

PARENTS GUIDE

This guide for parents is based on the Association Roditeli's Handbook "Welcome school, parents". It aims at decreasing the levels of school drop-out through increased awareness for the school organization and affairs concerning children and their mothers and fathers. It is issued in the frame of the PREVENT project (PREVENT - The Involvement of Parents in the Prevention of Early School Leaving).

UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT

According to the popular psychologist Erik Erikson, development passes off universal stages that lead to stable identity. Each stage has its own requirements and sets different tasks. Erikson sees growing-up as a sequence of resolved crises that incite change, development and independency. The successful resolving of crises is essential for mental health.

Here you will find some of the main aspects of the school period (6-12 yrs.) that play key role in child development and facilitate adopting adaptive social skills.

Initiative is this period's expected social skill. This is the time of increased social contacts, new responsibilities for oneself and others, better planning and purposeful behavioural control. Children start to identify with people whose actions and characters are comprehensible to them. They learn, plan and strive to a specific goal. Their motto is "*I am what I will be one day*". It is crucial that both parents support and encourage the child's independency. Having their aspirations to autonomy frustrated, children develop a feeling of guilt which makes them passive, dependent, and lacking purposefulness in setting and achieving goals.

The next social skill in the developmental line to be acquired is *industry* - the aspiration to new habits and success through simple subtasks (homework, school projects, growing a flower, getting one's books ready for the next day). Industry is built at school which is the time when children start to successfully acquire social culture, knowledge and rules. These are the solid ground for further mastering of new behaviours or skills. The motto of the period is "*I am what I learn*". Children at this stage need to grasp that their value for the society is their knowledge and actions, not their race, sex, age, religion or social status. This is the preventive factor against a feeling of *inferiority*.

Away from theory, give yourself a second to think about how well your child is at:

- Greeting, presenting oneself. Talking clearly and comprehensibly. Looking in the eyes.



- Participating in mutual activities or conversations. Initiating plays with peers. Sharing, giving and taking help. Accepting other's opinions, following rules and completing tasks.
- Requiring attention in a socially accepted way. Ceasing unwanted conversation and rejecting unpleasant proposals and ideas.
- Recognizing basic emotions in one and taking into consideration emotions of others, expressing adequately one's emotions. Apologizing.
- Taking care for oneself -changing clothes and putting them and one's possessions in place, tying shoes laces, eating appropriately, going to the toilet on one's own.

If your child is able to perform even one of these behaviours, he or she is already advanced on one's road towards growing-up. Help your child get accustomed to the new environment at school as you encourage his or her social skills. Remember to admit achievements fondly and thoughtfully.

TOGETHER IN 1ST GRADE

1. Children's emotional state is more important than details.

Children are emotional beings. They unmistakably discern the slightest hint of anxiety, doubt and pressure in their parents. On the wings of euphoria, mothers and fathers are beckoned to stare at details and practical particularities meanwhile prone to forgetting their child's emotions. Many parents provide their kids with the complete package of materials and textbooks but omit to assure the most important: time, care and emotional support - a hug, active listening, and encouragement.

2. The goal is not acquiring knowledge but learning skills.

The main goal of education should be acquiring life-long learning habits but not attending school as an obligation. The greatest benefit of school education is the training to learn.

3. Authority N1 is not school but parents.

Family atmosphere can form responsible, valuable and happy people. Parents are not school's partners, quite the opposite - school is a parents' partner. Even the etymology of the word "*parent*" proves your importance. The Latin word "*parentis*" means somebody who protects and takes care.

The first day of school is the starting point of authority change. Your opinion as a parent matters but the teacher also becomes an influential figure for your child. Try not to be on the collision course with the teacher and don't undermine his or her opinion. In case you disagree with your child's teacher, find an appropriate way to talk to the affected parties. It is your responsibility to maintain communication with school and to request information for your child's behaviour and development. When both parents show intrinsic interest in the child's education, the process of communication with school is significantly alleviated.



Parents are in charge when a situation concerning children occurs. However, searching for multiple sources of information and maintaining constant contact with teachers help to facilitate child's development.

4. Responsibility differs from ambition.

Some parents develop *the Yoda syndrome* - the delusional, overpowering desire to raise a genius whose competency is nearly supernatural. Unfortunately, this syndrome cultivates in children a view of school as the dullest place on earth. The aspiration of having your child's bright future secured is understandable, but behind the parental ambition, suffocating the child's individuality, a dominant and controlling tendency can be seen. Learn to distinguish responsibility from ambition and it will spare you many sleepless nights and stomach problems. Your child's health depends on a reasonable load of work and responsibilities.

Here are five key messages, guaranteeing a successful preparation for first grade:

1. **Build communication skills in children.** Talk openly with your child in order to have him or her talking the same way with peers.
2. **Prepare the child for coping with conflict situations.** Talk about the possible problems before they emerge along with specific techniques for resolving conflicts. Make the child see that conflict is normative therefore it needs to be overcome rather than avoided.
3. **Encourage the child to stand up for their opinion.** This will relieve one from the pressure to comply with mutually agreed upon state of things and the risks of conformism.
4. **Organize a comfortable spacious place and provide the necessary materials.**
5. **Support the child and stay close - this is the best a mum and a dad can do.**

We wish open windows of opportunities during the adventure of starting school (once again) together with your child.

DAILY ROUTINE

First grade is one of the biggest challenges faced by children. They have to accustom to entirely new routine, environment, group, and obligations. They need to make efforts to adopt knowledge which is quite unfamiliar to them, although we as adults may not see it this way. It is obvious that parents need to support children in teaching them to learn, plan and prepare everything for the next day. Adequate daily routine is very influential on physical and psychological health at this age.

➤ Establish routine

At first glance, rhythm and repetition may look boring and dull in contemporary life but they have deep meaning for children. Weekly, monthly and annual rhythms give a feeling of security and trust in life - very useful in life.

➤ Time management



Time is the most valuable resource and its effective organization depends on clear prioritizing. Here is our advice:

- Make a list of as many as possible of the child's daily activities - include everything during the week and the month.
- Write them on a piece of paper.
- Underline the most important activities that you wish to be the child's focus.
- Assign time period for accomplishment using different colours.
- Put them on the weekly curriculum.
- Discuss with your partner and allocate duties.
- Encourage everyone to take responsible attitude to the child's time management.

➤ Main tasks

Taking to and picking-up from school. The child has to be at school 15 minutes prior to the start of the first class. Picking-up should be on time. It is important not only for the teachers but for the child as well. Punctuality makes the kid feel valuable instead of forgotten or neglected by the most precious people to one - one's parents. Furthermore, you serve as a model for accuracy and responsible approach towards an engagement. In case of delay, find a way to inform the child in advance.

Extra-curriculum activities. The leading principle is "Less is more". Start the school year with lighter extra-curriculum agenda leaving enough space for play. Include no more than two activities of which one should be a sports one.

Homework preparation. Parents should remember that they may help in doing homework, but they must not do it for the child. The intervention will lead to subsequent problems because the grades will be yours and child will never learn to manage on his or her own.

Bedtime. Sleep and rest are indispensable for a healthy lifestyle, and the health of the child is a parents' obligation.

Household duties. Beginning of school year is not a reason for exempting the child from the household duties such as throwing off the garbage, walking the dog and, most of all, tidying up their room. Household duties need to be on the curriculum.

THE SCHOOL RECORD FOR MESSAGES OR THE SUCCESSFUL WAY OF COMMUNICATION

As early as the first parents' meeting, you are told that the parents and the teacher need to find a suitable means of communication for the next four years. Communication is the basis of trust and sharing - something children sincerely need in order to feel secure.

A COUPLE OF POSSIBILITIES:



The school record. You are told by the teacher to have it bought and prepared in the child's bag. Supposedly, the child will write down the information intended at you - next day's homework, necessary art materials, school celebration that your child participates in, the parents' meeting, etc. Be prepared though that the record won't be filled in every day, and this bears the risk of your forgetting to check it out. This may eventually lead to a missed meeting or celebration.

Email. Exchanging email addresses is one of the first tasks for the parents and the teacher. This possibility saves the time for writing down a message for every child and gives the opportunity for a quick and easy connection among parents as well. Besides, the probability that the message is never received is considerably reduced. The email list can spare you an unhappy morning with the child crying for having forgotten being supposed to bring a picture of a bunny that day.

WATER

Everyday drinking of water is essential for the developing and growing organism. Don't forget the bottle of water. But sometimes the bottle is overlooked because the parents believe the child has taken it and the child thinks it will be prepared by mum or dad. Maybe it is best to have the child responsible for preparing it, but you check it before going to bed. Equipped with a bottle of water, the child will be less tempted to buy a soft or sweet drink when thirsty and won't need to drink water directly from the fountains in the school toilet which are not always at best condition.

TOILETS

Seventy percent of Bulgarian children restrain themselves from going to the toilet.

This is a topic everyone avoids talking about. We have taken it for unchangeable and like an ostrich hide our heads deep in the sand. Don't let the school year start before you visiting the school toilet together with your child. Be supportive during this challenge. Many children see for the first time a toilet with a hole. For them it may be a serious discomfort. Most parents deem the lavatory pan more hygienic. It is unnecessary to discuss the validity of this statement, but we all know how hard it is to use them without getting your trousers sprinkled. It is important to help your children overcome the toilet-related stress. Teach them to wash their hands after being in the toilet and to utilize wet wipes. Go together to the school toilet and teach them how to use it thereby getting them calmed down.

Restraining from going to the toilet may induce a multitude of problems: chronic constipation, dehydration (because children avoid drinking water at school), psychological discomfort.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

From first to fourth grade PE classes are three times a week and at many schools are delivered by the class teacher and not by a PE specialist. The belief that the sports class is



less important than the rest of the curriculum is broadly held. Parents prefer to free their child from PE class if they need to go somewhere. Sometimes the teacher also uses this class for additional preparation on Bulgarian language or Mathematics. It is important for us to understand that sports class is useful for several reasons:

- Overweight and spinal curvature disorder prevention.
- Opportunity for identifying a child's talents in a particular sport.
- Getting acquainted with different sports and choosing the most desirable.
- Following rules and respecting boundaries.
- Mutual exploration, team building, acquiring tolerance and team skills.
- Activity, anxiety reduction, emotional venting and efficiency enhancement.

SCHOOL BAGS

Choosing the right backpack is of significant importance for child's health and proper development. It has to meet the following requirements:

Weight - the bag along with its content must not exceed 10-15% of the child's weight. Therefore if your first-grader weighs around 25 kg, his or her bag must not outweigh 3-4 kg.

Width - the bag must not exceed the width of your child's shoulders. It is recommended that the backpack is not more than 30-40 cm in order to not touch your child's legs when on his or her back.

Straps - they have to be adjustable in order the child to be able to carry the bag equally comfortably when in a T-shirt and when in a winter jacket.

Back - it is recommended to be hard.

Colour - in the sake of safety it is better to have the backpack in vivid signal colours.

To avoid spinal curvature disorders, it is best to teach your child to place the bag on a table or a desk before putting it on. Foster a habit in them to empty out their bags before arranging them for the next day. Before getting this habit fully adopted you will need to check the bag in the child's stead. Negotiate with the teacher to keep some of the stuff at school in order to protect children from overstraining themselves. If needed, get the other mothers and fathers involved for providing lockers in which the children could keep their things.

DEAR TEACHER...

Despite the poetic heading, the advice is very pragmatic. The odds of getting a well-prepared teacher are high. Whether you become partners depends greatly on your approach. Here are some pivotal facts:



#1: Teachers are ordinary people besides professionals working with your children. Be sympathetic and cooperate with your teacher the way you expect he or she would with you.

#2: Teachers want your child to succeed which makes you partners by default. The subtle shade is that teachers want every child to succeed. Give this thought a consideration and you will find out that you also want the success of every child in the class because a productive atmosphere will encourage your child to learn.

#3: Teachers chronically lack time. The curriculum is overburdened and due to the financial reform and allocated budgets classes are packed. A single first-grade lesson lasts for 35 minutes. Dividing this period into the number of children will show you how much personal time with the teacher is allotted to every child. Nevertheless, teachers manage to do their work.

Parents choose their own way of connecting with their child's teacher. Doing it, they are partially influenced by their vision since childhood and additionally by the socially accepted attitudes. Despite this, we should remember that we should support the teacher and demonstrate our benevolence. We wish the teacher success because this is the best for our children. This is the reason why both parents need to be involved in communication with him or her. Sometimes he or she will lack the answers you want to hear, but it doesn't make him or her incompetent. We just need to find the solutions together. In the mass communication era, we become experts thanks to the Internet. We fall in love with experts' recipes and loath anyone who dares to defy them. It is of crucial importance for children that their parents build a quality relationship with the teacher, because it makes them calm and secure. Notwithstanding how much we think we know, the teacher is the only one who can act, because he or she is the only adult in the classroom. The teacher is the one who will wake the sleeping children up, calm the agitated ones down, console the crying eyes and encourage the curious minds.

We all need a teacher - someone to respect and honour.

TOP 9 OF WHAT TEACHERS EXPECT FROM PARENTS

1. **Help the child!** Mother's and father's engagement with the school preparation is of help to the teacher and to the child.
2. **Do no more than what's needed.** The child should be in charge of their own stuff. The goal is acquired skills not perfect homework.
3. **Provide materials and learning conditions at home** - personal library, place for studying.
4. **Be a model!** Let your children know that learning is precious for you. Demonstrate through your actions that reading is pleasant and useful. Read every day with your child. Negotiate the TV and computer games time limit. The father's involvement is crucial.
5. **Encourage the child to give its best at school.** Keep your expectations realistic and your demands positive.



6. **Recognize the negative influence and help the child to overcome it.**
7. **Support school rules and goals.** Be careful to not undermine school norms. Do not engage in insulting statements, disregard or following different rules at home.
8. **Share your thought with the teacher when you think a problem with the child exists.** The sooner the better for finding a solution.
9. **Accept your responsibility as a parent.** Don't expect that the school and the teacher will take your role. Inspire your children with self-discipline and respect for others. Don't shift the responsibility upon educational system.

READING

Learning to read is one of the most important skills for children at school. Reading is acquired equally at school and at home. Children become keen readers when their parents:

- Read at home and give them books as presents.
- Read them a goodnight story every evening.
- Take them to libraries and bookstores.
- Encourage them to talk about and discuss books.

IDEAS FOR FUNNY READING WITH MUM AND DAD:

1. *Reading in verses.* Rhythm and rhyme help children memorize easily texts and follow the lines with eyes.
2. *Double reading.* The parent and the child take turns in reading an interesting story.
3. *Sign-reading.* During long trips children find and read signs, billboards and road-signs.
4. *Better than TV.* Substitute evening TV for an action book, an adventurous story, or a comic.
5. *Labels.* Label the objects in the child's room so he or she will learn how words refer to real objects.
6. *Reading cooking recipes.* Being together in the kitchen, ask the child to help you with reading the recipe. Step by step - instructions, ingredients, measures.
7. *Shopping and reading.* Read the signs and labels in the grocery store or supermarket. At home, while putting the stuff in place play the reading game again.

EASY MATHEMATICS

Acquiring mathematics is quite necessary for further school progress and later in life. Our children need stable knowledge in this subject in order to achieve in higher education and to have broader career choice.

ADVICE FOR MASTERING MATHEMATICAL SKILLS:

1. **Check out if your child comprehends the essence of mathematics.** Playing with objects helps transition from specific to abstract thinking. The child may pile up several cubes and tell you their exact number.

2. **Help the kid understand the basic positions in mathematics.** It means that they can answer an easy problem in 3 seconds. Regular training is a condition for quick answers. The task can be presented in the form of a game.
3. **Teach the child to inscribe numbers intelligibly.** Twenty-five percent of mistakes in problem solving are due to unintelligible symbols.
4. **Help the child when in need.**
5. **Show the child how to cope with homework.** It elaborates the knowledge that children acquire in the classroom. Teach the kid to start writing homework with first reading the lesson in the textbook or the examples in the working book.
6. **Encourage the child to exercise.**
7. **Explain how to solve problems.** Make a habit in your child to read the text of the problem a couple of times before starting to solve it. Teach him or her that even on the most complicated problem they can apply their knowledge step by step.
8. **Help your child learn the concepts in mathematics - language of the subject.** Lacking them, the child will never really comprehend it and progress in acquiring it further. Check it out if your pupil masters the new concepts. If not - use simple models and problems to show him or her the principles of the concepts.
9. **Teach the child to solve mentally.** It helps them to automatize operations and to more easily recognize and apply acquired models.
10. **Implement mathematics in everyday life.** Encourage the child to use it in practice: to calculate the bill while shopping or to plant cultures at equal intervals. These tasks may help one understand the purpose of mathematics.

ART - AN OPPORTUNITY TO FLY

Indisputably, art is one of the options towards a more harmonious and aware view of the self. Art enriches and forms personality. This is why parents should introduce the child to the world outside but also to the world inside him or her. Art helps children express themselves, explore and create without letting them fall into passiveness, indifference and aggression.

Our responsibility as parents is to be the first to excite interest in literature, music, theatre. Thus we help children prioritize values and show them that life is much more than expensive sneakers and steaks...

Read together, visit exhibitions, go to the theatre and continue to talk, discuss and entertain together. Cultural habits are acquired not given. Think about how much time it took to teach your child to eat, get dressed and wash independently. Don't hurry to jump to the conclusion that your child doesn't like reading or going to the theatre.

Every child loves to create. Give them a chance. Direct the kid but foremost listen to his or her needs. Quit imagining that your daughter should be the next music idol or your son will eventually turn out to be the reincarnated Picasso. The important thing is that the child holds responsibility in the engagement. Art will develop further their concentration, intellect, imagination, aesthetic taste and will help them relieve from stress. Art will endow children wings for flying.

TEACH THEM TO LEARN

Learning doesn't come around by itself. We need to help children in learning how to learn effectively. It is one of the main tasks faced by primary school education - building learning habits.

Do you remember how much children loved playing the school-like game when they were 4-5 years old? Well, 10 years later they don't even want to hear about it. The key is that all that time we have expected achievements from them without explaining how they could reach success.

Starting of school is the time to establish habits for independent studying in your child. It means that every day the child should allot an hour for practising and planning study activities alone. Don't exempt the child from this responsibility even in homework-free days. Suggest educational games. It is important that the child understands that this is time for studying not for watching TV, playing computer games or going out. Thus children will keep in mind to do their homework regularly. You may expand the duration of the studying time with the child's growing-up.

People have different learning styles. Some are convinced that the best studying area is a quiet, well-lit room with a desk. Others, however, prefer the opposite atmosphere. They need action. Their concentration is marvellously improved by a couple of minutes run or a quick basketball match. Therefore studying in the above-mentioned way is not recommended for such children. Moreover, some children have highly developed visual skills. They learn best what they see. For them reading the geography lesson and going through a couple of appropriate maps is enough. Some, on the other hand, prefer having an audience. They learn everything they hear or reproduce orally.

If you want to be sure which group your child falls in, seek the cooperation of the teacher or the school psychologist. Dedicate some of your time to find out more about the different learning styles. You may do this together with your child.

But even if you know exactly what your child's strengths are, he or she will still meet obstacles. Then you may need to explain that hardship and exerting effort are normal parts of life. Help the kid pass through the complicated task gradually. Try to make studying interesting. Show your child that it is important, demonstrate interest in their newly acquired knowledge, and ask questions. Make him or her feel proud with it.

We may recommend you some educational websites:

www.dechica.com

www.krokotak.com

SCHOOL FOR ANYONE

Association Roditeli strongly supports inclusive education for children with special educational needs in the Bulgarian school. Although specialized schools are cheaper for



providing all technical materials and means for children with special needs, we firmly believe that every school should ensure good enough conditions, a supportive environment and a host of resource teachers.

Research shows that the main obstacle to integration of children with special educational needs in mass school is parents of the so-called normal kids. Some of our fears are:

- Children with special educational needs will impede the overall progress of the class.
- Other children will imitate them and thus will have problems like them.
- Other children will get upset by the view of them.

We don't aim at disproving these fears but would like to make visible the invaluable benefits for us and our kids from communication with children with special needs. Modern thought has proved that success is based neither upon academic knowledge nor IQ but upon two other kinds of intelligence - social and emotional. The only way to learn how to use positively our emotions is to be in an environment that provokes them.

We should understand the needs of others and walk in their shoes for a while. We have a lot to learn from parents of children with disabilities. They are forced to accept that their child won't be able to do particular things and that his or her success doesn't depend upon what he or she can't but on what he or she can. The constant struggle is the kid to know a little more now than before.

It is crucial to recognize the need of every child and to work with it. Sometimes problems like left-handedness may be easily solvable. Forced switch of the leading hand may result in negative consequences for the child's harmonious development because left-handedness is defined at brain level. Still if we just let the left-handed child learn to write on one's own, one may end up writing in a unnecessarily uncomfortable, ineffective and confused way. There are three main rules in help of the left-handed children:

- Hold your hand perpendicularly at the bottom of the page you are writing on.
- Write with erected wrist and put your hand beneath the level of the line of writing (you don't need to twist your wrist in order to see the written text).
- Hold the pen at 2-3 cm from the edge.

In other cases educational difficulties like poor reading, writing, spelling, mathematics and ill-coordination, lack of concentration are due to unrecognized dyslexia. Many people had dyslexia - Einstein, Edison, Da Vinci, Andersen... Putting up with dyslexia, purposeful following of a specific strategy for overcoming the problems, and constant communication are keys to normal development. If you doubt that your child may have difficulties in acquiring reading, writing, calculating, don't hesitate to find a specialist or consult the Dyslexia hotline 0 800 1 3759.

HOW TO MAKE A CLASS?

We call a successful class the healthy environment consisting of the following criteria:

- Children with positive self-esteem.
- A narrow gap between highest and lowest results.
- A trustful relationship between teachers and parents.
- A trustful relationship between parents and children.
- The spontaneous wish to spend spare time together.
- No animosity between groups.
- High inclusion of everyone.

THE RECIPE IS:

1. Let's get acquainted!

You may not believe but it is highly possible that till your child is fourth grade, you still won't know more than a couple of the parents' names though you know them visually. It is also possible that although the children spend a great deal of time together, they don't know much about each other. How can we avoid this?

Some ideas:

- Put name labels during the first parents meetings at least. Write down how you want others to call you.
- Try to call the parent you are talking to by name. If you have forgotten it, just admit it and ask again.
- As soon as the first meeting, create a list of all parents' name and family, child's name, mobile phone number, home number, email. Copy the list and give it to everyone.
- Create a mail group - this is a convenient way of communication with each other and with the teacher.

2. Let's build trust!

Getting to know each other usually contributes to trust but it is better not to solely rely on time but to actively build trust between us - teachers and parents.

Some ideas:

- Use effectively the parents' meetings for discussing of the questions you are interested in, but be prepared to hear different opinions.
- Initiate mutual experiences - participate actively in preparation of school celebrations, excursions, and trips instead of satisfying with giving money and assessing the result. Initiate picnics, repair campaigns, grass-mowing of the school yard or an ice-skating evening. Another wonderful occasion for mutual time is birthdays during which children can romp around freely.
- Decide upon parents' rules on important questions like pocket money, mobile phones, leaving school premises for shopping, school uniform. You may even decorate your own T-shirts or hats with a special talisman.



- Always place the need of the child at the centre but remember to distinguish a need from a wish.

3. Let's learn how to make a shared vision out of many individual dreams!

Do you remember kaleidoscopes from childhood? When you look inside, at first you see a pile of small pieces of glass of different colours, but if you turn it sideways and stare, you see that the pieces are forming a strange figure. The most interesting thing is that same pieces may form different figures depending on the arrangement. Pure magic.

Some ideas:

- Agree upon unanimity not difference. Always ask yourself what we all want.
- Respect and support teachers. They are your most important ally. Even if they are not perfect, they are still more experienced and truly wish your child success.
- Allot enough time for strategic planning - once in the beginning of every school term. We often pay attention to the urgent but omit the important.
- Don't forget that goals are dreams with a deadline. Be courageous to make them true.

In the end - If you are lucky, your class teacher will support and advise you in the task of creating healthy and supportive environment for the children. The opposite is also possible - your class teacher may lack experience or oversee the significance of working with parents. There may be a couple of teachers during the first year at school as well. Don't be disappointed. So long as you desire deeply in your heart your child to grow up in a benevolent, humane and daring class, you can overcome circumstances. You simply need allies. You can rely on other parents, parents' board and Association Roditeli.

Building class community is a continuous process in which parents are substantially involved. It is important to make the habit of discussing the questions concerning children with the other parents and the teacher. The process alone will help you get to know each other and build trustful relationships. What are the questions of primary importance?

Some ideas:

- **Parents' meetings.** Usually they are called together by the school administration or the class teacher but you too could initiate one if needed. These meetings are the perfect space to negotiate rules and plan celebrations, parents' initiatives and volunteer campaigns with the kids.
- **Immediate feedback.** Together with the teacher agree upon the means and regularity of the information flow related to the children - by phone, via mail, meetings or in the children's message records.
- **Break.** Contemplate with the other parents, the teacher and your child on the places the pupils can spend the break safely and optimally at. Decide upon how kids can have fun in the room, in the hall and in the school yard.
- **Trips, school in the open.** The more often the class travel together, the more united the kids will be. Unitedness contributes to better learning process and the



class' success. Discuss the goal and the expected results of every such travel. Involve yourself in choosing the place, itinerary and transport. Suggest establishing a tradition for celebrating particular events outside school, best in the open. Association Roditeli proposes you to get to know the class while getting to know Bulgaria before moving to foreign countries.

POCKET MONEY

Cultivating financial responsibility in children is quite an important skill that is often neglected. The acquired habits in managing our money during the years we still bring it in a bunny-shaped purse stay the same when we start keeping it in the leather one or in the credit card.

WHAT THE CHILD WILL LEARN FROM HAVING POCKET MONEY?

Pocket money teaches your little child to utilize own albeit limited amount of money and to take responsibility of them. As long as the amount is small, the inevitable mistakes won't cost much. Mistakes are part of the lesson.

HOW MUCH MONEY AFTER ALL?

Let's begin with the magical formula - weekly money equals to the child's age multiplied by 50 pennies (stotinki). Therefore in case your child is 7 years old his or her money is $7 \times 0.50 = 3.50$ leva.

An essential question is how much money children are allowed to bring at school. The most saving children usually manage to collect praiseworthy amount of money. Still the problem is that if the topic is left uncommented, children may bring their money at school in order to boast. This is normal since it is their money.

SOME ADVICE FOR POCKET MONEY:

1. **Explain the kids the point and principles of spending money.**
2. **Make a list of forbidden items.** Let your kid give suggestions while you set the criteria. Thus the child will understand the underlying meaning of the ban and will break it less often.
3. **Instruct the child to buy only from approved by you or the school places.** Explain that he or she must not under any conditions buy anything from other kids, teachers or strangers in the school yard.
4. **Initially give your child money every day as you increase the time - twice a week, once a week.** Define a specific day for giving the money and try to stick strictly to it. Let the child spend the money as they want.
5. **Avoid giving extra money when the child has spent it preliminary.** If you do, it should be at the expense of the next week's money.
6. **At any case do not punish the child for stolen or lost pocket money.** It is a tough lesson for a kid anyway.

7. The pocket money system is effective only when the family financial issues are clearly discussed.

Last but not least, it is recommendable to discuss the pocket money policy with the other parents in the class, with taking into consideration your class teacher's experience and advice.

THE DIGITAL HIGHWAY

Any parent won't let their child alone at the street without explaining the traffic code, having the kid with them hand in hand and showing him or her how to move around safely. The same approach applies to child's safety on the digital highway - Internet. Internet, more than any other topic, elicits the perennial parental question of trust and boundaries. Rules are necessary, but the comprehension of them is more necessary. When a relationship lacks trust, rules exist only to be broken.

ONLINE SAFETY RULES:

- While communicating online I keep my personal information for me. I don't reveal personal details for my family.
- When uploading photos I am careful to choose those that do not possibly expose me to ridicule. I never upload photos of my friends without asking for their permission.
- I share my passwords with no one apart from my closest relatives. Thus I don't let anyone represent falsely for myself.
- I acknowledge that online identity is not necessarily true. Therefore I carefully choose who to talk to and seek advice from my parents if I need to.
- If I want to go to a date with someone who I know only online I discuss this with my parents. They can help me feel safe.
- I ask for my parents' opinions when I want to install a new software or game. Thus I keep my computer virus-free.
- I surf the net in the negotiated with my parents time period.
- When someone bothers or insults me online I cut off communication by blocking them. I always feel safe to confide in my parents.
- When I stumble upon an unpleasant or scary thing on the Internet I talk to my mother and father. I know that together we can report it at www.web112.net.
- I tell my parents about my favourite Internet stuff. It's so nice when I get them interested in a site or a game!

More information at the site of National Safer Internet Centre - www.safenet.bg.

Consider installation of filtering programmes on your computer that prevent exposure to uncensored, pornographic or other harmful content. Find out about some programmes at www.yprt.eu/sip

Teachers and parents can confide their worries in the Bulgarian Helpline for Online Safety for support and advice. The Helpline is established with the support of the Safer Internet



Programme of the European Commission. The line provides you with the opportunity to contact a counsellor by phone, Skype or via email every work day between 10 to 4 p.m.

MOBILE DEVICES

It's quite normal that parents need to know what's happening with their child while away from them. Mobile phone is one possible relief to this need. First, you have to estimate the advantages and disadvantages of such a decision.

Although there is no explicit data on the harm of phone's radiation, experts are clear that the use should be confined to minimum. Phones are prohibited during class and so you need to take into consideration the school agenda in order to call your pupil. You may need to deliberate on the question whether it is necessary to call your child every break. One possible solution is a talk with the teacher what is the appropriate moment to call your child. Shake your hands on your being called if an emergency occurs.

Mobile phones can be a great challenge for the child's concentration. The kid may use it as a source of fun even during class. In case you decide to give a mobile phone to your child, it should be the cheapest model because it may get stolen or lost. You need to negotiate rules on using the phone - when and who the child may call and for how long should the calls last. Parents have to explain what the responsibility of the child is in the monthly bill.

The mobile operators offer services that allow you to see constantly where your child is and how he or she uses the phone and give you the opportunity to control their calls and bill. Before having the programme installed, explain your child how it works and why he or she needs to have it on the phone. It will prevent the kid from feeling traced or spied upon. Leaving enough personal space to your child is an essential condition for high self-esteem and coping abilities.

It is good to know that modern cell phones hide the same risks as Internet does.

BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Systematic money stealing, nasty mockery and inappropriate pranks, sometimes beating. Bullying is not a media fable. It needs to be recognized, acknowledged and defied. One of the greatest challenges faced by parents is their knowing of a child's problem that he or she don't want to talk about. Some children do not share their worries but you can foster your kid to confide in you more often. What can you do?

1. **Listen carefully.** Everyone wants to be heard. Kids too. When they start expressing their ideas about the world, listen respectfully.
2. **Don't jump to conclusions.** Often children need a lot of time to get to the point of their stories. Try to hold your comments until the end is brought.
3. **Praise the child for sharing with you - "I am very happy that you told me that".** It is an effective way to encourage the child to come to you again with their fears.

4. **Show respect towards the child's problems even though you think they have none.** If you mock the child for being scared by the monster under the bed, he or she won't come to talk to you about the bully at school.
5. **Remind the child that they can come to you when they have troubles or are afraid of something.**

It's common for kids to have problems with their classmates during the first school days. Psychologically children need to feel safe in the unknown environment. If you see that your child or another child in the class has a problem, don't hesitate to discuss it with the teacher because this is the person who can best help. You may engage the school psychologist too. In case that the bullying hasn't ceased, turn to higher institutions.

HOW TO TALK TO THE CHILD WHEN HE OR SHE IS IN TROUBLE?

What to say?

"If someone bothers you or other children, you have to tell me or your teacher, even if you are told to keep secret."

Why to say that?

Since childhood children have a strong feeling of loyalty and do not like to be called *gossip*. Nevertheless, they need to learn that certain things have to be said, because it may be life-saving.

What to say?

"If you can't tell me let's think about someone who you can."

Why to say that?

Children may not share with their parents but may feel more comfortable to tell someone else. You can support your child in figuring out who he or she can confide in.

What to say?

"I don't think it is going to happen to you, but if it does I want to know that you are prepared to ask for help."

Why to say that?

Talking about safety doesn't mean that children have to be terrified of the perspectives, nor should they be purposefully misled that everything will be just fine.

You should admit the possibility that your child can be the perpetrator as well. It is an undesirable point of view though.

How to talk to the child if he or she is the perpetrator?



1. **Clarify the facts.** Ask for the details of what has happened, restraining from assigning guilt.
2. **Show sympathy and demonstrate readiness to act according to the situation and its possible solution.**
3. **Keep calm.** Be critical to the behaviour not the personality of the child. Ask for the advice of the school advisor.
4. **If the problem occurs more than three times in a couple of months, admit that you may need help and search for a psychological consultation.**

Association "Roditeli" ("Parents") is a nonprofit legal entity of public interest, associated member of EPA - European Parents Association.

Our Mission:

We support parents to be the best parents they could be, and we support children to become the best adults they could be.

Our Goals:

Recognition of parenthood as a basic value in society and recognition of family as the best environment for every child successful development.

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