

Preparing for School... Activities - February 2015

When they get to school, your child will be expected to sit, listen, stand in line etc and will be praised for 'good waiting' and 'good listening'. We recognise the importance of helping parents prepare our pre-school children so they are ready to understand how to behave in a busy classroom.

When children are good at waiting and listening they are able to stand quietly in a queue (we have sticky backs when we are standing against a wall), listen to a story without shouting out, sit through a song they don't like without wandering away and respond to their friends' comments without having to tell a bigger taller or louder tale.. and they do not always need to be first! Children need to learn that others can speak first.. that others have different opinions from their own... that others can do something well and service praise... that we have similarities and differences which mean we are all unique and special.

However, we also need to be careful because we want children to develop into strong and independent learners and to be able to take on the responsibility of leadership. We do not want to squash their natural desire to be the first and the best because it's great to see them developing the management skills they will need in future life.

Good waiting and good listening doesn't just mean giving toys to friends or understanding how to take turns during a game - skills our pre-school children have already consolidated very well through being at Grafton Childcare. Good waiting and good listening also means sharing the teacher's time, not shouting out during quiet times and not needing to be the first or loudest or one most noticed every time. We want our pre-school children to learn this now, in a supportive and gentle environment rather than a busy classroom where they might be 'told off' for shouting out rather than gently supported to respond in a different way.

Activities we plan to support your child that you can try at home include...

- When we are reading a story we often use one of our Grafton Bears or one of the props from our Story Sacks which is passed around the children. Whoever is holding the bear or prop speaks while the other children listen. We will closely monitor how children are coping with this and adapt the ways we use Grafton Bear and our Props depending on their responses. The bears and props are great for supporting children to learn to speak out in a group as well... another skill children will need to learn for school.
- We are starting to teach children 'finger on lips' followed by 'thumbs up' so they know through visual signs that when we give the 'thumbs up' they have done well waiting - this saves us having to break all the children's concentration to speak to individuals to ask them to wait.
- During our daily Circle Time sessions we will invite all the children to speak/listen by using their names and asking them to contribute in turn, when they are able to share news from home or tell us about a toy or book they have brought in for Show and Tell. Experts tell us that when a child raises their hand, shouts out or asks a question in the middle of a book (or lesson in school) they have stopped listening because what they are thinking about takes over from everything else. We feel that practicing turn taking will help the children learn that their turn will come because they will see that

everyone gets a chance to have their say. If they do forget and shout out we will gently ask them to 'please wait' using the 'finger to lips' technique used in school and praise them for 'good waiting' when it is their turn. At home, you could use a teddy who reads books with your child and has a turn to speak or make comments so they learn to listen to teddy.

- When we have completed activities and sea re showing everyone what we have done we will ensure each child has opportunities to go first... but we will also plan things so sometimes they go second or third so they have to wait a short while for their needs to be met. We will praise them for 'good waiting' as well as for what they have achieved because we want to use the same words as their teachers will use in school - and we know that all our children respond well to positive comments. At home you might help your child to learn that they sometimes need to wait a few moments, slowly extending the time scale for waiting when they have learned the new skill.
- Most pre-school children get louder and louder when they want something, when they are drawing attention to themselves or something they have done. We will counter this by speaking quietly to them when asking them to wait. When adults speak quietly and respectfully, children have to listen more carefully to hear what is being said - this encourages concentration and listening skills.
- To encourage your child to listen and praise their friends, we will plan some age-appropriate group activities to support all the children to think about how they deal in different situations such as if someone deflates them by saying something that makes them sad or shouts out over what they are trying to say. We will do it in a fun way using puppets and small world toys they enjoy playing with so they are engaged in their learning.

We will always try to be consistent in our approach. We think it might be hard for all the children to start with... so we will ensure they maintain their normal level of high wellbeing during their time and days here and support them as needed. This is not a race to achieve a goal - it's a slow plod for everyone. We will have to learn from how your child responds and we might need to adapt our techniques to better support them. Feedback from home is very important - please let us know how your child is getting on with waiting a few moments for attention, shouting out etc when with you via your child's Wow Cards (lilac postcards in your child's folder), Daily Diary's My Favourite Things Pages. Communication Book's - My Favourite Things Pages.

With thanks as always to Sarah Neville for helping with our series on Preparing for School.