

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

WELCOME TO BIRCH COPSE'S TERMLY LETTER FOCUSED ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES.



Helping Your Child Learn at Home

Practical tips and activities for parents and carers

Supporting your child's learning at home doesn't need to involve lots of worksheets, expensive resources or lengthy practice sessions. For children who find aspects of learning challenging, short, enjoyable activities that are repeated regularly can be particularly beneficial.

We've put together some simple ideas to help develop your child's reading, spelling, handwriting, maths and communication skills. You don't need to try everything – choose one or two activities that suit your child's needs and interests.

Reading – Building Confidence and Enjoyment

Reading involves more than recognising words. Children also need to develop fluency (reading smoothly and accurately) and comprehension (understanding what they have read).

Top tips for reading together:

- **Little and often:** Ten enjoyable minutes of reading is much more beneficial than a longer session that ends in frustration.
- **Give them thinking time:** If your child gets stuck on a word, allow them a few seconds to work it out. Encourage them to look carefully at the letters and use their phonics knowledge to sound it out.
- **Don't let them struggle:** If they cannot work out a word, help them and move on.
- **Read favourite books again:** Repeated reading helps children become more fluent, confident and expressive.
- **Praise specific achievements:** Rather than simply saying "Good reading!", try "I really liked how you sounded out that tricky word" or "You remembered to pause at the full stop."

Try this at home: Take turns reading a page or sentence each. You could also read a favourite story aloud, using different voices for the characters. Children benefit enormously from listening to stories, even when they are confident readers themselves.

Spelling – Making Words Memorable

Some children find spelling particularly difficult, even when they are confident readers. Repetition and using several senses together can help children remember spelling patterns.

Activities to try:

- **Rainbow writing:** Write a word several times, tracing over it in different colours.
- **Build a word:** Use magnetic letters, letter tiles or pieces of paper to build words. Mix up the letters and ask your child to rebuild them.
- **Spot the tricky bit:** Highlight the part of a word that your child finds difficult, such as the 'ai' in 'said'.
- **Say the sounds:** Encourage your child to break regular words into individual sounds, using their fingers to count them.
- **Group words together:** Practise words that share a spelling pattern, such as 'light', 'night' and 'bright'.

Try this at home: Choose just three to five words to practise initially. Ask your child to say the word, build it with letters, trace it and then write it from memory. Revisit the same words regularly, including on different days.

For tricky words, encourage your child to invent a picture or memorable phrase to help them remember the spelling.

Keep It Positive!

Children learn best when they feel confident, supported and successful. If your child finds something particularly difficult, remember:

- **Keep activities short:** Five to ten minutes of focused practice can be enough.
- **Make learning playful:** Games and practical activities can be just as valuable as written work.
- **Celebrate effort and progress:** Notice what your child can do rather than focusing on mistakes.
- **Break tasks into small steps:** Teach one skill at a time and revisit it regularly.
- **Follow your child's interests:** Favourite characters, toys and hobbies can make activities more engaging.
- **Know when to stop:** If your child is becoming tired or frustrated, take a break and try again another time.

Every child develops at their own pace, and different approaches work for different children. You do not need to turn home into another classroom. Everyday activities, conversations and games provide wonderful opportunities for learning.

Handwriting – Developing Strong, Confident Writers

Handwriting requires coordination, finger strength, pencil control and an understanding of how letters are formed. For some children, the physical act of writing can be tiring or frustrating.

Before starting to write:

- Check that your child's feet are supported and their chair and table are at a comfortable height.
- Encourage them to use their other hand to hold the paper steady.
- Consider whether a pencil grip or slightly sloping writing surface might help.

Fun activities to develop hand strength and control:

- Use tweezers to pick up small objects, such as pom-poms.
- Play with pegs, threading beads or building with small construction toys.
- Complete mazes, dot-to-dot pictures and tracing activities.
- Practise forming letters in sand, shaving foam or with a paintbrush and water.
- Draw large letters in the air before practising them on paper.

Try this at home: Choose one or two letters your child finds difficult. Practise forming them correctly using different materials before moving to pencil and paper. Check with your child's teacher that you are using the same letter formation taught in school.

Remember that neat handwriting is not always easy. Focus on small improvements rather than expecting perfection.



Maths – Making Numbers Make Sense

Children who find maths difficult often benefit from seeing and handling objects before working with written numbers.

In school, we use an approach called **Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract (CPA)**:

Abstract (CPA):

1. **Concrete – Doing:** Use real objects, such as counters, Lego bricks or pieces of fruit, to solve a problem.
2. **Pictorial – Seeing:** Draw pictures or diagrams to represent the problem.
3. **Abstract – Writing:** Move on to numbers and mathematical symbols once the concept is understood.

For example, to solve $4 + 3$, your child could combine four counters and three counters, then draw the groups, before writing $4 + 3 = 7$.

Everyday maths activities:

- **Dice games:** Roll two dice and add the numbers together. Encourage your child to recognise the patterns without counting every dot.
- **Number bonds:** Use playing cards to find pairs of numbers that add up to 10.
- **Cooking:** Practise counting, measuring, weighing and discussing fractions when sharing food.
- **Shopping:** Ask your child to find prices, count items or work out how much change is needed.
- **Counting games:** Count forwards and backwards in 1s, 2s, 5s or 10s while bouncing a ball or walking up the stairs.

Try this at home: Set up ten plastic cups as skittles. Roll a ball and count how many fall over. How many are still standing? This is a fun way to practise number bonds to 10.

If your child finds maths challenging, encourage them to use objects, drawings and number lines rather than expecting them to work everything out in their head.

Communication and Language – Learning Through Conversation

Good communication skills help children express their needs, understand instructions, develop friendships and explain their thinking.

Talking and playing games together can help develop vocabulary, listening, memory and confidence.

Five simple games to try:

- **Would You Rather?** Ask silly questions such as "Would you rather fly or be invisible?" Encourage your child to explain their choice.
- **Guess the Object:** Think of an object and give clues. "It's round, you can kick it and you use it in football." Can your child guess?
- **The Odd One Out:** Say four words, such as apple, banana, carrot and orange. Which is the odd one out and why?
- **Build a Story:** Take turns adding a sentence to a story. Start with "Once upon a time..." and see where your imagination takes you.
- **Three Good Things:** At the end of the day, ask your child to share three things they enjoyed. Use gentle follow-up questions to encourage conversation.

Try this at home: Play "I Went Shopping". The first person says, "I went shopping and bought an apple." The next person repeats this and adds another item. Keep taking turns, remembering the growing list. For children who find remembering difficult, use pictures or real objects as prompts.

Helpful sections of the school website

Phonics and Maths resources <https://birchcopse.co.uk/parent-resources>

Videos including support for spelling <https://birchcopse.co.uk/parent-workshop-videos>

Information about what your child will be learning in each subject

<https://birchcopse.co.uk/curriculum/our-curriculum>



Upcoming Events in the Local Area [please click on the link to check eligibility](#)

👤 Dads & Male Carers Support Group – Parenting Special Children Tuesday 20th October, 7.30–9.30pm Monthly face-to-face support group in Reading for dads and male carers of children with SEND or additional needs. An opportunity to meet others, share experiences and access support. [Event information](#)

👤 Autism Berkshire Parent/Carer Advice Drop-in – Southcote Family Hub Wednesday 21st October, 10.00–11.30am Free face-to-face advice session for Reading parents/carers of autistic children and teenagers. Speak to Autism Berkshire's family support team about your child's needs and available support. [Event information](#)

🗨 Understanding & Managing OCD in Children and Young People – Parenting Special Children Thursday 22nd October, 7.00–9.00pm Online workshop for parents/carers whose children experience intrusive thoughts, worries, repetitive behaviours or reassurance-seeking. Explores OCD and practical ways to support children at home. [Workshop information](#)

☕ Ethnically Diverse Communities Coffee Morning – Parenting Special Children Wednesday 4th November, 10.00am–12.00pm Face-to-face coffee morning at Norcot Mission Church, Reading, for families of children with additional needs from ethnically diverse communities. An opportunity to meet other parents and access support. [Event information](#)

🔥 Supporting Behaviour Part 1 – Autism Berkshire Thursday 5th November, 10.00–11.30am Free online workshop exploring distressed behaviour and meltdowns in autistic children, including how to respond and support children's emotional needs. Part 2 takes place on 12th November. [Workshop information](#)

🧘 Anxiety Workshop for Parents of Autistic and ADHD Children – Reading Families' Forum Friday 6th November, 10.00–11.30am Free face-to-face workshop delivered by Parenting Special Children at Caversham Children's Centre. Suitable for parents/carers of autistic and ADHD children, including those awaiting assessment. [Register by emailing kim@readingfamiliesforum.co.uk or calling 07469 550265.](#)

🧘 Anxiety Workshop for Parents of Autistic and ADHD Children – Reading Families' Forum Monday 9th November, 10.00–11.30am Face-to-face workshop at Whitley Family Hub, delivered by Parenting Special Children. Explores anxiety in autistic and ADHD children and ways parents can support them. [Register by emailing kim@readingfamiliesforum.co.uk or calling 07469 550265.](#)

🧠 ADHD Course – Parenting Special Children Tuesdays 10th, 17th and 24th November, 7.00–9.00pm Free three-part online course for parents/carers of children with ADHD registered with a Berkshire West GP. Covers understanding ADHD, anxiety and managing ADHD-related behaviours. [Course information](#)

👤 SEND Connections – Calcot Family Hub Wednesday 11th November, 1.00–2.00pm Local support session for parents/carers of children with SEND. An opportunity to meet other families and access support. Held at Calcot Family Hub, Curtis Road, RG31 4XG. [Family Hubs information](#)

🔥 Supporting Behaviour Part 2 – Autism Berkshire Thursday 12th November, 10.00–11.30am Second part of the free online workshop, focusing on practical strategies for responding to distressed behaviour and supporting emotional regulation in autistic children. [Workshop information](#)

🌙 Sleep Well: Trauma-Informed Workshop – Parenting Special Children Friday 13th November, 10.00am–12.30pm Online workshop for parents/carers supporting children affected by early life trauma. Explores sleep difficulties and supportive approaches to bedtime routines. [Workshop information](#)

🧠 Autism and Anxiety – Reading Borough Council Educational Psychology Service Wednesday 18th November, 9.30am–12.00pm Free online workshop for parents/carers of children aged 6–16 who are autistic, show autistic traits or are awaiting diagnosis and experience mild to moderate anxiety. Explores uncertainty, worries and coping strategies. [Book a place](#)

👤 Autism Berkshire Parent/Carer Advice Drop-in – Southcote Family Hub Wednesday 18th November, 10.00–11.30am Free face-to-face advice session for Reading parents/carers of autistic children and teenagers, offering individual advice and information about available support. [Event information](#)

🧠 ADHD: Medication, Treatment Choices and Outcomes – Parenting Special Children Wednesday 18th November, 7.00–9.00pm Online workshop for parents/carers exploring ADHD medication, treatment options and considerations when making decisions about support. [Workshop information](#)

🌈 Emotional Regulation in Autistic Children – Autism Berkshire Thursday 19th November, 10.00–11.30am Free online workshop exploring ways to help autistic children understand and manage their emotions, including visual strategies such as the Incredible 5 Point Scale. [Workshop information](#)

🧘 Anxiety Workshop for Parents of Autistic and ADHD Children – Reading Families' Forum Friday 20th November, 10.00–11.30am Face-to-face workshop at East and North Family Hub, supporting parents/carers to understand anxiety in autistic and ADHD children. Suitable for families before or after diagnosis. [Register by emailing kim@readingfamiliesforum.co.uk or calling 07469 550265.](#)

🧘 Anxiety Workshop for Parents of Autistic and ADHD Children – Reading Families' Forum Wednesday 25th November, 10.00–11.30am Face-to-face workshop at Ranikhet Family Hub, delivered by Parenting Special Children, exploring anxiety and strategies to support autistic and ADHD children. [Register by emailing kim@readingfamiliesforum.co.uk or calling 07469 550265.](#)

🌟 Understanding Emotional Regulation – Parenting Special Children Wednesday 25th November, 7.00–9.00pm Online workshop for parents/carers exploring why children can become overwhelmed, anxious or distressed and practical ways to support emotional regulation. [Workshop information](#)

🗨 Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries – Reading Borough Council Educational Psychology Service Thursday 26th November, 9.30am–12.00pm Free online workshop for parents/carers of children aged 5–12 experiencing mild to moderate anxiety, including separation anxiety, phobias and general worries. This particular workshop is not designed for autistic children or those with autistic traits. [Book a place](#)

🧠 Teenagers and Social Situations – Autism Berkshire Thursday 26th November, 10.00–11.30am Free online workshop for parents/carers of autistic teenagers aged 11–18, exploring social situations at school, home and online, and strategies to support social understanding. [Workshop information](#)

🧘 Anxiety Workshop for Parents of Autistic and ADHD Children – Reading Families' Forum Tuesday 1st December, 10.00–11.30am Face-to-face workshop at Southcote Family Hub, delivered by Parenting Special Children. Supports parents/carers in understanding anxiety in autistic and ADHD children, including those awaiting diagnosis. [Register by emailing kim@readingfamiliesforum.co.uk or calling 07469 550265.](#)

🔥 Sensory Processing Workshop – Parenting Special Children Tuesday 1st December, 7.00–8.30pm Online workshop for parents/carers of autistic and ADHD children, exploring sensory processing differences and practical strategies to support children's sensory needs. Costs £12.50 for Berkshire families and £15 for other families. [Workshop information and booking](#)

🌈 Little People, Big Feelings – Reading Borough Council Educational Psychology Service Wednesday 2nd December, 9.30am–12.00pm Free online workshop for parents/carers of children aged 3–5, exploring emotional regulation, co-regulation and understanding young children's big feelings. Not intended for children with learning difficulties or an autism diagnosis. [Book a place](#)

🍽 Eating & Mealtime Challenges in Autistic Children – Autism Berkshire Wednesday 2nd December, 10.00–11.30am Free online workshop exploring sensory differences around food, food refusal and practical strategies to support autistic children with eating difficulties. [Workshop information](#)

🌟 Understanding AuDHD – Parenting Special Children Wednesday 2nd December, 7.00–9.00pm Online workshop for parents/carers of children who have, or may have, both autism and ADHD. Explores how the two conditions interact and practical ways to support children. [Workshop information](#)

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Book a meeting with me –
<https://calendly.com/kburnard-birchcopse>