

ilíocht

Celebrating Diversity in Gaelscoil Bhaile Brigín



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Claim Forms

Anyone who is availing of July Provision, remember that claims forms must be filled in **after** the tuition has been provided and submitted **no later than August 7th**.

Remember Us

The summer programme for the special needs social group Remember Us is jam packed with activities including day trips to Clara Lara, Ardgillen Castle, Nature Detective days and much more. Contact Nora or Anne on **086 0457003** or email **hello@rememberus.ie** for more details

Schooldays.ie

Schooldays.ie have an extensive list of summer camps running in North Dublin to cover all interests. From science camps to activity camps there is something for just about everyone!



Summer Holidays

Welcome to the 3rd edition of ilíocht and the last of this school year. Where has the time gone?!!

This issue includes a very information article by Dental Hygienist Elaine Whelan on managing your child's dental health. It gives helpful advice for parents of all school going children, including preparing your child for a dental visit.

Our 3rd edition also focusses on the often unseen heroes of our school – the SNAs, one of whom very kindly gave us our "Day in the life" article. For the privacy of the child involved, the author has to remain anonymous but we are very grateful for this article. Although there isn't a typical day in the working life of a SNA, the author has succeeded in giving an insight into the invaluable work that's involved in helping a child with extra educational needs strive towards independence.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted an article this year. The "Parent Piece" in particular tend to be very personal accounts by nature and we are especially grateful to the parents who have let us into their private lives to raise awareness of the challenges their children face. Next year we would like to expand on the topics covered to include ADHD, ADD and Dysgraphia, among others, and would love to hear from anyone who has experience in these areas. If there is any other topic you would like us to cover please do let us know.

If you would like to submit a parent piece, an article of interest or get involved in ilíocht in any way,

Please contact celinecronan@gmail.com

Managing Your Child's Dental Health

By Elaine Whelan R.D.H Dental Hygienist

A toothache, when experienced, is debilitating and a pain not easily forgotten. But imagine how awful it would be if you could not communicate the pain or irritation? A toothache is the end result of untreated dental disease, most commonly tooth decay. Toothache is preventable with good oral hygiene and regular dental visits.

Home-care

Tooth brushing ideally should be done twice daily. What time in the day is up to you and your child but preferably when you have some time. Take it slow giving your child the control.

**“Supervise and then check.
Praise and praise again!”**

A toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles is what I recommend. The handle can be modified to improve its handling by using a tennis ball (cut the top of the ball and place the toothbrush inside) or a bicycle handle. Counting the strokes can help. Start brushing the outside surfaces then the inside surfaces and finish on the biting surfaces of the teeth.

An electric or battery operated brush with a soft round head can be worth trying. It does all the work and just relies on you placing it correctly. If the toothbrush is the problem try a face cloth or a baby's sponge brush. Two minutes is the recommended brushing time. Using an egg timer or listening to your child's favourite song is an easy way of watching the clock and it can put a structure to it.

A fluoride Toothpaste suited to your child's age is what I recommend. There are lots of flavours to try but generally the milder the flavour the better. Frothing can be a problem. This is caused by SLS or sodium lauryl sulphate. Sensodyne daily care has NO SLS and worth trying.

A mouthwash can be used if your child is willing. It is not essential but make sure it is age appropriate.

Flossing with flossettes is an easy way to access the teeth without losing a finger! Typically a young child will not have the dexterity to do this themselves and you will know whether you will be able to do this for your child.

A reward chart can also help. But avoid a sugary reward at the end of the week!

Dental Care

Finding a dentist to suit your child's needs is an essential first step. Your dentist may not be the correct choice for your child. But it is always worth having a chat with your dentist to see if they are happy to treat your child. It may be worth considering a dentist who specialises in special needs dentistry.

Dental Visit

Talk about going to the dentist and allowing the dentist check your child's teeth. Talk about the whole visit from leaving your house, to seeing the dental practice, it's colour, any landmark checking in at the reception desk, sitting in the waiting room, being called by the dental nurse into the surgery, sitting in the dental chair and then allowing the dentist check your child's teeth.

Ask that you not be kept waiting and if the dentist is running late that they would ring you so to avoid any extra waiting time.



Visit the dental practice before your scheduled appointment. Show your child around the waiting room, meet the dentist, the nurse and the receptionist. Take photographs print and put into a folder. Go through the pictures with your child explaining each step/photograph. Bringing a set of headphones with your child's favourite music/story or noise excluders can help with the extra and strange noise and sunglasses for the bright lights.

Dental Treatment

Sometimes children on the ASD spectrum can present with damaging dental habits. These include grinding / clenching of the teeth. This can cause jaw discomfort, pain and eventually wear down the surface of the teeth. Your dentist can have a special guard made to protect the teeth if necessary. Tongue thrusting. Self-injurious behaviour such as gum picking, placing objects into their gums and biting their lips and cheeks. You can try to keep a check on this during tooth-brushing. If you suspect a mouth ulcer or infection is present get an appointment with your dentist and start your child on corsodyl mouthwash or gel. This is an anti-microbial mouthwash that will kill off bacteria and allow the gums to heal.

Tooth decay can be a problem if there are feeding problems or allergies to food groups. Sugar is the cause of tooth decay and the more frequent sugar is in the diet the more likely a cavity is to develop.

"Be mindful of choosing fruit especially raisins and fruit juices or smoothies between meals as they have a very high sugar content".

Fissure sealants can be placed on the biting surfaces of the molars and premolars. This prevents food lodging in the deep grooves of the teeth and causing a cavity.

Gum disease or gingivitis is caused by plaque not being removed from the gums. Good daily tooth brushing limits the level of plaque on the teeth and gums and allows the gums to stay healthy. Having a scale and polish (teeth cleaning) removes any of the hard tartar and soft plaque build-up. This allows the gums to heal and become healthy.

Dry mouth is a side effect to anti convulsant, anti-psychotic and anti-depressant medications. It can result in mouth discomfort, reduced taste and increases the risk of gum disease and tooth decay. Biotene has a range of toothpaste, mouth sprays and mouth lubricants with can alleviate the discomfort. A good lip balm, drinking plenty of water and avoiding spicy food can help too.



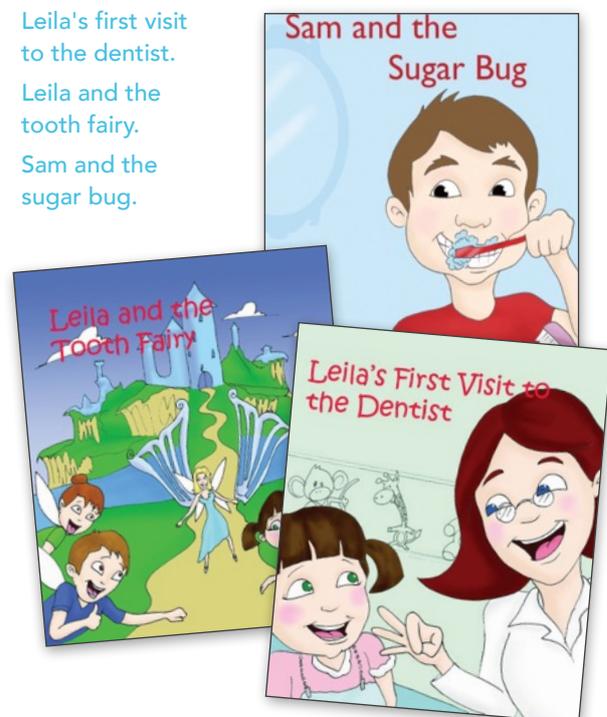
Acid erosion is the loss of tooth surface over time. It can be caused by a diet high in acid e.g. fruit, fruit teas, fizzy drinks and sports drinks. Make sure to use a straw when drinking acidic drinks and avoid swirling the drinks around the mouth. Acid reflux or vomiting can also be responsible. Don't brush the teeth straight after vomiting as this brushes the acid into the teeth. Having your GP prescribe a medication can alleviate the acid reflux. Acid erosion is commonly detected first by a dentist who notices the change on the tooth surface.

Dr Humairah Shah has written some books on visiting the dentist and all things dental. They are very well done and may help break down some of the fear barriers.

Leila's first visit to the dentist.

Leila and the tooth fairy.

Sam and the sugar bug.



Dr Caomhin Mac Giolla Phadraig is a special care dentist. Check out www.specialcaredentist.ie

A Day In The Life

Anonymous, Special Needs Assistant

Although I've always loved children, being an SNA wasn't the first career I aspired to. However, having been through a number of business lives I can honestly say that life as an SNA, at least for me, is more fulfilling than I could have ever imagined. Supporting children who find normal, everyday life challenging, and being in a position to help them through, is not only personally enriching but it is invigorating, and often a whole lot of fun too.

The great irony is that although the children I work with need order and routine more than most, a typical day is never really typical! So, rather than take you through the series of practices and protocols an SNA follows (or is supposed to) I'll try to paint a picture for you of the kinds of things myself and (let's call him) Joe, share during a given day.

I meet Joe and his Mum away from the hustle and bustle of the line as the noise and crowded area would make for a difficult start to the school day. He hasn't slept well and it has been a tricky morning at home. You see, one of Joe's difficulties is that he finds it very hard to fall asleep. Consequently, the next day he is tired and can become overwhelmed, finding sensory processing just that bit more difficult than on other days.

So, hand in hand we make our way to the classroom where Joe is greeted with a hug from one of his friends. He hangs up his

jacket and I jot down his homework (this is something that took him a significant amount of time last year and made him very anxious so it is brilliant to be available to remove that source of stress for him). Joe starts on his maths workbook along with his classmates, but because I know he's tired I am on the lookout for signs of him becoming distressed and overwhelmed.

The teacher asks me to collect some printouts from the office but Joe decides he needs a little "time out" in the multi-sensory room. We make our way there and he opts to take a rest, accepting the weighted blanket (designed to give deep pressure sensory relief) when I offer it.

After a short while we have a little chat to assist him identify how he is feeling and to discuss some strategies he might use to help himself feel better. It's great that his parents and I have had many discussions



about the language and approach we will all use to assist Joe in these situations, meaning that he is developing a toolkit for matching his emotions with satisfactory remedies.

He brightens a bit after our discussion, and we make our way back to the classroom where the subject underway is Gaeilge. Unfortunately for Joe, the work involves handwriting, one of his pet hates (due to the mechanics of the process and the effort required to do it to the standard Joe likes to do it to). I offer to do the writing, if he does the thinking and we make progress capturing his thoughts and ideas in his copybook. Towards the end of this piece of work, it's clear that another break is needed.

We head off to collect the printouts from the office and on the way pop our heads into Junior Infants to say hello. It's Joe's lucky day, they are learning about France and there is 'Pain au Chocolat' to be had. In the



main, chocolate and cake can solve a lot of problems as far as Joe is concerned!! One day, when the bread in his sandwiches wasn't the 'usual' bread and so he wouldn't eat it, I was lucky enough to be able to secure a cupcake for him in the staff room. He was delighted, and the spiral of upset and distress which had begun was quickly changed to him being like the cat who got the cream.

During Maths class – Joe's key academic strength – I help him to understand the concept underway, to read and make sense of the worksheet questions and to attempt the majority of them. Afterwards, I accompany him to Learning Support and assist him communicate his requests to the teacher there. I give her a quick update on how his morning has gone to help her gauge the amount of work to attempt with him.

When I get back from my break I smile to see Joe reading in one of his favourite positions – half on, half off the table with his

head swinging in the air. This multi-sensory experience helps Joe to deal with the demands of the day. I explain that the next lesson is English, and since there will be team-teaching we should go and meet the 2nd teacher to see what is planned for the session. From experience, I know that if Joe knows what's coming next, he is much better equipped to deal with it even if it's not what he would desire to be doing.

During PE the class are engaged in relay races. Joe enjoys this class very much and runs his heart out for his team. Towards the end of class, he begins to tire and slightly lags behind the other runners. His body language immediately displays that he's upset about this so I offer him the chance to leave the hall. He is now visibly upset so I gently coax the reason from him.

Typical of this lovely little boy, he is not thinking of himself but is sad that he has let his team down. We discuss this at length because negative thoughts like this can be carried around all day by Joe, if they are not managed carefully.

A really popular option for Joe, in order to get a necessary break from the hustle and bustle of the classroom, is to get 10 minutes

playing on the computer. It can be really devastating for Joe if the internet or PC are not working properly. He can tend to feel that this treat is being denied to him rather than something simply not working. We make our way to the teacher in charge of ICT so Joe can hear that it's a school-wide problem, and not something that's just happening to him. The recent strategy agreed with his Mum seems to be working well – if the computer is down and we get his homework done in school, he gets some extra "Techie time" at home.

So now, the day is drawing to a close and Joe is beginning to tire. His stimming increases and his wonderful sense of humour dims. I offer him a break playing with Lego or lying on his mat in the classroom. Instead he opts to stand his mat on its side and drape his blanket over it to create a cosy cocoon. Here he relaxes and quietly processes the various happenings of his day.

It's going home time. After some shared jokes, school work and a few bumps along the way, to receive a hug or high-five, a happy wave, to see a gentle smile, hear him tell his Mum it was a "good" day and to exchange a promise that we will see each other tomorrow makes it all so incredibly worthwhile.

What Is A Special Needs Assistant?

An SNA (Special Needs Assistant) is a person who is employed by the school to assist children with special educational needs. Their duties would typically include:

- Assisting on/off school buses
- Assisting with toileting/feeding/clothing if needed
- Assisting with writing/typing/computers etc. when required
- Accompanying children on school tours/excursions/activities away from the school (e.g. communion preparation in church)
- Accompanying a child/small group away from the classroom for short periods
- Assisting the Teacher/Principle with non-teaching duties
- Interacting with the parents of their charges regarding how the child's day went etc.
- Other appropriate duties deemed necessary by the needs of the child.

Although the above states the specific duties of an SNA as required by the Department of Education, in reality the relationship between a good SNA and his/her charge is a much more complex affair. A huge element of trust is required, firstly between the SNA and the parents. I think any parent can identify with the peculiar phenomenon of the "what did you do in school today?" answer of "nothing!" In addition to this "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" philosophy of school going children, parents of kids with SN (special needs) often have the added problem of trying to communicate with a child who has serious problems with understanding or explaining their feelings and emotions, or indeed may be completely non-verbal. So you can imagine, a huge amount of trust is needed in the person they are handing their child over to in the morning for the next five and a half hours. Good communication skills are also a must. She has to be able to keep a good line of communication open with the parents. Often a notebook is used to write daily notes back and forth between SNA and parents around how the child's day/night went, if he is in good form/tired/overwhelmed etc. This is an invaluable way of monitoring how a child is progressing and also helps explain why the child may be upset entering/leaving school so the problem can be addressed.

Most important though, is the trust that is built up between the SNA and the child, and this is a very complex relationship (and a wonderful thing to watch develop). The child needs to know that help is there, without question, when he/she needs it. At the same time,

the SNA needs to understand the child and his needs enough to know if help is really required or is a little push towards independence appropriate on this occasion. She needs to be familiar enough with the child's non-verbal language to determine if he is comfortable with what's going on around him, or if he needs a short break. She often needs to recognise this before the child knows himself (because often by the time the child becomes aware that he is overwhelmed it's too late).

SNAs also play a major role in helping children socialise. Because they will often accompany children to the yard, they can encourage the child to participate in structured games and assist if any problems arise. This can have huge effects on a child's self-esteem, showing him that he has skills and is valued as a member of the team. It also helps greatly with the concept of inclusion, i.e. ensuring each child participates as much as possible in the school day.

The role of an SNA is a purely non-teaching role. In my opinion that is a major failing on behalf of the Dept. Here we have intelligent adults sitting beside a child for part of/the whole of a day but who are not allowed assist with teaching the child, unlike many of their counterparts abroad. Also, the cuts to special needs assistant posts over recent years has done nothing to encourage people into these rewarding but ultimately extremely challenging roles. This needs to change. We need to start valuing the individuals who are working hand in hand with us to enable our children to reach their full potential.