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Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service | Believe in children Barnardo's

Helping children build healthy hydration habits – Simple tips to support a water only school day.



Commissioned by Essex County Council | NHS

Water only at school? Here's how you can help your child adjust.



Image taken from Tips for better drinking - ERIC

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This toolkit provides parents and carers with:

💧 Information about why hydration matters.

🏫 Understanding why schools promote water only policies.

🏠 Practical ideas for encouraging healthy drinking habits at home.

⭐ Simple strategies to make water more appealing and accessible for children.

Hydration plays a vital role in children's health, wellbeing, concentration and learning. Schools often promote or enforce water-only policies because water is the healthiest and most effective drink for children throughout the school day.





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Why hydration is important for children

Children's bodies rely on water for almost every important function. Staying hydrated helps children:

Support Brain function and learning

Even mild dehydration can affect:

- Concentration
- Memory
- Attention Span
- Mood
- Energy levels

When children drink enough water, they are better able to focus, participate and learn during the school day.

Maintain Physical health

Water helps the body to:

- Regulate temperature.
- Transport nutrients.
- Support digestion.
- Prevent constipation.
- Keep joints and muscles working properly.

Children are especially active and can become dehydrated more quickly than adults.

Improve emotional wellbeing

Dehydration can sometimes lead to:

- Irritability
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Reduced motivation.

Regular water intake can children feel more comfortable, calm and ready to engage.

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Why do many schools have a water only policy?



Benefits of water 💧

💧 **No Added Sugar**
Supports healthy teeth and overall health.

🦷 **Protects Teeth**
Reduces the risk of tooth decay.

⚖️ **Supports Healthy Growth**
Supports a healthy weight and lifestyle.

🔋 **Steady Energy**
Keeps children hydrated without sugar highs and crashes.

Things schools are trying to reduce 🚫

🥤 **Sugary Drinks**
Can contain high levels of sugar.

🦷 **Tooth Decay**
Frequent sugary drinks can damage teeth.

📉 **Energy Crashes**
Sugar highs can affect concentration later.

💔 **Unhealthy Habits**
Can contribute to poor long-term drinking habits.

✅ Consistency helps children build good habits

When children see the same message at school and at home, water becomes their normal everyday drink.

👫 Promotes equality and inclusion

A water only policy helps ensure every child follows the same healthy routine, reducing comparisons between drinks.

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How much water do children need?



Children's Hydration needs vary depending on age, weather and activity levels

Age Group	Recommended Daily Fluid Intake
4-8 years	Around 1.2 Litres
9-13 years	Around 1.5-1.8 Litres
Teenagers	Around 2 Litres

Children may need more fluids when:

⚽ Playing Sports/exercising.

🌞 Spending time outdoors in warm weather.

🥵 Feeling Unwell.

Signs to watch for that may indicate a child isn't drinking enough water.

- Dark yellow urine
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tiredness
- Constipation
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Dry lips and mouth
- Irritability



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Encouraging healthy water habits at home

Children are more likely to drink water if it is readily available.

Try:

- Keeping water bottles filled and visible.
- Offering water with every meal and snack.
- Having jugs or bottles available in shared spaces.
- Packing water for trips and activities.

Be a positive role model

Children often copy adult behaviours. Parents and carers can help by:

- Drinking water regularly themselves.
- Talking positively about water.
- Choosing water during family mealtimes.

If your child finds it difficult to drink water here are some top tips to support them.





Top 8 Hydration Hacks!

🧊 Colourful ice cubes.
🍓 Add frozen fruit.
❄️ Freeze bottles overnight.
📏 Mark drinking goals on bottles.
⭐ Sticker reward charts.
🏕️ Make hydration part of play.
🥤 Offer water with every meal.
🔄 Gradually dilute squash.





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Every sip counts!

The more familiar water becomes at home, the easier it is for children to feel confident with water only expectations at school. By making water the everyday drink, you're helping support your child's health, learning and wellbeing both at home and in the classroom.





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Useful resources:

Hydration Hacks for Kids: How To Make Water Fun | Buxton Water

Daily Hydration Routine to Drink More Water | Buxton Water

How much water do kids need to drink a day? - BBC Bitesize

Wee Checker – ERIC

Children's bladder health – what's normal and what can go wrong - ERIC

Water, drinks and hydration – NHS

Nutrition and Hydration Tips for Children - Bladder & Bowel UK