggest Lego tower? Can you measure it using your hands – a tape – a ruler? Which colours have you used and why? Can you make a pattern tower using your favourite colours? We will add letters to Lego blocks and show the children how to build their names.

**Lick** – We will plan some sensory activities with children linked to the sense of taste.

### Focus – I is for lion

#### Activity ideas include –

- We will find out about the star sign Leo the lion – were any of the children born during Leo's month?
- We will make a paper plate lion mask
- We will watch some of the film 'Lion King' together
- We will compare lions and tigers – how can we tell they are different?
- We will read the bible story of Daniel in the den of lions – what does it teach the children?



## Literacy focus - M is for...

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**Metal Mike** - this activity is taken from the Letters and Sounds Phase 1 book -

We will make a robot face using junk modelling - a tissue box for the mouth...

The children feed pictures of objects into a toy robot's mouth...

The adult sounds out the name of the object in a robot voice - c - u - p cup...

When the children are confident about the different letters in the game they can join in.

**Milk** - We will find out more with the children about where milk comes from, how it is made safe for drinking and the various things that are made from milk. We will do some taste testing and, if possible, organise a visit to a local farm to see the cows and maybe taste the ice cream.

**Moo** - We will make up an animal sounds game with the children. One of the children makes the sound of an animal (they might want to team it with actions) and the other children have to guess which animal the sound represents.

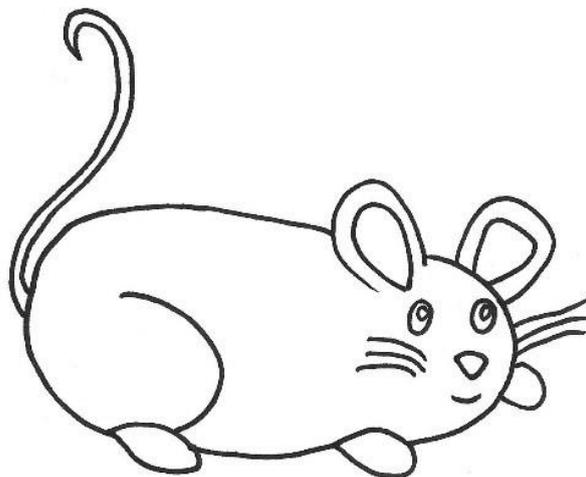
**Extension activity** - We will read an animal / farmyard book and add sounds.

**Focus - m is for mouse**

**Activity ideas include -**

We will -

- Read a 'Masie Mouse' story and plan some activities linked to the story
- Make a mouse mask for each child
- Sing 'Windmill in Old Amsterdam'
- Use playdough to make a mouse tail in the shape of a letter 'm'
- Learn the rhyme 'Pussy cat, pussy cat where have you been?'
- Why do mice make people squeal when they are so tiny? Talk to parents and see if they know...



# Mathematics - making comparisons - high and low

**Incy Wincy spider** climbed up the water spout  
Down came the rain and washed the spider out  
Out came the sunshine and dried up all the rain  
So Incy Wincy spider climbed up the spout again.

We will use hand movements to demonstrate high and low when singing the song.



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## Listen to music

There is lots of classical music which we can listen to and point out high and low sounds – comparing 'The Magic Flute' by Mozart with 'Mars' from the Planet Suites by Holst for example.

We will make our own high and low music with the children using the percussion instruments. Now make high and low sounds using your voice...

When using musical instruments We will use a high voice and play them high... a low voice and play them low down near the ground... a middle sized voice ....

.....

## More comparisons

We will teach the children about high and low using everyday resources and language to help develop their descriptive skills. We will -

- Compare the sounds of 2 musical instruments eg drum and bells. Ask the children to listen to each and tell you whether the sounds are high or low.
- Look at the giraffes in your small world animal box – are their heads high or low? Compare giraffes with animals that walk low to the ground such as insects.
- Bounce a ball high and low – who can bounce it the highest? Who can roll it along the floor?
- Compare animal voices – which ones are high (birds) and which ones are low (lions) – can the children make the same noises as the animals?

# Mathematics – recognising numerals

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We will make a sensory number line with the children to help them learn about numerals – written numbers.

Display - We will put numbers in the house and garden so children see them when they play – and buy books with numbers so they can read independently and with you.

We have numbers –

- On the side of the bookcase
- On the gate in the garden
- On a poster in the hallway
- On a poster in the playroom
- In books and comics the children can access freely through the day
- On the playhouse door
- Printed on song and rhyme cards
- On the floor and back of bikes so the children can park them in the correct parking bays
- In our shape writing prompts book
- Laminated for use in the sand and messy play tray
- In counting books the children have made...

Number writing poems – we have downloaded the following writing pattern poems -

<http://edsnapshots.com/learning-to-write-numbers-and-free/>.

**Supporting home learning** – We provide parents with a set of numerals with instructions for where to start each one when writing – so they can practice at home.

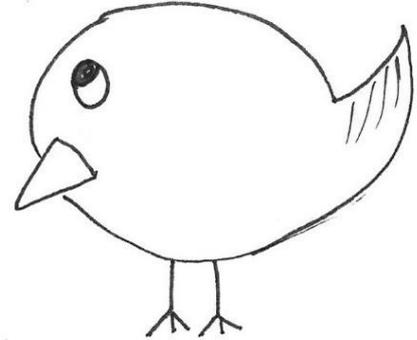
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# Number recognition mat

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
zero	one	two	three	four	five	six	seven	eight	nine	ten
	○	○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## 2 little dickie birds

2 little dickie birds sitting on a wall  
One named Peter and one named Paul  
Fly away Peter – fly away Paul  
Come back Peter – come back Paul



2 little caterpillars sitting on a branch  
One named Betty and one named Blanche  
Crawl away Betty – crawl away Blanche  
Crawl back Betty – crawl back Blanche

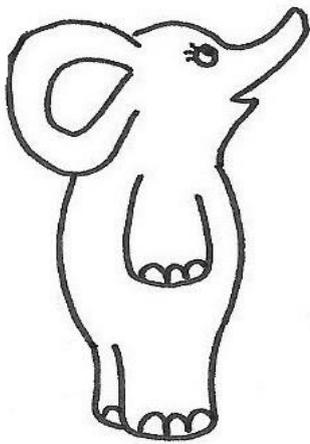
### Activity ideas – 2 little dickie birds

- We will buy or borrow a bird book and make a list of all the birds we can see in the garden – how many can you count?
- We will make shape birds using squares, rectangles, circles and triangles
- We will use fingers and pretend to be the birds hopping on the wall
- We will make some bird food together to encourage birds into the garden - recipes on the RSPB website
- We will collect pine cones to make bird feeders – we will find out what birds like to eat

**We will observe** – can the children follow the bird food recipe?

**Early Years Outcomes** – link to communication and language / listening and understanding

**Support home learning** – do the children have a bird table at home? We will share the bird food recipe with parents so they can make it together



One little elephant balancing  
Step by step on a piece of string  
He was having so much fun  
He called for another little elephant to  
come  
...encourage the children to invite a  
friend to follow them

#### **Activity ideas – 1 little elephant balancing**

- It's really hard to balance on string / skipping rope – can the children do it without wobbling?
- We will watch elephants in their natural habitat on YouTube
- We will sing –  
An elephant walks like this and  
that  
He's terribly tall and terribly fat  
He has no fingers and he has no toes  
But goodness gracious what a big nose!!

**Observe** – can the children balance?

**Early Years Outcomes** - link to physical development / moving

**Support home learning** – loan parents a copy of an Elmer book to read with their child at home