

Bridge to School™

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A safe ride to school

Bridge to School is an initiative of Ready to Read focused on connecting families with expert information and resources, so their child can start school with confidence.

Is there something you would like to read about as you prepare your child for school?

Please let us know at:
support@bridgetoschool.com.au.

“Children should use the ‘safety door’ (left passenger side door) to enter and exit the vehicle when parked in the street.”

“If walking to school, teach children to hold hands with you and to watch out for driveways – is there a car coming or going?”

School drop offs and pickups are notoriously crazy times of the day. Families are rushing to cars, racing to school and navigating busy school traffic. Unfortunately, it's times like these which present the biggest risks to your child's safety.

We asked the team at the Georgina Josephine Foundation for some tips on car safety. Here's what they advised.

The best way to proactively manage your family's car safety, is to plan your morning and afternoon routine so everyone (including children) can be in the right place at the right time.

Further, practising and teaching children some basic safety tips can help avoid incidents:

1. Children should wait until mum, dad or other carer is ready and with them before going outside or into the garage.
2. Hold hands with your child when going to and from the car. Kidsafe and Kids and Traffic recommend holding children's hands around vehicles until around 10 years of age, as they are still impulsive and their brains aren't always developed enough to toggle between what they have learnt and what is happening immediately in front of them. For example, a child who has been taught about car safety will likely still dive to grab their hat when it blows off in the middle of the car park, before thinking about safety!
3. Children should use the 'safety door' (left passenger side door) to enter and exit the vehicle when parked in the street.
4. If need be, create a safe place at home for children to wait, such as inside the front door, until you are ready to put them into the car.
5. Whenever getting into the car, take the long way around to the driver's side to double check what is around the car, before getting in to drive.
6. When collecting children from school or preschool of an afternoon, disembark the car and collect them from the school gate (or the designated pick up place at the school). Do not wait in the car for children to come to you (unless your school has a drive-through pickup arrangement).
7. If children travel to and from school on a bus, wait with them safely back from the road until the bus has stopped, before approaching to get on. In the afternoon, make sure you are waiting for them at the bus stop, so you can hold hands and cross the road together after the bus has moved away (so you can all see what traffic is around).
8. If walking to school, teach children to hold hands with you and to watch out for driveways – is there a car coming or going?
9. Use 'Stop, Look, Listen, Think' when crossing roads; and if available, use pedestrian crossings and traffic light crossings, to get to the other side of the road safely.

The Georgina Josephine Foundation was established in February 2012, to prevent and reduce unintentional injury or death of children from Low Speed Vehicle Runover (LSVR) accidents, after the Cockburn family lost their youngest daughter in an accident in their home garage in 2011.

For more information, visit www.gjfoundation.com.au.





The emotional journey to school

Starting 'big school' represents a huge change for children and their families. The start of school is a time when a child experiences a range of different emotions and these need to be processed carefully to ensure a smooth transition to school. Some children thrive with the new school environment, learning new academic skills and trying to establish new relationships with their peers; while other children will need extra support to settle in. For some children, they will feel proud to be a big kid. For others, the start of school can be a mix of stress, anxiety and nervousness. It is normal for children to fear the unknown and experience stress about leaving the secure and nurturing home environment or preschool.

“When you allow your child to share their worries, you can help them think through how to deal with them.”

Children at this age may find it difficult to tell us how they feel so it is normal for them to express themselves through a range of behaviours. At a time of major change like starting school, some of these behaviours are not unexpected. Some behaviour is easy to identify, such as tantrums and crying; while others can be much more difficult to notice, like being quieter and even more withdrawn than usual. It can be difficult for children to explain how they are feeling, so it is up to parents to help work out what feelings may be underlying their child's behaviour. This doesn't mean ignoring challenging behaviour – you still need to set clear limits. However, understanding how your child is feeling and why they are behaving in a particular way can help you work out how to support them emotionally.

What parents can do to help

It is very important for parents to be positive and encouraging. While learning new academic skills is important, focusing on the positive emotional development of the child is more important when they first start school. A happy and well-adjusted child is more likely to learn better and achieve success at school. Your child will inevitably have some questions or concerns about starting school. Although it is tempting to quickly reassure them and move on, it is important to let your child know that their worries have been heard. Talk about what your child can expect when starting school and be calm, reassuring and positive with them. Do not dismiss or ignore their feelings but explore those feelings with them well in advance of their first day. A child's fears will arise from not knowing, therefore discuss the new things that will happen and reassure them. Let your child know it is normal to feel happy, sad, excited, scared or worried. It is important to normalise their feelings by

explaining that starting something new can feel scary and lots of people feel this way. Let them know it's okay to feel nervous – other children will be feeling nervous too. It can be helpful to share a time when you started something new and how you felt. When you allow your child to share their worries, you can help them think through how to deal with them.

Preparation is the key

Discussing what the new school day routine will be like ahead of time can help to reduce any potential stress. Most children will start school not knowing many other children, so it may be useful to rehearse how to make friends. Your child will feel more confident by talking through and practising some strategies for what they might do to get to know the other children; reminding them how they did this in situations in the past can also help. This is a big change in their lives, so the better prepared your child is, the more calm they will feel when they start.

Once they start school, check in with your child and find out how they are feeling. The best time to approach this is when they are feeling relaxed. We should always answer a child's questions honestly and always be ready to provide reassurance when necessary.

Keep your own emotions in check

Often children who are nervous about starting school feel this way because they are feeding off their parents' anxieties. Monitor your own stress levels. Children can pick up on how you are feeling, so try to talk positively about school. Unless we make a fuss, the child will not know there is something for them to worry about.

If your child's anxiety about school continues to cause them significant distress and impairs their social, academic and daily functioning, it is advised that you speak with their class teacher and if need be, a psychologist, to further investigate and tailor strategies to suit your child's individual needs.

Jane Hewlett is the Principal Psychologist at Psychological Wellness in Baulkham Hills, Sydney. For the past 15 years, Jane has worked with clients from a wide range of backgrounds and with a variety of presenting problems. She has been trained in therapies including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (MCBT) and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy; and has worked in both Australia and the United Kingdom. Jane has a Bachelor of Psychology and a Post Graduate Diploma in Child and Adolescent Psychology; and is a fully registered psychologist with the Psychology Board of Australia. <http://www.psychwellness.com.au/>

Healthy digital habits -

with Dr Kristy Goodwin

Today's pre-schoolers are now growing up in a screen-saturated world. They often learn to tap, swipe and pinch before they've learnt to grip a pencil, tie their shoelaces, or ride a bike.

So what can families do to help prepare their children for the digital future they'll inherit? No, you don't need to be teaching your pre-schooler how to code or touch type before they walk through the school gates. These are skills and concepts that they will certainly be introduced to in the early years of primary schooling, but they aren't pre-requisite skills or competencies that we need to pre-teach. Instead, parents of pre-schoolers need to teach them how to use technology in healthy and helpful ways. Developing good digital habits from the start will enable children to foster positive and powerful relationships with technology (and not become a slave to the screen, as many children and adolescents now find themselves).

Parents need to establish firm, consistent boundaries with technology before children start school. Pre-schoolers certainly need limits in terms of how much time they spend with digital devices (I'm yet to meet a parent who isn't somewhat concerned with screen time); but we also need to establish boundaries around what, when, where and how kids use screens to ensure that their screen habits support, rather than stifle, their learning and health.

Unfortunately, many kindergarten and prep teachers and allied health professionals throughout Australia are raising concerns that pre-schoolers' tech habits are interfering with their basic developmental needs and priorities. For example, there are mounting concerns that if pre-schoolers are spending excessive time with screens, then they're not getting sufficient physical activity. When children are physically active, they develop fundamental movement skills such as rolling, skipping, swinging, climbing and bouncing, which helps to develop their vestibular systems (this gives them a sense of balance and this is what allows them to sit still on the carpet or on a chair

and pay attention). However, the increase in young children's sedentary activity levels, now means many children are not developing their vestibular systems, resulting in an inability to balance and sit still – and it is these children who are being misdiagnosed as having 'attention issues'.

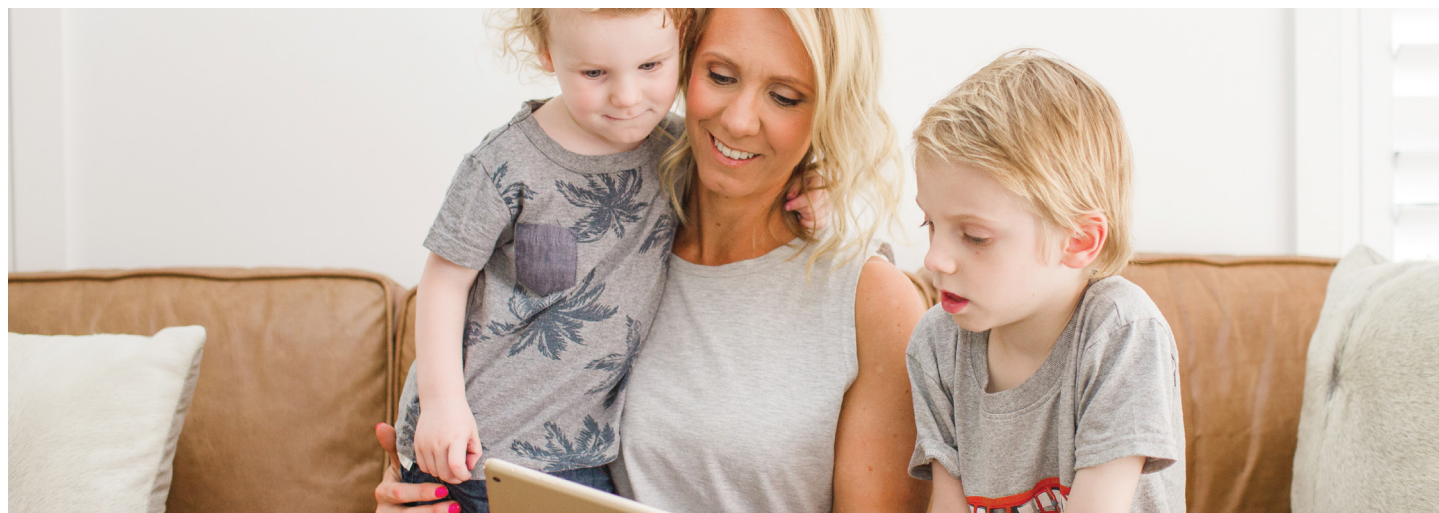
"Parents need to establish firm, consistent boundaries with technology before children start school."

How much

We do have government guidelines regarding recommended amounts of screen time. Whilst it's critical that parents enforce limits around how much time children spend with devices, what's more important is to examine the 'opportunity cost'. What are young children missing out on when they're spending time with screens? Is screen time interfering with their basic developmental needs being met, such as sleep, play, social interaction, physical movement and language skills?

What

The use of high-quality, educational content for young children to use on digital devices has been shown to support their learning. There is a wealth of developmentally-appropriate learning apps, TV programs and interactive toys that have been specifically designed to foster young children's learning and development. Nosy Crow, Toca Boca, Duck Duck Moose and ABC Kids are examples of quality app developers for pre-schoolers. Common Sense Media and the Australian Council on Children and the Media both offer reviews of apps, TV and movie content suitable for young children.



When

Establishing boundaries around when screens can be used is vital. The 60-90 minutes before sleep time should be screen-free, as the blue light emitted from tablet devices and smartphones delays the onset of sleep (books, audio books, music, or even TV are much better alternatives to small, handheld devices). Rapid-fire, fast-paced screen action should also be avoided before school, as it overloads the sensory and nervous systems, making it difficult for children to pay attention in class.

Where

Identifying no-go tech zones in your house is critical from a young age if we want to help our kids develop healthy technology habits. I recommend bedrooms, play areas, bathrooms and cars (for short trips) as tech-free spaces, along with meal areas (always eating in front of a screen displaces opportunities for language and social interaction and has been shown to promote mindless eating in children).

How

With increasing rates of young children presenting with myopia (near-sightedness), musculoskeletal issues (like 'tech neck') and the risk of noise-induced hearing loss (from using ear-bud headphones that exceed recommended decibel levels for children), it's essential that parents help their children use screens in ergonomic ways and ensure that screens aren't used excessively.

Technology is a wonderful tool that can support our kids' learning, if it's used appropriately and in intentional ways. Developing healthy tech habits from the start ensures our kids can leverage the benefits it offers; and minimises any potential harmful effects.



“Rapid-fire, fast-paced screen action should be avoided before school, as it overloads the sensory and nervous systems, making it difficult for children to pay attention in class.”

Dr Kristy Goodwin is a digital parenting speaker, researcher and author of 'Raising Your Child in a Digital World' and mum to two boys (and yes, they do throw techno-tantrums). Kristy helps parents and professionals ditch their guilt and guesswork when it comes to raising young kids in a digital world, by arming parents with facts, not fears.

You can find answers to more of your 'digital dilemmas' here www.drkristygoodwin.com.

Use the promo code "BTS20" to get 20% off Kristy's video seminar for parents of preschoolers at <https://drkristygoodwin.com/about-plugged-in-childhoods/> or a copy of her eBook 'Raising 2-5 Year Olds in a Digital World' here <https://drkristygoodwin.com/about-raising-2-5-year-olds-in-a-digital-world/>.

The link between hearing, language and literacy



Of all the senses, hearing has the greatest impact on language development. Today, infants are tested at birth in hospitals so that if a hearing loss is detected, no time is wasted in providing amplification for the hearing-impaired child. The child's first three years is a critical time for receiving sound, before the auditory cortex begins to deteriorate – so early intervention is essential for a good hearing/language prognosis.

There are two types of hearing loss: Sensori-neural (permanent) or conductive (usually treatable). For those born with a sensori-neural hearing loss, hearing aids or Cochlear implants can provide the appropriate level of amplification.



“Of all the senses, hearing has the greatest impact on language development.”

For those with conductive losses, medical intervention is usually required with excellent success rates after treatment. A GP visit is the starting point and referral to an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist may follow. Conductive losses can be caused by malformations in the anatomy of the ear (e.g. atresia), eustachian tube dysfunction (colds, allergies, adenoids), or from middle-ear infections (otitis media, sometimes referred to as glue ear). Ignoring middle-ear infections can result in a rupture of the tympanic membrane (burst eardrum), which makes recovery more complicated.

In the initial stages, a conductive hearing loss may be mild; but if ignored, the fluid in the middle ear thickens and the hearing loss can become much more significant.

A mild hearing loss is often difficult to detect. Perhaps the child asks for repetition frequently, cannot hear when the television is on, may not be attentive in classroom settings, or may have trouble participating in conversation from the back seat of a car. When this is not detected, after a while the hearing drops and it can result in a child who can no longer hear speech at normal conversation levels.

Hearing loss will impact the child's learning and language development. Speech therapists can provide guidelines for language development and whilst there can be great variation between children, there are age-appropriate levels that are recommended. If a child has not reached a milestone, a hearing check and/or visit to a speech therapist is recommended. Remember, with early intervention, a successful outcome is easier to achieve.

Whilst language is the overt outcome of hearing, in the preschool years there is also the development of phonemic awareness taking place, where the brain learns to perceive the phonemes of speech which impact on later literacy skills. Often children around age seven with a history of early conductive hearing loss, are found to have poor auditory processing skills when they are learning to read. This can manifest as a poor auditory memory, inability to differentiate pitch, or difficulty hearing amongst noise – all skills needed for learning and reading.

Another precaution for children with a hearing loss is the need for extra care when crossing a road, as they cannot hear the low frequency sounds of a motor car approaching.

If a parent, carer or teacher has any concerns regarding a child's hearing, a simple visit to a paediatric audiologist is recommended. Hearing testing for children, when carried out well, is a painless, fun procedure using age-appropriate games and puppets. It usually takes no longer than 30 minutes and can be a pleasant experience.

Signs your child may need a hearing test

- They commonly ask you to repeat what you've said
- They find it hard to hear with background noise, e.g. television
- It's difficult for them to participate in conversation from the back seat of the car
- They may not be attentive in classroom settings

Lindsay Reinhardt, BA, MASA CC, dip Special Education, Dip Audiology, is Director of Northside Audiology, an audiology clinic located in Sydney. From their purpose-built, state-of-the-art facility in Chatswood to their clinics in Bella Vista, Neutral Bay and Gladesville, Northside Audiology makes the process of hearing assessment and hearing management as straightforward as possible.
<https://northsideaudiology.com.au/>



Access to early literacy for ALL communities



The Ready to Read Community Literacy Program is a not-for-profit initiative, in partnership with Clever Care NOW. The vision for this collaboration is to increase early literacy levels across all communities.



Community Literacy Program

The goals of this initiative are to:

- Increase awareness about literacy issues
- Broaden access to the Ready to Read early literacy program to communities across Australia
- Bring the joy of reading into the community

This initiative has been developed in response to concerning statistics:



Regular Ready to Read Hurstville and Caringbah classes are also managed by Clever Care NOW, which is a not-for-profit organisation based in the Sutherland Shire.

For more information, visit:

<https://readytoread.com.au/community-literacy-program/>
and follow the Ready to Read Community Literacy Program on Facebook.

Recognition for early literacy

The Ready to Read program, operating in small classroom environments across Sydney since 2001, has been recognised as the **Best Local Preschooler Activity, 3-5 years at the national What's On 4 Kids Awards!**

This is a wonderful acknowledgement not only for the strong program and continued effort of all teachers at Ready to Read; but for early literacy in general, which is being increasingly recognised for its importance.



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