Transitioning to Secondary School: Occupational Therapy Tips and Strategies

Cork Kerry Primary Care

Paediatric Occupational Therapy

We aim to provide you with tips and strategies that will help to prepare your child for their transition to Secondary School.

Further strategies specific to your child's needs can be provided upon meeting with your Occupational Therapist.

Content

1. Preparing your child for a new school setting
2. Establishing routine
3. School Clothes
4. Organisational Skills
5. Homework and study
6. Additional support
7. Finding a balance
8. Online resources

1.Preparing your child for a new school setting

- The school setting
- Building new friendships

The school setting

Tips and Strategies:

- Moving to a new school can be a time of excitement but it can also cause worry and feelings of anxiety for some children. Learning about their new school in advance of transitioning can help your child feel prepared and ready.

- Visit the secondary school website with your child if this is available. Gather information about the time school starts and finishes. Is there a half day? Who is the School Principal? What opportunities are available for extracurricular activities. What does the school uniform look like? What choice of subjects are available?

- Attend an open evening. Visit the new school towards the end of sixth class to help them become familiar with the new setting.

- An older sibling attending the school can share their experiences, talk about the setting and what to expect.

Establishing new friendships

Tips and Strategies:

- Discuss conversation starters that could be used when making new friends if this does not come easily to your child. For example: Where are you from? Did you go on any holidays over the summer? Do you know anyone else in first year? What subjects/option subjects did you choose to complete this year? What are your hobbies/interests?

- Attend new activities/groups/summer camps during the summer prior to the transition to secondary school. This will be an opportunity to make new friends and meet new people.

- Discuss phone use. Who to share their number with. Discuss safe use of social media. Set boundaries. A time out from social media could have a positive impact on well being, sleep and study.

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3. School clothes

- Dressing skills

- The school uniform

- The school tie

- Physical Education (P.E.)

- Changing for P.E.

Dressing skills

Tips and Strategies:

- Practise dressing skills over the summer holidays prior to starting Secondary School.

- If fastening a button continues to be a challenge, leave shirt buttons fastened to speed up dressing in the morning. Your child should continue to practise buttoning in the evenings or at weekends.

- If tying shoe-laces remains to be difficult, slip-on school shoes could be sourced. Consider triathlon lock laces for trainers. Continue to practice tying shoe laces outside of school until independence is achieved.

Triathlon lock laces

- Please refer to the hand-outs entitled fine motor skills and self-care skills on the 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage' for tips on how to develop these skills.

    http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/

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The following hand-outs are available to view on our webpage http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/

The school uniform

Tips and strategies:

- Create a visual schedule of the dressing sequence. A visual schedule is a sequence of photos that helps your child to learn each step and what comes next. Photos of your child's clothes can be arranged in the order that they are put on.

- Choose a routine place to store the uniform after undressing. Your child may choose to lay out the uniform on a chair, place it into a drawer, or they may decide to create a label for a hanger such as 'Hang my uniform here!'

- Position a long mirror in your child's bedroom to encourage them to monitor their own presentation.

- Label clothes tags with initials so that clothes can be easily found amongst others.

- Is there a shirt or trousers pocket to ensure safe keeping of money and valuables. Create a hidden pocket. A key-ring with cord can be attached to a belt or school bag to keep locker keys safe.

TO DO
1. PJs OFF
2. Underpants on
3. Shirt on
4. Pants on
5. Tie on
6. Jumper on
7. Socks on, Shoes on

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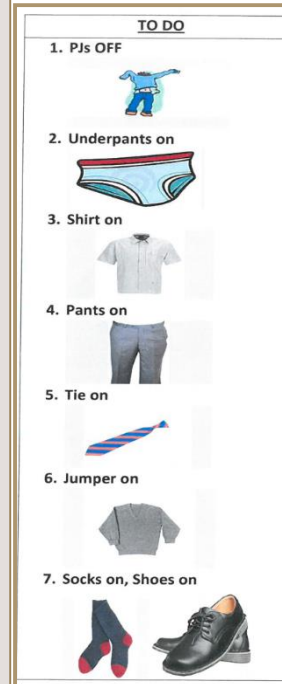
The school tie

Tips and Strategies:

- If a neck tie forms part of the school uniform set aside time for practise before school starts. Break the task into steps. Practise each step.

- Write out each step in their own words using 'Goal, Plan, Do, Check' format. (CO-OP approach to learning a new skill). This strategy will help your child to plan out what has to be completed whilst learning and remembering the sequence of steps.
  https://co-opacademy.ca/about-co-op/the-co-op-approach/

- Create a visual schedule/picture plan, taking photos of each step being completed.

- If your child is not yet independent in this dressing task, your child can leave the tie in a 'tied state' when undressing until speed improves.

CO-OP Approach

My Goal: Tie my school tie

My Plan:
Step 1._____
Step 2._____
Step 3._____
Step 4._____

Do

Check (Did it work? Do we need to change any step)

Sample visual schedule: Tying a neck tie

Tying a School Tie- Right handed

Step 1
Place the fat side on your right hand side. The thin side will be on your left hand side. Make sure the seam is facing inwards/towards your body.

Step 2
Make the fat side twice as long as the thin side.

Step 3
Wrap the fat side around the thin side twice. Make sure the seam is facing inwards/towards the body.

Step 4
Bring the fat side up through the V.

Step 5
Once it has been brought up through the V, bring the fat side down through the second loop. Make sure the fat side is on top of the thin side.

Step 6
Place one hand on the knot and one have on the thin side and move the knot up to your collar.

Step 7
To remove the tie: Place one hand on the knot and one hand on the collar/neck piece. Pull the collar/neck piece out of the knot. Remove it over head if you do not wish to fully untie.

Physical Education (P.E.)

Tips and strategies:

- Source a bag that can be dedicated to P.E. gear.

- Create a mind map of items needed for P.E. A mind map is a method of brainstorming. A mind map can be drawn on paper or created using Microsoft word on a word processor.

- Choose a place to put this mind map in the bedroom. It can be stuck with blu-tack to the inside of a wardrobe door. This mind map can be referred to routinely when organising the P.E. bag, ideally the night before.

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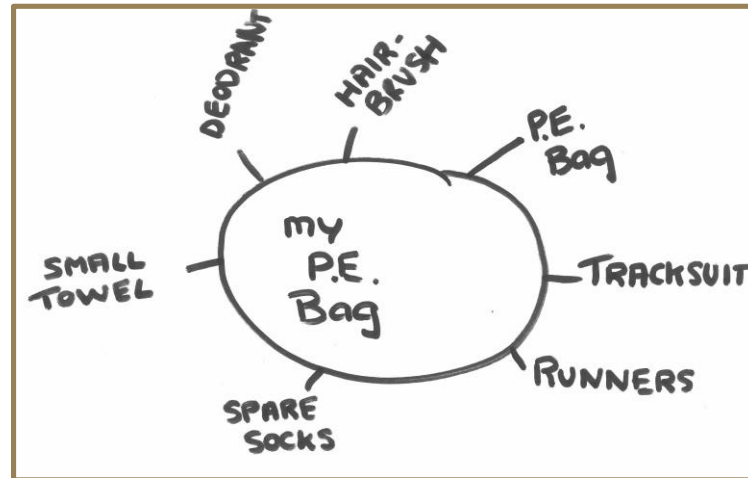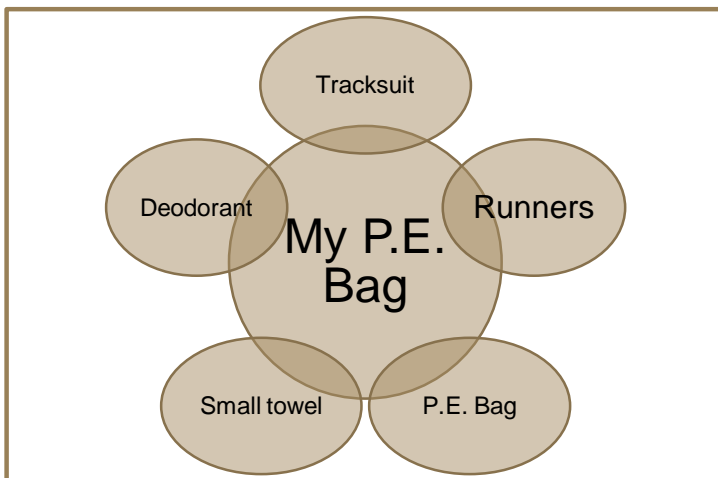
Changing for P.E.

Tips and strategies:

- Your child may need practise folding or sorting their school uniform when undressing for P.E. This preparation will help your child when getting dressed quickly to return to class.

- If P.E. is first class in the school day, it may be possible to wear their P.E. outfit to school.

- Remind your child to use the mirror if available in the changing area at school before returning to class to sort clothes on self.

- If your child needs extra time to dress, make contact with their P.E. teacher at the start of the school year.

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2. Establishing Routine

- Time management

- Establishing a morning routine

- Getting to school

Time management

Tips and Strategies:

- Time management is important at home and in secondary school.

- Encourage use of an alarm clock to assist in waking independently for school.

- A digital alarm clock can suit children who are sensitive/over-responsive to noise/the sound of the clock ticking through the night.

- Place the alarm clock away from the bed. This will encourage your child to get out of bed upon hearing their morning alarm.

- Wear a wrist watch. Put this on as part of dressing.

- A digital watch can be easier to read and follow for some.

Establishing a morning routine

Tips and Strategies:

- Some children have difficulty remembering the steps involved in getting ready for school. Some have difficulty starting a task or sequencing these steps independently. To help with this it is beneficial to develop a morning routine.

- Create a visual schedule/picture plan of the steps involved in getting ready for school. Images for a visual schedule can be downloaded online or photos can be taken of your child completing tasks.

- Encourage your child to be consistent in their routine each day. Praise efforts made.

- An alternative to a visual schedule is to create a 'to do' list or checklist of the tasks to be completed.
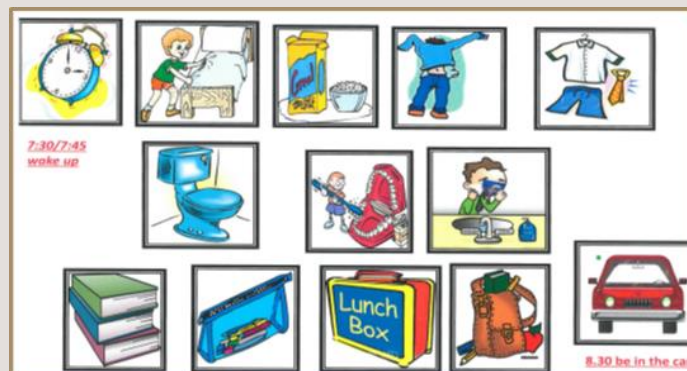
Visual Schedule/Picture plan

Getting to school

Tips and Strategies:

- Practise the walk/cycle/bus route before secondary school begins.

- If your child chooses to cycle to school, explore where they can leave their bicycle.

- Practice using the bicycle lock. Consider a combination lock if keys are easily lost.

- If your child chooses to get the bus, encourage your child to find out where the bus leaves from everyday. Help your child become familiar with their bus – departure times, bus number, type of bus. Write out a to-do list. Will payment be by card or cash. Where will this be stored safely?

- Encourage your child to leave enough time in the mornings after getting off the bus/out of car to go to locker and organise books and belongings for the day ahead.

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4. Organisational skills

- The school bag
- Books, copies and pencil case
- Colour coding
- The timetable
- The school locker

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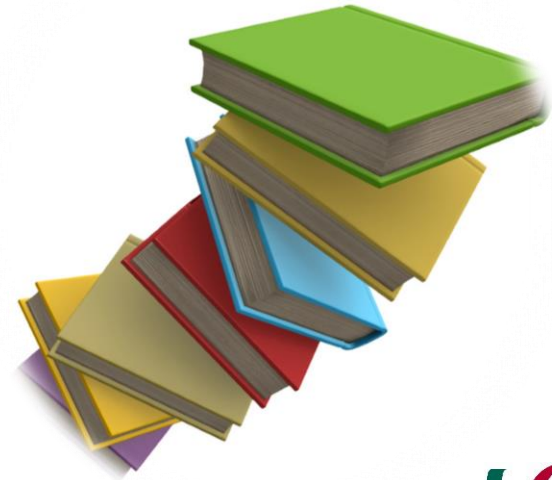
Organisational skills

Please refer to the hand-out entitled Organisational Skills on the HSE 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage' for details on how to develop organisational skills.

http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/

The school bag

Tips and Strategies:

- School bags can look the same. How can your child tell their bag apart? Your child can apply a badge, key-ring or use a permanent marker to create a symbol.

- Encourage your child to routinely pack the school bag the night before. Use a calendar to write down items that need to be remembered on certain days. Check the school bag with your child over the first few weeks of secondary school. Praise efforts made to organise their belongings.

- Write the name of items that are routinely forgotten onto a key-tag/key ring. This may include the pencil case, calculator, or runners. Place this key-tag onto the zip of the school bag or P.E. bag. When the zip is being closed this key-tag will act as a visual reminder to check that items are packed.

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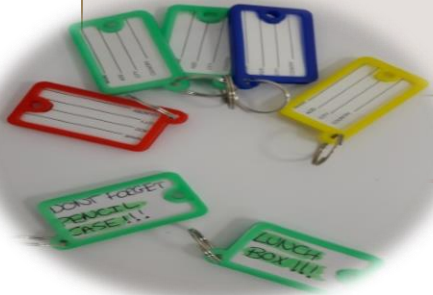
Books, copies and pencil case

Tips and Strategies:

- Colour code books and copies using coloured labels, stickers, markers etc. Alternatively invest in coloured folders per subject.

- Place stickers or coloured labels onto the 'side' of the school book or copy to make them easier to see.

- Sort books and copies according to subject/colour rather than size.

- Use of a see-through/transparent pencil case to find writing tools easily.

- Keep a spare pencil case and calculator at home in case it is forgotten.

- Will your child be accessing the school curriculum via an ipad/tablet class? In these cases books are downloaded to the ipad/tablet.

Transparent pencil case

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Colour coding

Tips and Strategies:

- Choose easy to purchase colours e.g. highlighters and primary colours. Encourage your child to take a lead in choosing the colours to help with carryover/memory.

- Allocate colours to the most frequent/daily subjects first- English, Math and Irish.

- When colour coding the school timetable make three copies of it. Place one copy on the back of the homework journal, one copy can be placed on the inside of the locker door, and one can be place above their study desk at home. This helps your child find books required quickly.

SUBJECT	NAME OF COLOUR	COLOUR
English	Red	
Maths	Green	
Irish	Orange	
History	Yellow	
Geo-graphy	Blue	
Science	Pink	

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Sample of a colour coded timetable using colouring pens and highlighters

BEFORE

AFTER

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8-45-9.20	Science 2 Sci K (124) 303	Maths 2 Math 0(145) 304	Art 2 Art M (114) 300	Geography 2 Geo K (214) 109	Irish 2 Iri O (158) 115
9.20-10.00	Geography 2 Geo K (214) 109	SPHE 2Soc K (220) 209	R.E. 2 Rel 0 (154) 211	English 2 Eng G (208) 115	PE 2 Phy G (111)
10.00-10.40	English 2Eng M (133) 307	History 2 His K (120) 111	English 2 Eng G (208) 134	Irish 2 Iri O (158) 301	PE 2 Phy G (111)
10.40-10.50	Tutorial 2 Tut K (333) 111	Tutorial 2 Tut K (333) 111	Tutorial 2 Tut K (333) 111	Tutorial 2 Tut K (333) 111	Tutorial 2 Tut K (333) 111
11.05-11.45	MTW 2 Mat K (115) 129	Irish 2 Iri O (158) 301	Geography 2 Geo K (214) 109	Art 2 Art M (114) 300	French 2 Fre P (157) 109
11.45-12.25	MTW 2 Mat K (115) 129	Science 2 Sci K (124) 303	Maths 2 Math 0(145) 304	Art 2 Art M (114) 300	Maths 2 Math 0(145) 304
12.25-13.00	History 2 His K (120) 111	French 2 Fre P (157) 211	Irish 2 Iri O (158) 301	History 2 His K (120) 111	MTW 2 Mat K (115) 129
13.00-13.30					
13.30-13.45					
13.45-14.25	French 2 Fre P (157) 301	Science 2 Sci K (124) 303		Maths 2 Math 0(145) 304	CSPE 2 Civ K (217) 115
14.25-15.05	Irish 2 Iri O (158) 301	Science 2 Sci K (124) 303		French 2 Fre P (157) 309	R.E. (JC Exam) 2 Rel 0 (154) 313
15.05-15.45	Maths 2 Math 0(145) 304	English 2 Eng G (208) 117		R.E. (JC Exam) 2 Rel 0 (154) 307	English 2 Eng M (133) 305

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Sample of colour coded timetables using Microsoft Office on a Word Processor

In the case of significant literacy difficulties, transfer the timetable to Microsoft Word and your child can add pictures.

The School Locker

Tips and Strategies:

- Place a copy of the colour coded timetable on the inside door of the locker.

- Consider the need for a spare locker key.

- Attach the locker key to the uniform using a stringed and labelled keyring.

- Encourage your child to have a designated place for their locker key at home.

- Is a combination lock required if a key will likely be lost.

- If your child has difficulty with organisation or is sensitive to noise or large gatherings, make a request to have a locker located at eye level or at the end of a row. If this is not available your child could learn to go to their locker at times when it is less busy.

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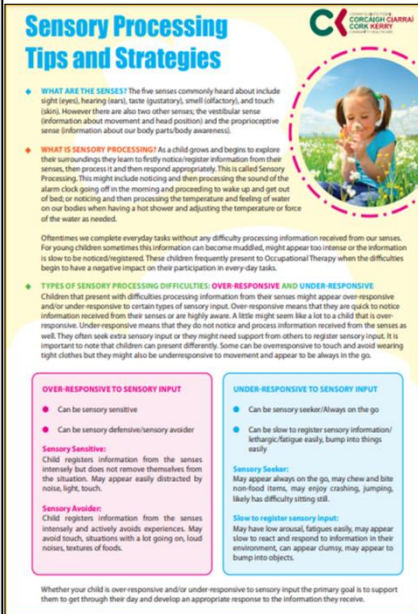
5. Homework and Study

- Homework, study and sensory processing
- Setting up a homework/study area
- Homework
- Study tips and revision

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Homework, Study and Sensory Processing

Tips and Strategies:

- Information received via our senses include light, sound, smell, taste, touch, movement and body awareness. Some children may appear sensitive/over-responsive to this information, a little might seem like a lot. Some children may appear under-responsive. They may seek extra movement or appear lethargic and sleepy. If there are difficulties processing and responding to sensory information, this may impact on your child' ability to focus in school and when completing homework and study.

- Your child may benefit form the 'increased opportunities' for movement in secondary school when moving from class to class.

- Your child may require movement breaks to help them to attend, concentrate and regulate when completing homework and study at home.

- Your child may appear sensitive/over-responsive to noise or sounds and become easily distracted by these when studying. A quiet room may suit best. Alternatively your child may seek sound or music to help them concentrate, remain alert and focused.

- Your child may benefit form using colours and highlighters when studying and revising to keep them focused and alert.

- Please refer to the hand-out entitled Sensory Processing on the HSE 'Occupational Therapy for Children and Young People Cork Kerry Primary Care' website for further details. http://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children

Setting up a homework/study area

Tips and strategies:

- Consider how your child studies best. Do they need light? Are they distracted by noise? This will guide where the table and chair should be positioned.

- Create a study/homework area with a desk and a chair that are the correct height for your child.

- Feet should be able to reach the floor. Hips and knees at 90 degrees. Elbows should rest comfortably on the desk for handwriting and reading.

- A Calender can be placed over the desk to record when assignments/projects are due.

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Homework

Tips and strategies:

- Encourage a break, snack and a chance to move around/ be active before starting homework.

- To record homework quickly in class, your child can write abbreviations of subjects into the homework journal at the start of the week.

- When homework is completed, it can be crossed out. Any outstanding work can be highlighted with a highlighter.

- Depending on the secondary school system, occasionally homework is emailed to students or put onto the school website. If unsure link with teachers or the year head about the acceptable/expected amount of time to spend on homework.

- If reduced attention span and concentration is experienced- consider use of a timer. Encourage your child to take short breaks to move every 15 minutes.

- Link with another parent. Consider sharing contact numbers for times when there is a query about school-work or assignments to be completed. Your child may also have a contact number for a classmate that they can check with.

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Study tips & revision

Tips and Strategies:

- Use a calendar to schedule time for study. Establishing a study routine will ensure your child does not become overwhelmed before secondary school exams. Lack of preparation can cause added stress and anxiety.

- For children that find initiating creative writing and study a slow and challenging process, a mind map is a useful strategy to use.

- A mind map is simply a map of one's thoughts and a quick way to get information into and out of the brain. It can be made of pictures or words. Mind Maps can be used routinely in secondary school when taking notes, planning essays or revising.

- Templates for mind mapping are available to download. Websites include: https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/

- In addition to mind maps a number of secondary school students use 'Quizlets' (Quizlet app) as a means of revision. Quizlets are often created by secondary school teachers to help students revise.

- Remind your child to remain hydrated, ensure they have eaten and encourage breaks during study to aid concentration and attention.

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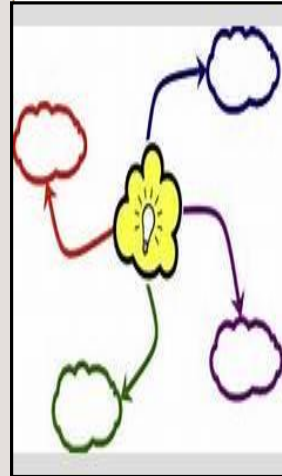
6. Additional support

- Additional support and assistance in school

- Assistive technology

- Reasonable accommodations (RACE)

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Additional support and assistance in school

Tips and Strategies:

- If a child required additional support in primary school and it is thought that support may be required during this transition, it is recommended that parents arrange to speak to or meet with the head of learning support/special needs coordinator in the secondary school or School Principal.

- This contact should be made in the months prior to your child transitioning to the school. Ideally before your child has finished sixth class and before secondary school's close for the summer. This can be as early as May for some secondary schools.

- Provide copies of professional reports detailing your child's strengths and needs.

- Applications for assistive technology may need to be re-made by the secondary school if the laptop is to remain in the primary school. It is important that the secondary school is made aware that your child has been using assistive technology to access the school curriculum.

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Assistive technology (AT)

Tips and Strategies:

- Assistive technology in the form of a laptop or a tablet computer can be required by some children to support reading and handwriting due to an underlying diagnosis.

- Touch typing is an important skill to master. Websites such as Typing.com and Rapid Typing are useful to practise. Touch typing classes may be available in your local area.

- Software to support mind-mapping include 'Inspiration' and 'Popplet'.

- The electronic version of books may be available to download. Proof of purchase may be requested if the hard copy of a book has been purchased. Contact can be made with publishers to discuss the availability of the electronic version.

"UCC's Assistive Technology Outreach programme offers free training and presentations on assistive technology to support students with disabilities/learning difficulties, their parents and educators."

https://www.ucc.ie/en/lawwellbeing/news/uccs-assistive-technology-outreach-programme.html

UCC Assistive Technology Outreach Co-ordinator: Deirdre Madden
Tel: 021 4902784 (Wed to Fri during school term)

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Assistive technology(AT) continued

Tips and Strategies:

- Use a lightweight laptop carry case or envelope sleeve.

- A USB key is beneficial to save and transfer files.

- Help your child learn to use Microsoft Word.

- Practise organising and creating folders on the desktop for each subject.

- To help find files easily remind your child to name and/or date files at the time of saving. Practise saving files to the correct folder. Practise saving to a USB key to backup important data.

- Set up a connection to internet/Wi-Fi at home if homework is to be received and sent by email. Access to a wireless printer is beneficial at home and in school.

- Supervise and monitor safe use of the internet by your child.

- Screen time should be reduced at least an hour before bedtime to aid your child's ability to sleep. Blue light omitted by electronic devices, close to bedtime, can inhibit the bodies production of melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone that helps your child to fall asleep and get a good nights sleep.

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Reasonable Accommodations (RACE)

Background:

"If a person with a disability is prevented from accessing the service in the normal way, the person providing the service has a duty to do all that is reasonable to accommodate them in accessing it. The particular arrangements that need to be made are then called reasonable accommodations".

State Examinations Commission RACE student guide 2020

- In cases where a child has been using assistive technology to access the school curriculum or if they have an underlying diagnosis that may affect how they will complete state examinations, the Secondary School will make an application for RACE on your child's behalf.

A series of tests can be administered by the Secondary School typically in second year to explore what accommodations may be required for a child prior to state examinations.

State Examinations Commission- RACE guide for students
(This is updated on a yearly basis)
https://www.examinations.ie/schools/EN-1013-79847199.pdf

Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission
Cearr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí, N37 TP61,
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 TP65.

Reasonable Accommodations at the 2019 Certificate Examinations

Guide for Students

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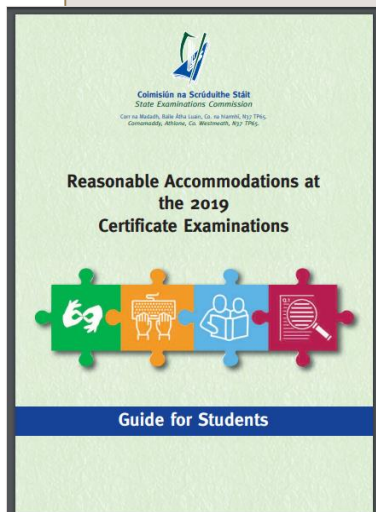
7. Finding a balance

- Balancing school-work and leisure

Balancing school-work and leisure:

- Moving to a new school can create feelings of anxiety for some. Ensuring that your child feels prepared will be key to this successful transition.

- Study and exam time can be a trigger for stress for some children. Having a study plan or timetable can help. It is important that your child becomes aware of potential triggers of stress so that they can be identified.

- Encourage your child to explore activities that calm or relieve stress. Going for a swim, walk, cycle or listening to music may help.

- Your child should be encouraged to take regular rest breaks when studying and engage in activities that create enjoyment and relaxation away from study.

- Engaging in extracurricular activities and exercise will have a positive impact on mood and mental health. Getting sufficient Sleep/Rest is crucial.

- Link with your child's General Practitioner (GP) if you have concerns about your child's anxiety, low mood or ability to attend and concentrate.

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8. Online Resources

Online resources

- Occupational Therapy for children and young people Cork Kerry Primary Care webpage, HSE
  https://www.hse.ie/corkkerry/ot-for-children/

- The Dyslexia Association of Ireland
  http://www.dyslexia.ie/

- Dyspraxia DCD Ireland
  www.dyspraxia.ie

- Jigsaw- Young people's health in mind
  Jigsaw Cork and Kerry provide a service to those experiencing mild mental health concerns for example self esteem, bullying, low mood. Jigsaw Cork and Kerry is a free, non-judgemental and confidential mental health support service for young people aged 12 - 25 living, working or studying in Cork and Kerry. Contact Jigsaw for more details.
  https://www.jigsaw.ie/jigsaw_cork/
  www.jigsaw.ie/kerry/

Online resources continued

- **National council for special education- Online resources for parents**
  https://ncse.ie/

- **State Examinations Commission- RACE guide for students (This is updated on a yearly basis)**
  https://www.examinations.ie/schools/EN-1013-79847199.pdf

- **Cork Sports Partnership- community events and sporting opportunities**
  https://www.corksports.ie/

- **Your Good Self Programme**
  www.hse.ie/yourgoodself

- **HSE-Teaching your children to be active**
  https://www.getirelandactive.ie/
  https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/teaching-your-children-to-be-active.html

Please note online links are correct at the time of publishing. Links to online information can be updated frequently. Please visit the websites homepage for up to date information if a link does not bring you directly to a document.

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

We hope you find these tips and strategies helpful, in supporting your child's transition to Secondary School.

Further strategies specific to your child's needs can be provided upon meeting with your Occupational Therapist

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