



# Getting off to a good start at school

Children who are feeling well will learn well.





# Dear parent of a preschool-year pupil!

As a parent, you are the most important person in your child's life. Can you believe that your child is now big enough to start school? This is a big step for child and parent alike: a time of both opportunities and challenges lies ahead.

Did you know that children who are feeling well do better at school? And that school is really important for your child's well-being and success later in life as well? So let's make sure that your child gets off to as good a start as possible at school!

As a parent, you are the most important person in your child's life. This means that you have good opportunities to influence your child's health and well-being in a positive way.

It is not always easy to know what to do and what to keep in mind. That is why we have made this folder, to give you as a parent support with many of the key factors that affect your child's health.

We hope that you will find the folder useful, so that we can work together to give your child the best possible conditions for feeling well and being successful at school.

Remember that you can always contact the school health services (elevhälsan) or 1177 Vårdguiden for support or advice.

**We're rooting for you!  
Now let's get started!**

*This booklet is intended for parents and other guardians. But to make things simpler, we have chosen to write only "parent".*



**As a parent,  
you are the  
most important  
person in your  
child's life!**

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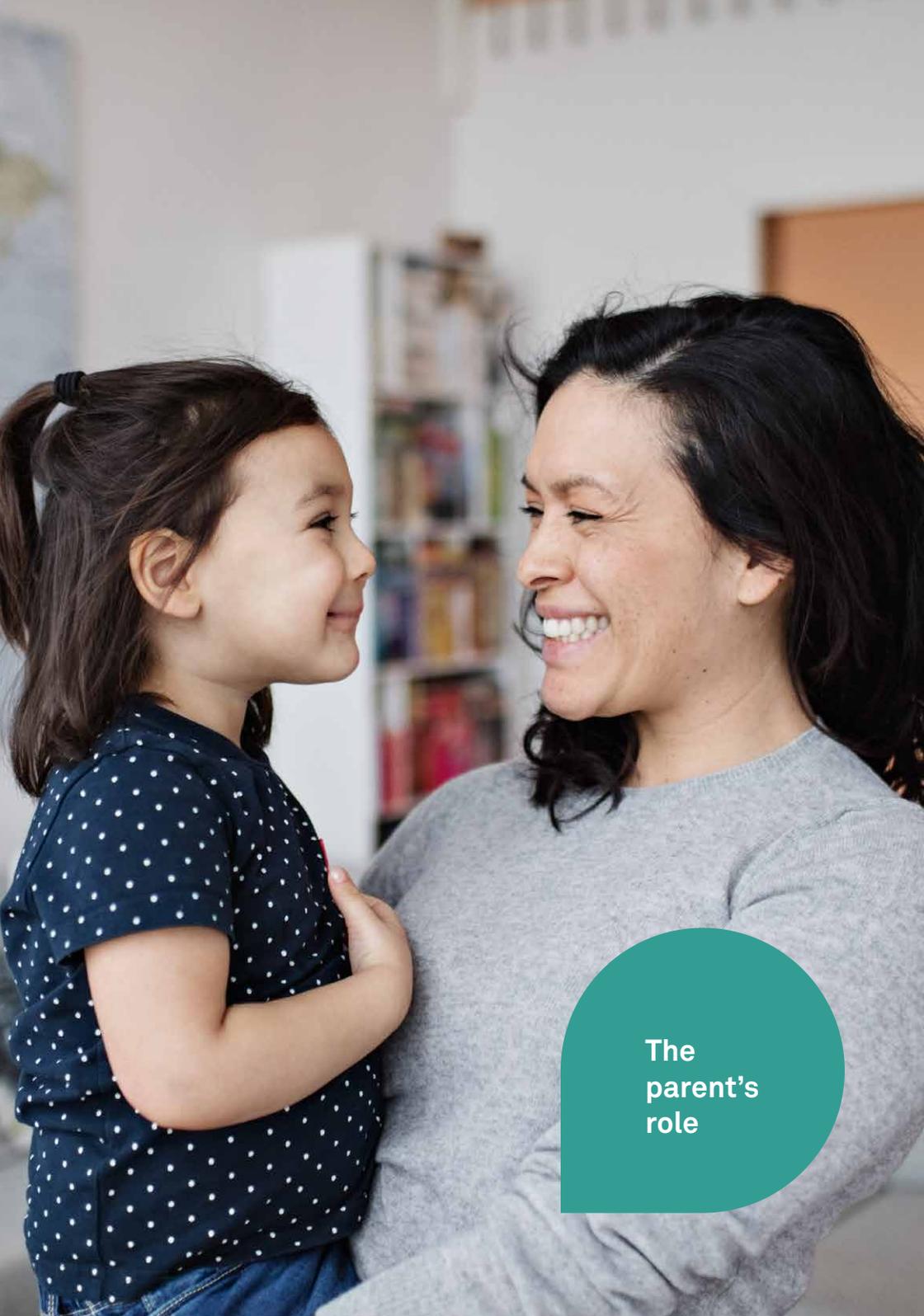
As a parent, you need to help your child build good habits and strike a good balance between screen time and other everyday activities.

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The mental plate model, with its seven parts, illustrates in a simple way the activities that your child needs to balance in order to feel well.



The  
parent's  
role



# Let's begin with you!

When asked, children themselves say that what is most important in order for them to feel well is to have parents who care about them, spend time with them and listen to them.

As a parent, you are the most important person in your child's life and the person who knows your child best. This puts you in a unique position to influence your child's health and development.

The most important protective factor in life for children is to have a good relationship with one or more parents or other closely related adults.

Children who have someone to talk to about their feelings and situation are better able to cope with setbacks in life. This reduces the risk of school dropout, mental ill-health, criminal behaviour, substance abuse and other bad outcomes.

Spending time with your child now is time truly well spent.

**Children whose parents are engaged and present in their lives feel and develop best.**



**Read together!**

# Read together!

Knowing how to read is an important ticket to the future for your child. As a parent, you are crucial for your child's development as a reader. Reading with your child makes it more likely that he or she will succeed at school, which in turn makes it more likely that he or she will feel well.

## **Reading aloud to your child is particularly important to:**

- develop your child's language
- enhance your child's vocabulary and expressive ability
- create a desire to read
- improve reading ability.

Research shows that children whose parents often engage in reading and writing activities with them score better at reading tests even after four years of school.

Children who have a native language other than Swedish need to be read to and have stories told to them in that language. This encourages them to learn multiple languages, and it is good for their language development. You can borrow books for children in different languages at the library.

Reading aloud not only promotes reading development – above all, doing so lets you spend a fun and cosy time together, and it gives you an occasion to talk about feelings and about how we treat each other. This helps the child understand him- or herself and others.

Learning to talk about feelings is also good for children's mental health, and it can help to make your relationship with your child better.

## **Tips!**

- Read aloud to your child every day
- Create a quiet time for reading and talking
- Keep reading aloud to your child when he or she has learned how to read



**Movement  
is so  
important**

# Movement is so important

Moving about is a true miracle cure! It strengthens your fitness, muscles, skeleton, psychological well-being and self-esteem. This means that children who move about enough are more likely to have the energy to deal with both school and leisure activities.

It is recommended that children in the preschool year (and all the way up to the age of 17) should move about for at least one hour every day. This may involve active play or sport, where the child is jumping, running, dancing, throwing, balancing, climbing, etc.

It may also involve going for walks or riding a kick scooter or bike.

There must be enough movement to make the heart beat faster and heat up the body a bit. Many of the things that children do when playing actively will also strengthen their muscles and skeleton, which is great.

In addition, children need to be reminded to take movement breaks to avoid sitting still for too long. Do a couple of squats together, or some dancing on the spot!

Find something that is fun for your child (and for you). What is important is not how you move but that you move about every day.

It is a good idea to be active together. Show your child that movement is good and that it is OK to become sweaty and short of breath.

**And best of all:  
any movement counts!**

## Tips!

- Move about together
- Children move about more when playing outdoors than indoors
- Bike or walk to school together



Healthy  
eating habits

# Healthy eating habits

Children need to eat healthy food to be healthy and develop well, and to have enough strength for school and leisure activities. This means that they need nutritious food as well as good and encouraging meal routines.

Knowing what food is healthy can be tricky, so here is a bit of advice.

## **Things to keep in mind about nutritious food:**

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, fish, shellfish, nuts and seeds.
- Replace white flour with whole-grain flour, replace butter-based fats with vegetable ones, and replace high-fat dairy products with low-fat ones.
- Eat less red meat and meat products, salt and sugar.

## **Things to keep in mind for good, encouraging meal routines:**

- Children need to eat regularly. They need breakfast, lunch and dinner plus one to three healthy snacks every day.
- Eat together. It may be a good idea to let dinner be a nice time when you get together to talk about how your day was.
- One day a week for sweets or unhealthy snack food is enough – choose either Friday Family Fun or Saturday Sweets.

Look for the keyhole symbol when shopping for food and use the plate model when serving.

### **Tips for more fruit and veg!**

- Feed your child vegetable sticks while you are cooking
- Add vegetables (including root vegetables) to the food you cook
- Serve fruit salad or fruit spits instead of sweets



Daily  
digital life

# Daily digital life

**As a parent, you need to help your child build good habits and strike a good balance between screen time and other everyday activities.**

Today, screens are a major part of children's everyday life. They let children do a lot of things that are both educational and fun, like watching videos, painting, gaming, learning the alphabet or going treasure-hunting outdoors. However, screen time also makes children sit still more.

Time spent in front of screens must not take time away from other activities like sleeping, playing, hanging out with friends, reading or engaging in physical activities. It is best to do different activities every day and to have fun with others – this is what is best for children's health and well-being!

As a parent, you need to give your child guidance about his or her screen use and help him or her strike a good balance in daily life.

And by the way, it is also important to think about your own screen use. Children do as adults do (not as adult tell them)!

## **Tips!**

- Have common screen rules
- Encourage play and movement every day
- Have no-screen zones – for example the dinner table
- Follow the 20-20-20 rule: look 20 metres away from the screen every 20 minutes and hold your gaze there for 20 seconds.
- Keep a distance of 40–60 cm from the screen and turn down its brightness
- Stay away from screens in the last few hours before bedtime



**Children need free play to discover and explore the world around them**



**Sleep tight!**



# Sleep tight!

Good sleep is important. Sleep helps us to recover and lets both the body and the brain rest. In children, important growth hormones are released during sleep. Children who sleep well can concentrate better at school and have the energy to play in their free time.

At the age of six, children need to sleep for 10–11 hours a night. It is easier to sleep well if the child moves about and is active during the day and then gets peace and quiet in the evening.

Blue light from screens like TVs, mobile phones and tablet computers can have a negative effect on the sleep hormone. A good rule is to avoid screens for one hour before bedtime.

## Tips!

- Read a book to your child as he or she is winding down
- Keep the bedroom dark and cool



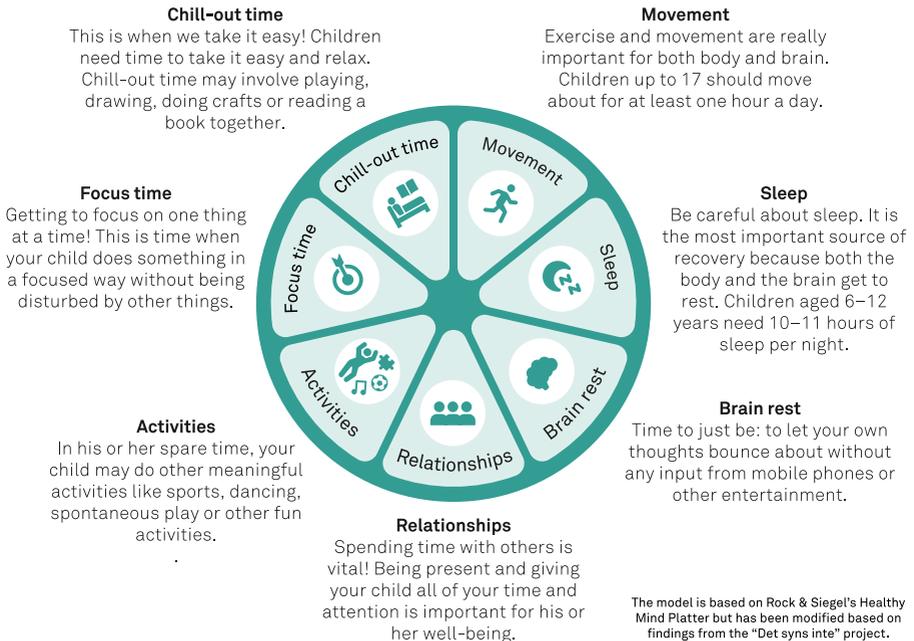
Balance in life  
– the mental  
plate model

# Balance in life

As a parent, you need to make sure that your child has the best possible opportunities to develop and to feel well. This is your most important task as a parent, but sometimes it may not be a very easy one. A good tool to use in this context is the “mental plate model”.

The mental plate model includes a number of fundamental needs – here referred to as “activities” – that need to be present in your child’s life every day in order for him or her to feel as well as possible and to deal with the stresses of life in the best possible way. The mental plate model, with its seven parts, illustrates in a simple way the activities that your child needs to balance in order to feel well.

Remember that you only need one or two doses of each activity every day to feel better. Go through the model at home and discuss it with your child. Try to agree on a good balance together.



# Some useful links

Below are some links to good websites (mainly in Swedish) where you can read more about the topics covered in the booklet or find other interesting information.

1177 Vårdguiden

[www.1177.se](http://www.1177.se)

Professional associations for physical activity

[www.fyss.se](http://www.fyss.se)

Generation Pep

[generationpep.se](http://generationpep.se)

Physical-activity guidelines of the Swedish Public Health Agency

[www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)

Swedish Food Agency

[www.livsmedelsverket.se](http://www.livsmedelsverket.se)

Det syns inte (“You can’t tell from the outside”)

[detsynsinte.se](http://detsynsinte.se)

Livsviktiga snack (“Vital talks”)

[livsviktigasnack.se](http://livsviktigasnack.se)

Save the Children

[www.raddabarnen.se/rad-och-kunskap](http://www.raddabarnen.se/rad-och-kunskap)

Swedish Media Council

[www.statensmedierad.se](http://www.statensmedierad.se)

Children’s Library

[www.barnensbibliotek.se/hem/forforaldrar/lasahogt](http://www.barnensbibliotek.se/hem/forforaldrar/lasahogt)



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