

# READY.SET.SCHOOL!

A STEP BY STEP TRANSITION TO SCHOOL GUIDE



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# READY.SET.SCHOOL!

## GUIDE FOR PARENTS & CARERS

Starting school is an important milestone in any child and family's life. For families of children with developmental delay or disability, transition to school requires additional thought, time, planning and support to make the process as smooth and as positive as possible.

This Ready.Set.School! Guide has been designed to support parents and carers of children with disability and developmental delay, with sections covering:

- **Getting Started**
- **About My Child**
- **How to Apply**
- **Sharing Information**
- **All About School**
- **Starting School**
- **Sources of Support**

This guide is one of several resources designed to support a community-wide approach to transitioning children with disability and/or developmental delay to school with practical information, support, resources and strategies.

Other resources in our Ready.Set.School! series include:

- [Early Childhood Intervention Practitioners Guide Book](#)
- [Community Organisation Guide Book](#)
- [Early Childhood Education and Care Professionals Guide Book](#)
- [Schools Guide Book](#)
- [Glossary of Terms](#)



# GETTING STARTED

# 1

**As parents and carers you know your child's strengths, interests and needs better than anyone.**

Your knowledge of and goals for your child helps you to decide what you want for your child, including the most appropriate:

- early childhood intervention programmes and supports,
- early childhood education and care (ECEC) services (preschool, day care), and
- type of school setting

In making these decisions, you may find it helpful to consider what is important for your child in the longer term.

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# GETTING STARTED

Some parents set short and long-term goals, and some also develop what is sometimes known as a “vision” which they can re-visit and adapt as their child grows and changes. As your child gets older, you can ask them what they want or would like to do

A “vision” is simply a description of what you want for your child in the future. A “vision” can serve as a guide for making current and future decisions for your child, such as your child’s transition to school. A vision might emphasise your child with developmental delay or disability:

being included in the same settings and activities as other children of their age developing specific skills and having access to particular interventions, therapies or resources

There are no right or wrong answers for your child and family. You decide how far and how wide the scope of your vision is, according to your current needs and preferences.

## Creating a “vision” for your child and family

Begin by writing a brief outline of what is important to your family in terms of your goals for your child. By writing or describing your goals, you gain a clearer picture for yourself and are therefore better able to communicate your vision to others. It doesn’t matter how you word this. What is important is that it is meaningful to you.

### What are your long term goals and hopes for your child?

Examples of “visions” parents have developed for their child include:

*“Van will make friends with other children his age and learn skills so he can live independently.”*

*“Sarah will be as independent as possible, make her own choices, have meaningful relationships and be involved in community activities that she enjoys.”*

## GLOSSARY

**Early childhood intervention:** refers to services offered by a range of practitioners including early childhood special education teachers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, social workers, doctors, nurses,

orthoptists, audiologists and others depending on the needs of the child & family.

**Disability:** a physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural impairment which affects development.

**Early childhood education and care:** refers to preschools, long day care, occasional care and family day care attended by children under the age of six years.

Some broad goals might include to:

- enjoy school
- learn skills which will increase independence
- make friends
- participate in leisure activities with their peers or siblings
- make connections in the local community

For further information see the [Resourcing Families website](#) which provides information sheets, specific workshops and webinars around developing a vision for your child.

Remember, as a parent, you are the best source of information about what matters to you and your child. Information from other sources can gradually be added to your vision to develop plans.

### Sharing your vision

You can use your vision for your child when participating in planning programmes, services and supports.

Prior to school this can be done at:

- Individualised Family Service Plans (IFSP) meetings
- Transition to school planning meetings

Once your child starts school this can be done at Individual Learning Plans (IEP) meetings.

## GLOSSARY

### **Individualised family service plan (IFSP):**

is a written plan which outlines specific goals for a child's development which are based on the family's priorities. The IFSP document is developed collaboratively in a meeting between the family, the early childhood intervention practitioner and others (e.g. preschool) working with the child and the family.

### **Transition planning meetings:**

are held to plan for your child starting school. They are usually organised by the Principal and are held once your child's enrolment has been confirmed at a specific school. See preparing for transition meetings for more information.

### **Individualised Programmes:**

refers to educational programmes that have been adapted or modified to meet a child's individual learning needs. These are also referred to as individual education plans or individual learning plans.

# GETTING STARTED

## What you know about your child

Parents and carers know their child the best. When considering school options it is helpful to think not only about your child's needs, but also their strengths, personality, temperament and interests.

Below are some questions to consider and discuss with other family members, friends, early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioners and early childhood educators.

## Personality and learning styles

All children have their own unique personality. Different types of learning environments suit different personalities. For example, a child who is easily distracted may learn better in a more structured environment. Consider the following questions:

- Is my child creative?
- Is my child easily distracted?
- Does my child become anxious or stressed?
- Is my child very active?
- Is my child sensitive?
- Is my child a bit passive?

After thinking about these questions, decide which factors are important for your child in choosing a school.

- Structured learning environment?
- Small school?
- Large school?
- Strong emphasis on academic achievement/ independence/ inclusion?
- Playground size and structure?
- Classroom layout?
- Creative arts (music, painting etc)?
- Regular physical education opportunities?

## Learning needs

All children have learning needs - that is, areas where a child requires additional support or assistance. Think about the things that help your child learn best. The table below may help you to identify and share what has been helpful to your child.

**Area of  
Development**

**Strategies and learning situations which  
have helped recently**

Communication	e.g. use of visual supports, or key word signs
Social	e.g. mainstream preschool (ECEC) and/or structured small group programs, use of social stories™ to explain social situations
Self-help	e.g. strategies for independent eating, visual supports for the toilet routine
Behaviour	e.g. everyone (home and ECEC) working consistently on positive behaviour plan or use of rewards
Mobility	e.g. particular equipment or training from therapists or family to ECEC educators
Vision	e.g. use of large print books, or visits from vision specialists to train ECEC educators
Hearing	e.g. training ECEC educators to use Key Word sign or any preferred means of communication
Sensory processing issues	e.g. provision of activities to help regulate sensory input in ECEC such as use of a quiet calming corner

# GETTING STARTED

You may like to think about the things that help your child learn best and share these strategies with your child's new teacher.

Communication	
Social	
Self-help	
Behaviour	
Mobility	
Vision	
Hearing	
Sensory processing issues	

Rate the areas of your child's learning needs in order of importance to you and your family, one being least important and eight being most important.

<b>Communication</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Social</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Self-help</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Behaviour</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Mobility</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Vision</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Hearing</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Sensory processing issues</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

### Sharing what I know about my child

Now that you have thought about your child's personality and learning styles, their learning needs and their interests, you may like to complete the 'snapshot of my child' template. This is helpful information to share with others such as your child's teacher at school.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators in some states and territories may suggest using a Transition to School Statement to share this information with the new school with your input and consent.

[Click here](#) for more information and to download the NSW Department of Education Transition to School Statement.

[Click here](#) for more information and to download the Victorian Transition Learning and Development Statement

[Click here](#) for more information on transition statements in Queensland.

# GETTING STARTED

## Snapshot of my child

Child's name		Place image of your child here
My child likes to be called		
My child is good at		

### My child likes to: (tick all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Play alone               | <input type="radio"/> Paint and draw                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Play with other children | <input type="radio"/> Do craft activities            |
| <input type="radio"/> Play outside             | <input type="radio"/> Sing                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Play quiet games inside  | <input type="radio"/> Do musical movement activities |
| <input type="radio"/> Listen to stories        |  |
| <input type="radio"/> Other: .....             |  |

.....

.....

.....

### My child doesn't like: (e.g. loud noises, changes in routine, doing puzzles)

.....

.....

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.....

.....

.....

I'd like you to know this about my child: (e.g. how to know when they are becoming stressed, learning needs such as structure and predictability or novelty and variety)

.....

.....

.....

.....

My child learns best by: (e.g using visual supports, having step-by-step instructions)

.....

.....

.....

.....

My child communicates with others by:

- ☐ Using gesture or body language      ☐ Using pictures
- ☐ Using sign language      ☐ Talking
- ☐ Using communication device: .....

To move about the school, my child:

- ☐ Uses a walking frame      ☐ Uses orientation/mobility aid
- ☐ Wears ankle-foot orthotics      ☐ Walks independently

Other information that I would like you to know:

.....

.....

.....

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Relationship:

(Mother, Father etc)

# GETTING STARTED

## Considering when to start school

The decision about when is the best time for your child to start school is an individual one. For some children, starting school at age six rather than five may provide them with an additional year to mature and increase their independence. For other children waiting until they are six will not be of great benefit.

It can help to discuss the timing of your child's school entry with people who know your child well and also have an understanding of the school system. These people could include your child's early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators and/or early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioners.

**When making this decision, it is important to think about how this decision will affect your whole family.**

What are the most important things to consider when deciding when my child will start school? If your child has a developmental delay or disability, their development in certain areas may be delayed and/or different to most children of the same age.

Deciding when your child should start school should not rest entirely on your child's academic skills. Teachers say that academic skills are one of the least important areas in terms of children adjusting and adapting to school. Think and discuss with those who know your child's:

- capacity to manage and regulate their emotions (e.g. calm themselves down if they have become upset)
- ability to follow an educator's instructions
- level of independence with self-help skills such as using the toilet
- ability to manage their own belongings (e.g. lunch box/school bag)
- social skills (e.g. how they relate to other children and adults)
- social surroundings (e.g. similar aged children in your community that are also starting school)
- support networks and/or school settings available
- family considerations (e.g. financial or other around starting school)

It is important to also consider that in schools:

- The teacher is usually shared by a larger group of children than in early childhood settings
- The arrangement of the school day differs from most early childhood settings
- There are increased expectations for children to be part of a group for a longer period and to follow adult-led activities for more of the day

### Can my child start school gradually?

For some children a gradual transition into full-time school attendance may help with make the transition more smooth. This needs to be planned for during transition to school meetings. For example, your child might attend:

- Week 1 – 5 half days
- Week 2 – 3 full days and 2 half days
- Week 3 – 5 full days.

Ultimately your child should be attending school on a full-time basis as soon as possible. This is every child's right and the necessary supports should be in place to make it successful.

### What are the legal requirements for starting school?

Each state and territory in Australia has its own compulsory starting date for formal schooling.

ACT	Children must have turned five by 30th April to begin the school year. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
NSW	Children can begin school at the beginning of the year if they turn 5 on or before 31st July that year and must be enrolled in school before they turn 6. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
NT	To start non-compulsory Transition at the start of the year a child must be 5 by 30 June that year. For Year 1 children must turn 6 before 30th June that year. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
QLD	To start Prep (non-compulsory) a child must turn 5 by 30th June that year. Children must start year 1 (compulsory) if they turn 6 by 30th June that year. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
SA	Children must start school by 6. If a child turns 5 before 1st May they will start school in term 1 that year. If a child turns 5 on or after 1st May, they will start school on the first day of term 1 the following year. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
TAS	Children may attend Kindergarten (non-compulsory) they turn four on or before 1st January of the year they start. Children must turn five by 1st January to start Prep, the first year of formal school. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
VIC	Children must turn five by 30th April to attend school that year. <a href="#">Read more.</a>
WA	Children must start school if they have turned 5 after the 30th June in the year prior or if they will turn 5 before the 30th June in the current school year. <a href="#">Read more.</a>

# ABOUT MY CHILD

## 2

Each family makes a choice of school that is right for their own child and family.

### Key elements for planning

#### Information for families about school options

- Talking with professionals who know your child well
- Information booklets
- Websites
- Transition to school workshops
- Other parents who live in your local area who have a child with a disability or developmental delay

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## Identify key people

- Early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioners (e.g. special educator, speech) pathologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist
- Early childhood education and care (ECEC) educator
- School principal
- Classroom teacher (if known)

## Identify key information about your child to share with the new school. You can use the 'snapshot' to do this.

- How does your child communicate?
- How do you think your child feels about starting school?
- How has your child responded to transitions in the past?
- How does your child move around?
- How does your child manage self-care e.g. eating, drinking and using the toilet?
- How does your child interact with other children and adults?
- How will we communicate regularly with the teacher?

## Information for families about the school system

- What do you want and need to know about the school?
- Are there information sessions for new parents?
- Is there any written material about the school to familiarise parents with routines, rules, equipment and uniforms etc?

## Ongoing evaluation

- What are two or three initial goals for the transition plan?
- How will your child's team keep track of how the plan is progressing?
- How will your child's team know if things are going smoothly? (e.g. feedback from school staff, feedback from visiting ECI practitioners, your child's response, your relationship with the school.)
- How will we identify strategies to respond to any concerns? Will all members of your team have a way of communicating about this?



## Plot out a timeline for planning your child's transition to school

*It can help to ask the questions below and include this information in your timeline:*

*When do any application forms need to be submitted?*

*When can you expect to hear from schools about the offer of a place for your child?*

*When do any building works applications need to be lodged?*

*When do any assessments need to be completed?  
When will orientation begin?*

*When will visual supports and or social stories™ be developed?*

## ABOUT MY CHILD

**I know which school my child will attend:**

Listed below are some possible actions that you might like to take to help prepare your child to start school. You might like to discuss these actions with members of your child's team. Not all activities will apply to your child or your family. You may add any additional activities that apply in the blank section/s below.

[illegible]

**I do not know which school my child will attend:**

Listed below are some possible actions that you might like to take to help prepare your child to start school. You might like to discuss these actions with members of your child's team. Not all activities will apply to your child or your family. You may add any additional activities that apply in the blank section/s below.

ACTIVITY	COMPLETION DATE	WHO COULD HELP?	DONE?
Make a short list of schools that you are considering for your child			<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact your local school to arrange a time to meet Principal and tour school			<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange to meet Principal and tour any other schools that you are considering			<input type="checkbox"/>
Use questions from 'Approaching a School for the first time' to make your choice			<input type="checkbox"/>
Read 'Preparing for Transition Meetings' (Step 4 - Sharing Information' in this guide)			<input type="checkbox"/>
Attend 'Transition to School Planning Meeting' at the school with your team			<input type="checkbox"/>
Complete any application or enrollment forms for school			<input type="checkbox"/>
Find out dates of the school's planned orientation day/s			<input type="checkbox"/>
Take my child to orientation day/s and arrange other visits as needed			<input type="checkbox"/>
Take photos of the school for 'My New School' story			<input type="checkbox"/>
Read 'My New School' story with your child			<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange a playdate with a child/children who will attend school with my child			<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide teacher with a copy of your completed 'Snapshot of my Child' form			<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>

# ABOUT MY CHILD

## Thinking about school options

*"I wanted him to go to a regular school and his older siblings were already at this school. We were happy with this school already."  
Ying, mother of Alan*

When you have considered your child's personality, learning styles, learning needs and interests, think about your whole family's needs:

- Do you have other children? If you would like all your children to attend the same school, consider siblings and the suitability of the school for them
- How closely is the school linked with your local community?
- Are there opportunities for parent and family involvement with the school?
- What is the availability of before, after school or vacation care if needed?
- How easy is it to travel between home, school and your workplace (if appropriate)?
- Do you have a preference for public or private education?

### Do you need access to before and or after school care and/or vacation care?

If so, click here to go to the Child Care Service Directory to find out where out of school hours (OOSH) care services are located in your area, or call the Child Care Access Hotline on 1800 670 305

## What are the options?

There are three different education systems:

- Public or government schools
- Catholic schools
- Independent or private schools

Each system differs in the way they provide support to students with developmental delay or disability.

In general, Catholic and independent schools support children with developmental delay or disability in regular mainstream classes. There are also Catholic special schools and support classes in some areas.

Public schools may offer a number of different options for supporting children with disabilities.

For more information about mainstream public schools, support classes, and special schools, in NSW [click here](#).

## Start locally

The practitioners who work with your child will know your child and family and may know of schools which you might like to consider within your local area. It may also be helpful to talk to friends and neighbours to benefit from their experience.

*"Our Early Childhood Intervention Service were great on a personal level when we were looking at school options. I attended a seminar with representatives from each education sector and also a parent representative. Hearing from a parent was the most valuable thing in terms of hearing that I needed to really look at my own child's needs."*

**Mattie, mother of Justin**

## Public Schools

It is every child's right to attend their local public school.

There are many advantages to attending your local school. There will be children within your local community who attend the same school and if you have other children they can also attend that school.

The first point of contact for all types of public school options is your local public school.

It may be possible to apply for a school for which is not in your local area. This can be done after you have made contact with your local school. The principal of your local school can help you to do this.

For links to a directory of Public schools in your state see page 21 of this guide.

## Catholic Schools

If you are interested in your child attending a Catholic School, your first point of contact should be the principal of your local Parish school.

It is possible to apply for a Catholic School outside your local area, however, the first place to start is with your local Parish school.

There are also Catholic special schools and support classes in some areas.

For links to a directory of Catholic schools in your state see page 21 of this guide.

# LOCATOR

## Australia Capital Territory

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## New South Wales

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## Northern Territory

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## Queensland

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## South Australia

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## Tasmania

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[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## Victoria

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

## Western Australia

[Public School Directory](#)  
[Catholic School Directory](#)  
[Independent School Directory](#)

# ABOUT MY CHILD

## Independent Schools

If you are interested in your child attending an independent school, you will need to contact the individual school directly.

Ask for a prospectus to be sent to you with information about the school and if you are interested in applying for the school, make an appointment to meet with the principal.

There are also a number of independent special schools and support classes nationally

For links to a directory of Independent schools in your state see page 21 of this guide.

## Distance Education

Distance education is for students who are geographically isolated or whose special circumstances prevent them from attending school on a regular basis.

## Home Schooling

Parents or guardians who choose home schooling for their child must be registered by their state or territory teaching and education authority e.g. Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) in NSW.

Parents must accept responsibility for developing, implementing and evaluating their child's learning program.

## Approaching school for the first time

*"We did a lot of research and went to workshops. We also had friends who had mainstreamed their child. We already had our older daughter in the school and they were very welcoming to us."*

Khalilah, mother of Ahmed

When making a decision about which school might best suit your child and family, visiting some schools is an important step in the process.

Allow plenty of time for making decisions, completing any applications and planning. As a general rule: schools should be approached 2 years prior to when your child would start if the child has a physical disability and 12 months prior for children with developmental delay and all other disabilities.

## How to approach a school

Make sure you are prepared and know what you want before you approach a school. When you have decided on a school or schools for your child:

- Contact the school/s you're interested in and make an appointment with the school principal.
- Usually the principal will arrange a time to meet you and have an initial discussion about the school and your child and for you to have a tour of the school

## Be prepared

- Before your first visit to a school you may like to: review the forms that you completed earlier in this guide.
- Consider taking along a friend or trusted professional to visit prospective schools as an extra pair of “ears and eyes”

Here are some things you may like to talk about on your first visit to a school:

- What is most important for your child and family in terms of a school for your child e.g. open communication between the staff and you, being alongside typically developing children of the same age, being with siblings, or within your own community?
- Your child’s main strengths and needs. There will also be other opportunities to share this information in more detail at a transition planning meeting
- Any specific questions you might have about the school

The Raising Children Network website has some useful questions you could ask. [Click here](#) to find out more.

### Tips for the meeting

Take along a note pad and pen to record any notes or things you may like to discuss with your team afterwards.

The school may also ask for a copy of recent assessment reports.

When you visit the school, consider the school's readiness to work with you and your child:

- How welcoming is the school principal and staff when you meet them?
- How do key staff members at the school interact with your child?
- Can you see yourself working in partnership with the principal and key staff members you meet?
- Does the school seem open to learning from you about your child?
- Does the school seem open to working collaboratively with professionals who already work with your child and know him or her well?

# ABOUT MY CHILD

## Class types in public schools

Every child has the right to attend their local public school. Most children with additional needs attend mainstream schools.

Public schools offer a number of different options for supporting children with disability.

There are specific eligibility criteria for support classes and special schools. Placement is based on an application process. It is important to note that there are a limited number of positions available in support classes.

Parents know their child best and are aware of their goals for their child. Each family makes a choice that is right for their own child and family at that point in time. Any decision made about schooling options, can be reviewed with school staff and members of your team each year, to make sure that the school or type of class continues to be the most suitable one for your child.

## After your first meeting - what next?

Once you have visited a school and met the principal, think about:

- Things your family likes about the school (strengths, opportunities)
- Potential challenges (weaknesses, threats)

You may then have some new questions to discuss with the principal at each school that you are considering.

Strengths  
of the  
School



Any  
potential  
challenges



Review  
with  
Principal

You may have thought of some potential challenges. Before you make a time to discuss these issues with the School Principal, you can prepare by thinking about the following things:

- How you are going to raise your concerns
- Whether you have any ideas or solutions
- Whether the school might have some ideas or solutions
- Whether you want to talk through your thoughts with others who know your child before you meet with the School Principal once more.

### Some examples of conversation starters

"I think \_\_\_\_\_ might be a potential challenge for Jamie. Is there any way we might be able to manage this?"

"I just wanted to come to you with an idea. I am wondering whether it could help with (describe the challenge)\_\_\_\_\_. Do you think that could be possible? Do you have any other ideas on how we might be able to do this?"

"I am a bit concerned about how Samir will go in the playground interacting with other children. I am wondering whether it would be helpful for the new kindergarten teacher to have an opportunity to speak with her preschool teacher about things that have helped Samir socially?"

"As Jai doesn't talk much, we appreciate hearing about what is happening during the day in other ways. I understand how busy teachers are, so I'm wondering what might work best for his new teacher in terms of regular communication with us?"

Remember it is important:

- To build a good relationship with the school right from the beginning. This is so that everyone is able to talk about their concerns, challenges and ideas. Acknowledge the school's perspective and be realistic about your expectations when raising questions or ideas
- To listen to the school's views, be flexible and willing to try new things
- That the partnership works for both parties

Conversations with the principal provide an opportunity to see how you and the school can work in partnership to find strategies and solutions.

# ABOUT MY CHILD

## Examples of things to potentially discuss with the Principal

Things that I like and that I see as strengths of the school:

- Close to home
- Welcoming
- Approachable Principal
- Community feel in the school
- Friendly parents and children
- My child already knows other children going to this school
- Well-resourced
- Smaller class sizes

Things that I feel may be potential challenges:

- Small classrooms
- Open classrooms
- Social play in large playground
- Stairs to classrooms
- Physical layout of Kindy class
- Participating in Assembly

## How you might discuss identified issues with the Principal

- Do you have possible solutions or questions that can be raised with the principal in your discussion?
- Might it be possible to adapt or adjust the layout of the classroom e.g. partitions, re-arranging seating?
- Is there any flexibility around location of your child's class?
- Would it be possible to take photos to make a social story for times such as Assembly to prepare your child?





# HOW TO APPLY

3

**When enrolling your child it is important to understand your rights and the rights of your child.**

## **Rights of parents and their children in schools**

It is important to understand your rights as a parent or carer and the rights of your child in the school system.

### **As a parent or carer you have a right to confidentiality:**

- Between yourself and the school
- Between service providers and the school

This means information about your child and family can only be shared with your permission.

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### As a parent or carer you have a right to collaboration:

- Around the range of educational services available
- About assessment materials and procedures
- About your child's educational programme
- About your child's placement

This means the school must include you in making decisions about your child's education.

### As a parent or carer you have a right to advocacy participation:

- In your child's assessment
- In the planning and review of educational programs
- In the review of your child's placement

This means you can provide information about your child and have your say.

### As a parent or carer you have a right to support:

- From the school and area personnel
- From an advocate, if desired
- From a nominated support person such as a family member, friend, or community liaison officer
- From an accredited interpreter

This means you can get help from any of these people to find more information and/or get support at meetings.

### Your child has a right to confidentiality:\*

- Between parents or caregivers and the school
- Between service providers and the school

This means information about them can only be shared with their permission.

\* It is important to understand that while these rights apply to your child when they start school, they may not be yet able to exercise their rights. As the parent or carer of your child you are your child's representative and you are able to exercise their rights with them or for them.

## APPLICATION PROCESSES

### Australia Capital Territory

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### New South Wales

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### Northern Territory

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### Queensland

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### South Australia

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### Tasmania

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### Victoria

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

### Western Australia

[Public School Enrolment](#)  
[Catholic School Enrolment](#)  
[Independent School Enrolment](#)

# HOW TO APPLY

## Legislation relating to the rights of people with disabilities:

The Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) makes it illegal in Australia to discriminate against a person on the basis of their disability across a range of areas of life including education.

[Click here](#) for more information about The Disability Discrimination Act (1992).

In August 2005, the Federal Government made Disability Standards in the area of education, known as the Disability Standards on Education 2005 (the Education Standards). The Education Standards set out the rights of students with disability under the DDA in the area of education. They also set out the obligations of education providers, like schools and universities, under the DDA to assist students with disability in the area of education.

[Click here](#) for more information about the Federal Disability Standards on Education 2005.

## Your child has a right to information:

- About assessment materials and procedures
- About their educational programmes

This means information must be made available to your child.

## Your child has a right to participation:

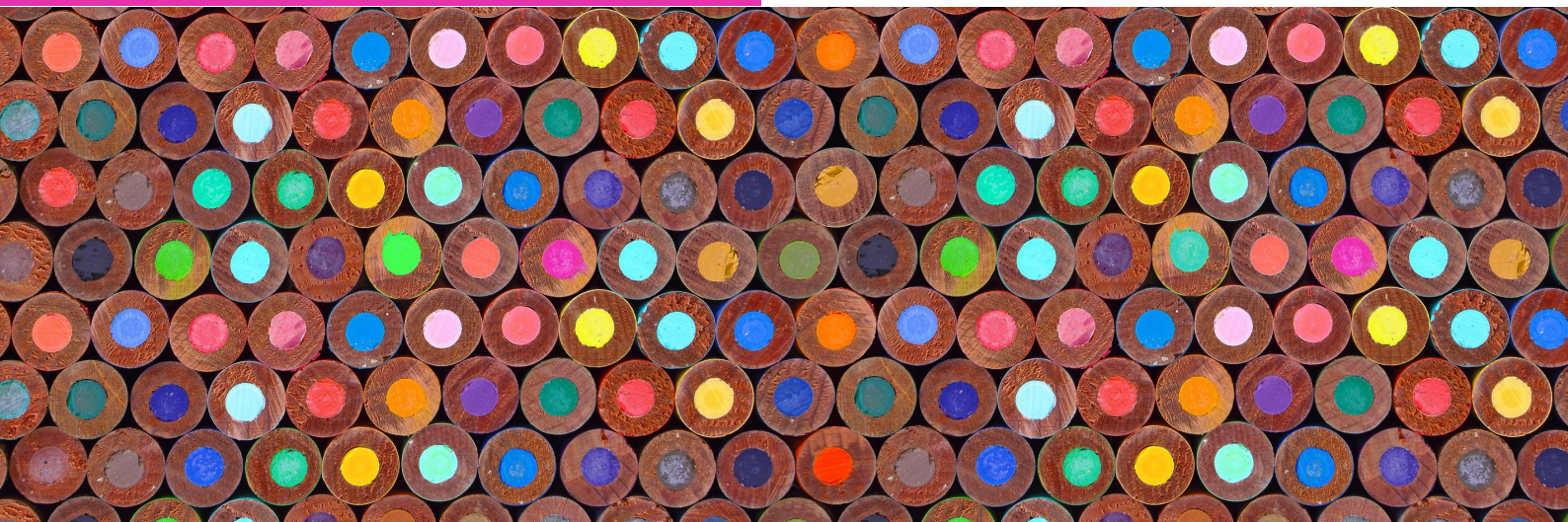
- In the assessment process
- In the planning and review of his/her programs
- In the review of school placement

This means your child can provide information about themselves and have a say as they grow and develop.

## Your child has a right to support:

- From school and area personnel
- From an advocate, if desired
- From a nominated support person such as a family member, friend or community liaison officer
- From an accredited interpreter

This means you can get help from any of these people to find out information and get support at meetings.



# SHARING INFORMATION

## 4

**Sharing your knowledge of your child's strengths and needs can assist with planning for your child.**

**Why forming a team is important in order to:**

- Help your child's transition to school to be coordinated and organised
- Work out who will take on which roles
- Develop and work on shared priorities and goals
- Make sure information about your child's strengths and needs is shared
- Help you know about and understand the options available to your child

In order for your transition team to work effectively, it is helpful to decide on the roles and responsibilities of each team member. These roles will vary from one child and family to another. Roles may change during the transition to school process.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7



# SHARING INFORMATION

## Forming a transition team

Your family is at the centre of the transition to school process. A good working relationship with the school and other support professionals is one of the most important factors in a successful transition to school.

You can decide who you would like to assist you to plan your child's transition to school. Some people may attend planning meetings. Others, such as professionals from a diagnostic and assessment service, may only provide information to help with the planning process. You may like to include someone from your child's:

- Early childhood intervention (ECI) service
- Early childhood education and care (ECEC) service (e.g. preschool or day care)

You may also choose to draw on the experience of other parents you have met along the way.

The school also has members on your child's transition team. School representatives may include:

- School staff such as the principal and/or class teacher
- Support staff associated with the school system's transition process

## Your family

As parents or carers, you know your child the best. Sharing your knowledge of your child's strengths and needs can assist the new school with planning for your child. Other ways you can be involved in the transition team:

- Making a decision about what type of school you feel will best suit your child
- Finding out about and visiting the schools you are considering
- Completing and returning the application and/or enrolment form
- Leading the planning process or nominating a trusted professional to take the lead
- Providing written and/or verbal information about your child's interests, strengths and needs, including your notes from within this guide.
- Taking your child to orientation visits at the school

It is possible that you may be still be waiting for confirmation of a placement at your preferred school. If this is the case, talk to your team about arrangements and steps you can take to begin preparing your child.

### Your early childhood intervention (ECI) service

If your child has received support from an early childhood intervention service prior to school, you may like someone from this service to be on your transition team.

There may be one person who has worked with your child and family over a period of time and knows your child and family well. They may have worked with you to develop an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and worked with your child at home and/or in their early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting.

This person, who some services refer to as a “key worker”, may be the best person to support you and your child in the transition process.

They could offer support by:

- Talking to your child about school - what it will be like, what they will do at school and who they can approach for help
- Talking with you about your goals and vision for your child’s education, and your thoughts and questions about schools
- Accompanying you on visits to look at possible schools
- Assisting you to complete application and/or enrolment forms
- Attending transition to school planning meetings with you, as well as orientation visit/s to the school with your child and you
- Providing programs which support you to help your child to develop school readiness skills
- Discussing your child’s strengths, needs and strategies to support their learning with school staff

### Early childhood education and care (ECEC) service

An example of an early childhood education and care service is preschool or day care teacher or carer.

If your child has been attending preschool or child care, their teacher or carer may be a useful person to have on your team.

In early childhood education and care settings, children are encouraged to become as independent as possible, follow a daily routine, and interact with other children. These are skills that will be useful at school.

A preschool or child care teacher will know how your child manages these activities and how they respond in a larger group of children.

Your child’s teacher or carer may have developed specific strategies which are already working to support your child’s learning.

Sharing what has worked for a child in one setting can assist the school greatly in understanding how to best support your child.

Your early childhood education and carer service could offer support by:

- Talking with you about your thoughts and questions about schools
- Attending transition planning meeting/s with the school as part of your team
- Inviting school staff to visit their setting to observe your child
- If needed, providing written information about your child’s learning through a brief written report

# SHARING INFORMATION

## Diagnostic and Assessment service

It can be helpful to have had some form of assessment in the year before your child starts school. Assessments may be formal or informal and may be completed by a:

- Paediatrician
- Psychologist
- Speech Pathologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Physiotherapist

Assessment information can assist in planning for your child's transition to school by:

- Describing your child's developmental delay or disability in professional terms
- Confirming their eligibility for certain programs such as support classes or special schools
- Describing their needs and the types of supports that may assist in the school environment

Assessment reports may also include information from questionnaires you have completed about your child or discussions the assessing professional has had with you about your child's development and progress.

## Support Staff associated with the school system

There are a number of support professionals from the school or school system who may become involved in the transition process. The support staff vary between educational systems.

Before your child starts school, the most likely support staff you will meet are:

## Public School support staff might be:

- School Counsellor
- Itinerant Support Teacher (early intervention)
- Learning and Support Teacher

## Catholic Schools support staff might be:

- Education Officers
- Guidance Officers and/or Itinerant Support Services, including Special Education Teachers, who provide consultative support to classroom teachers

## Independent Schools support staff might be:

- Each school will have different support staff which may include professionals such as a School Counsellor or Special Education Teacher
- The Association of Independent Schools has special education consultants who can provide consultancy support to the teacher once the child is enrolled in that school

No matter which school system they are from, support staff can provide help to you and your transition team during your child's transition to school by:

- Talking with you about your child's strengths and needs
- Talking with early childhood intervention professionals about the strengths and needs of the child
- Visiting your child in their early childhood education and care setting
- Attending transition to school planning meeting/s
- Visiting your child in their school setting once your child starts

### School staff

Initially, the school principal and/or assistant principal will be your main contacts in the school.

Once your child's teacher has been identified, they may be included in the transition team. However, it is possible that you may not know who will be your child's teacher until your child starts school.

School staff could offer support by:

- Arranging transition to school planning meeting/s
- Allocating time for staff to participate in transition planning
- Receiving information from parents as well as from professionals who have worked with your child
- Completing any funding applications
- Allocating funding to support your child's participation in the school
- Liaising with any support staff within the school system or outside (e.g. early childhood intervention or early childhood education and care professionals)



# SHARING INFORMATION

## Preparing for transition meetings

### What are transition to school meetings?

Once your child's enrolment has been accepted, a transition to school meeting is held.

Transition to school meetings:

- Are to plan for your child starting school
- Provide valuable opportunities to: meet with key people involved in the transition process
- Discuss your child's support needs
- Clarify what needs to happen to make starting school as successful as possible
- Usually happen face-to-face
- Can take place via video or teleconference or email as a practical alternative

### Who usually attends?

You attend this meeting, and you may like to invite:

- A support person to take notes, and be an "extra set of ears"
- Any early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioners who have worked with your child and family
- Your child's early childhood education and care (ECEC) educator
- The school representatives may include: the Principal
- Class Teacher/s
- School Counsellor

### What is my role as a parent in the meeting?

You should be at the centre of the transition plan as you know your child best. Your role is to make sure people know and understand:

- Information about your child's personality and strengths
- Your vision for your child
- What is important to you in relation to your child starting school

During the meeting, you may come up with new questions or thoughts about your child's transition to school which you may like to raise during the meeting so that the people there can provide answers for you.

### What usually happens in transition planning meetings?

- The school principal often arranges and hosts the meetings before your child commences school. It is also usually the school principal who runs the meeting on the day
- Several people will have information to share about your child's strengths and needs, so it is important that the person running the meeting allows all these voices to be heard
- You will be given the opportunity to share information, thoughts and feelings from your family's perspective
- The principal may have some forms that need to be completed and will ask you some questions in order to do this

### How can parents and the team plan to make transition to school meetings successful?

Do some preparation prior to meetings:

- Agree on agenda and purpose of the meeting. (e.g. to determine the transition plan, roles and responsibilities)
- Determine how much time is being made available and what is each member expected to contribute
- Make sure particular concerns or questions you have are included on the agenda so that participants are prepared

### Some questions you may wish ask:

- What types of activities will be put in place to help my child become familiar with the school?
- How will information about my child be shared with the school staff?
- When are the school's general orientation days?
- Would it be beneficial for my child have a gradual transition to school?

Having a clear agenda and agreed expectations will lead to a more successful meeting that builds relationships and achieves successful outcomes.

### What might I be asked about my child at the transition meeting?

Questions might focus around 5 main areas also known as "domains"

1. Curriculum (Key Learning Areas): how the curriculum and teaching methods may need to be individualised and modified for your child in order to achieve the outcomes set out in the syllabus documents
2. Communication: including your child's ability to communicate their wants and needs with others (expressive communication) and your child's ability to understand language used by others (receptive communication)
3. Participation: social competence (your child's ability to interact with others and participate in the school) and safety (what strategies are needed to maintain your child's safety)
4. Personal Care: hygiene, eating and dietary and health care procedures which are needed (e.g. toileting, feeding, medical needs)
5. Movement: mobility, positioning and fine motor skills which may impact on your child's participation in learning activities

### What happens next?

You can ask what you can expect to happen after the meeting and when you can expect any follow up actions to occur. Sometimes another meeting is planned to discuss progress on the transition plan

## UNSURE?

### What if I am unsure of the process or of language used?

You may find that language used by the school system is different to what you have been used to. Just like families have their own familiar ways of talking to each other, all settings have their own "jargon".

It is your right to ask people to explain what they mean if they use words, ideas or concepts that you don't understand.

# SHARING INFORMATION

## The importance of sharing information about your child

In addition to the information you provide, the early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioners and early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators who know your child can also provide information that will assist the school to plan for your child.

They can provide information about:

- How your child learns and participates in a group setting
- Ways they have adapted and adjusted their programs to make sure your child is included

By sharing this information with the school:

- Important knowledge and skills about what helps your child to be involved in his/her class are not lost
- It may be possible to prevent some challenges arising, by learning from what has been in place in the past

## Common Questions:

**Q. I am worried about who will have access to information. How can I make sure that confidentiality is assured for my child?**

A. All early childhood education and care and early childhood intervention professionals and staff employed by schools are bound by a code of conduct which reflects the Privacy Act. This includes a responsibility to keep all information about children confidential and only to share information with others with permission from parents.

Parents should be asked to sign a “permission to contact” form which enables professional/s to communicate with your child’s teacher by phone or email. You will need to list the names of all the professionals who you give permission to contact the teacher (e.g. preschool teacher, physiotherapist, psychologist).

**Q. Wouldn’t it be better for the new school to get to know my child without any preconceptions and develop their own strategies?**

A. Research, including feedback from many families and professionals, shows that when information is shared and everyone works together, transition to school is more successful.

## Assessments and starting school

### Common Questions:

Q: What is an assessment for?

A: Assessments can:

- Help to clarify areas of learning strengths and needs
- Confirm the diagnosis of a disability

While assessments can provide useful information about a child's skills and development, it is important to note that assessment scores have limitations.

Assessments do not accurately reflect:

- The full range of your child's current skills and abilities
- What your child may be capable of in the future
- Your child's personality and temperament
- Progress your child may have made

Although completing a formal assessment is not an essential requirement in order to attend a local public school, it can provide some useful information.

Q: Why might certain assessments be recommended in the year before my child starts school?

A: Your child might be asked to have an assessment to:

- Assist with planning for school
- Assist school staff to plan for your child's individualised school curriculum and learning environment
- Help you think about the most appropriate learning environment for your child
- Support an application for a school or support class which has eligibility criteria based on a particular diagnosis, for example a moderate intellectual disability
- Provide valuable information about changes in your child's skills over time
- Provide information on your child's diagnosis and cognitive level in order to apply for some school options (e.g. support classes)

## SHARING INFORMATION

### Q: What type of assessments are there?

A: Assessments of a child's development may include a combination of methods such as observation (e.g. watching how your child behaves and relates), and the use of "standardised" testing (developmental and intelligence assessments are often used prior to starting school).

Other types of assessments include:

- Speech and language assessments conducted by speech pathologists which identify a child's expressive and receptive language skills
- Adaptive behaviour assessments usually conducted by psychologists which assess how a child functions in their daily life
- Vision assessments
- Hearing assessments
- Occupational therapy assessments which may identify types of equipment or changes needed in a school environment such as access to toilets, or information about a child's fine motor development or sensory processing
- Physiotherapy assessments which may identify a child's mobility skills and any physical changes which may be needed in a specific school setting such as ramps or rails

### Q: What does standardised mean?

A: 'Standardised' means that the test being used is given to everyone in the same way.

The person assessing your child (assessor) cannot adjust or change the assessment in any way.

The reason for doing standardised assessments is so that the results can be compared with children of the same chronological age.

Some of the requirements of standardised tests include:

- The assessor needs to ask all questions in exactly the same way as the test requires
- There may be a limited amount of time allowed to complete the test
- The assessment may only be completed by a professional who is trained to do the test
- The assessment can only be completed once within a certain period of time (e.g. 1 year)

Q: I am concerned that the psychologist is assessing my child in an unfamiliar place and that he/she doesn't know my child well. Will this impact on the assessment results?

A: A psychologist will use a standardised assessment which must be given in the same way to all test takers, so that the results can be compared.

Assessment results are used together with any additional information you can provide so that the school has access to all the information it may need.

### Q: What is likely to happen in an assessment?

A: Some time is spent with parents asking questions about areas such as your child's:

- History
- Growth
- Physical movement
- Behaviour
- Play
- Interactions with family members

Usually a child is asked to complete some activities and answer some questions with the person who is assessing him or her. The activities and questions vary based on the child's age.

Parents may not always be able to be in the assessment room with their child during these activities, because of the requirements of the test. The person assessing your child should, however, provide you with detailed feedback about the results of the assessment.

### Q: What happens if my child doesn't do what he or she is asked to do in the assessment?

A: It is useful to the assessor to see how a child has responded to their requests in a standardised assessment, even if they are unable to complete the full test. It is not uncommon for young children to have difficulties with completing an intelligence test if they have difficulties in these areas

- Comprehension (understanding what is said to them)
- Compliance (following an adult's requests)
- Joint attention (the capacity to share a focus of interest with someone else)

These areas may also have an affect on your child's ability to complete some activities within a standardised developmental assessment. If this is the case, other types of assessments such as an adaptive behaviour assessment, or other means of gathering information about a child's skills, such as observation and talking to parents (also known as "parental report") may be used.

### Helping assessments to go smoothly

Share your knowledge about your child. An assessment process is usually conducted in collaboration with the family and any professionals involved with the child.

It may help to make some notes beforehand about any questions you may have or points about what you feel are your child's strengths and needs.

Seek input from those who know your child well:

- ask your child's early childhood education and care (ECEC) educator (e.g. preschool or day care teacher) to write a brief report providing information about your child at preschool or child care

## SHARING INFORMATION

- Assessment services like to read a report from an early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioner to provide more information about your child's development

Reduce any anxiety for you and your child. To make your child feel more comfortable, it may help to:

- Talk about what will happen with your child beforehand
- Take along some snack foods, a drink and a familiar comfort toy or object if this will help your child to feel more relaxed during the assessment
- Keep in mind that the results of formal assessments do not define your child as a person and do not predict all future learning

### Q: Where can I get an assessment?

A: Talk to your ECI, GP, Paediatrician or your local community health service about whether an assessment prior to starting school would be helpful. If an assessment is helpful, these practitioners will advise you where to go in your local area.

Some assessments are provided through health services and child development assessment clinics around Australia. These are usually free of charge but often have waiting lists.

It is also possible to access assessments privately through a consultant developmental paediatrician and/or psychologist. However, a referral from your GP or community health service may be required in order to access assessments this way.

### Q: When is the best time to have an assessment?

A: Ideally between 6 to 12 months prior to school. This can provide time to think through options and discuss them with your family and team. Due to waiting lists for assessments, it may be necessary to contact the assessment service around 6 months in advance.

Some assessments are provided through health services and child development assessment clinics around Australia. These are usually free of charge but often have waiting lists.

When children have a developmental delay, there are two main types of standardised assessments used; developmental tests and intelligence (also known as psychometric) tests.



## Question

## Developmental Assessment

## Intelligence Test (IQ)

What are some examples of Assessment tests?

- Griffith's developmental scales
- Bayley's scales of infant development

- Stanford Binet (SB)
- Wechsler (WPPSI)

When and why are these assessments used?

- These assessments:
- Are often used with children around the age of 3 years
  - Give a profile of abilities which can assist practitioners to target areas requiring further development
  - Provide an opportunity to observe the child's strengths/relative strengths

- These assessments:
- Determine a child's potential for learning and their current level of cognitive functioning
  - Can show whether there is a difference between a child's ability (what they could do) and their performance (what they do) or whether their difficulties with learning might be due to lower cognitive skills

How are these assessments carried out?

Standardised developmental assessments use some play-based activities, observation, information from parents, and structured assessment tasks

These tests are completely standardised

What areas do these assessments measure?

Language, gross motor, eye hand co-ordination, self-help and problem solving abilities

A range of problem solving skills including verbal and visual-spatial reasoning, memory and knowledge

Who does these assessments?

Developmental paediatrician or psychologist

Psychologist

What do these assessments assess?

The rate of development of a young child

A child's current level of cognitive functioning and learning potentials

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

## 5

It can be helpful to find out some information about the school, before your child starts.

### How does school differ from early childhood education and care?

There are a number of differences between early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and mainstream schools.

On the following pages designed to help you understand what the new environment at school might be like for your child, who is who at the school, as well as activities to help prepare your child for a smooth transition to school.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7



Things that may differ	Early childhood education and care services	Mainstream schools
Ratio of adults to children	<p>The maximum adult to child ratio for children aged between 3 and 6 years is 1 adult to 10 children.</p> <p>This will vary from one service to another, with many ECEC services having a lower number of children to each adult.</p>	<p>For Kindergarten: 1 teacher responsible for teaching the whole class.</p> <p>There may be a school learning support officer (also known as an SLSO or teacher's aide) employed in the class for some of the time.</p> <p>NSW public schools recommend class sizes to be around 20 children. Catholic schools maximum class sizes will vary between schools. Independent schools maximum class sizes will vary between schools.</p>
Structure of the day	<p>Varies from one service to another. In general:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More time is allocated to play-based learning experiences which follow the children's individual interests</li> <li>• There is a routine, but this can be adapted to meet the needs and interests of the children each day</li> </ul>	<p>Day usually has some structure. Usually selected times within the school day to do certain things such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to the teacher</li> <li>• Complete work individually or as part of a group</li> <li>• Have free play time</li> <li>• Eat</li> <li>• Use the toilet</li> </ul>
Regulatory guidelines	<p>National Quality Standard: sets consistent, quality standards for ECEC services, and outside school hours care services.</p> <p>Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF): provide a basis for ECEC staff to plan and report on education programs.</p>	<p>All children enrolled at school in NSW follow the curriculum developed or endorsed by the NSW Board of Studies.</p>

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

Things that may differ	Early childhood education and care services	Mainstream schools
Approach to learning	<p>Learning is largely facilitated through play.</p> <p>Children's participation in activities tends to be driven more by their interests.</p> <p>The main emphasis of the EYLF is on the child "being, becoming and belonging" rather than on a set of specific educational outcomes. This is achieved through helping the child develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A strong sense of their identity</li><li>• Connections with their world</li><li>• A strong sense of wellbeing</li><li>• Confidence and involvement in their learning and</li><li>• Effective communication skills</li></ul> <p><a href="#">Click here</a> for more information about the EYLF.</p>	<p>There are usually more teacher-led learning experiences as a large class group and in smaller groups.</p> <p>Play continues to remain an important part of learning in Kindergarten.</p> <p>The main learning focus is on the curriculum and teaching outcomes across the Key Learning Areas (KLAs). These might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• English</li><li>• Mathematics</li><li>• Science and technology</li><li>• Human society and its environment (HSIE)</li><li>• Creative arts</li><li>• Personal development, health and physical education (PDHPE)</li></ul> <p>You should seek further information as to the specific curriculum in your State or Territory.</p>
Rules and boundaries	<p>The types of expectations may be more flexible.</p> <p>Children are able to interact informally with one another and with adults more often during the day.</p> <p>Adults are generally able to respond to children more quickly.</p>	<p>Expectations, social rules and boundaries are usually more defined.</p> <p>Children are usually taught age-appropriate rules.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raising your hand and waiting for your turn to speak</li><li>• Not talking to your friends when it is quiet work time</li><li>• No talking in assembly</li></ul>

Things that may differ	Early childhood education and care services	Mainstream schools
<p>Family-centred / curriculum focus</p>	<p>Prior to school, it is generally best practice for ECEC and ECI services to focus their programs on areas identified as priorities to families. This is known as family-centred practice.</p> <p>You may have been actively involved in most aspects of planning and your child's learning prior to your child starting school</p>	<p>Schools are generally accountable firstly to the school curriculum. Much of teacher training is focused primarily around teaching children.</p> <p>While it is of great importance for teachers and families to work in partnership, there may be somewhat less time to provide individual feedback to parents on a daily basis than there may have been in ECEC.</p> <p>It is possible and valuable to continue to be actively involved in your child's education at school, but this may look and feel somewhat different from the family-centred practice you may have experienced prior to school.</p>
<p>What happens in the playground?</p>	<p>ECEC services generally have a wide range of learning experiences available in the outdoor playground including: cubby houses, tents, climbing equipment, a sand pit, table-top activities, and sensory play.</p> <p>ECEC educators may lead games and activities in the outdoor playground and facilitate children's social play at times.</p>	<p>School playgrounds tend to have less obvious structured activities available. Children's play in the school playground tends to be based around imaginative play, and group games such as chasing, skipping, and hand ball.</p> <p>Teachers who are "on duty" in the playground monitor children's play to ensure they are safe. As a result of the larger number of children in the playground, they may have less time available to facilitate children's social play than in ECEC settings.</p>

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

## What to find out about the school

Before your child starts at their new school, it can be helpful to find out some information about the school.

You may like to collect this information gradually or ask at a planning meeting with the school.

Taking photos (or video footage) may help your child become familiar with the school. You can use these to make a "My new school" story for your child about starting school.

Note: It is important to ask for permission from the principal before taking photographs or video footage.

## Things it might help your child to know about:

- People at school
- School environment
- Playground
- School routines

## Things parents should find out:

- Kindergarten start and finish times
- Uniform details
- What additional items to bring to school

It can help to note all of this information down in one place for easy reference.

On the next page you will find a helpful checklist of things to find out about school which you can complete.

Each State or Territory has compiled specific information about starting school for families of children with developmental delay or disability.

You can find links to this information for your State or Territory in the column on the right hand side of this page, entitled 'Family Information'.

## FAMILY INFORMATION

**Australia Capital Territory**  
[Students with Disability](#)

**New South Wales**  
[Disability Learning and Support](#)

**Northern Territory**  
[Enrolling students with disability](#)

**Queensland**  
[Every student with disability succeeding](#)

**South Australia**  
[Disability support at school](#)

**Tasmania**  
[Students with disability](#)

**Victoria**  
[Support students with additional learning needs](#)

**Western Australia**  
[Disability services and support](#)

Checklist of things to find out about your child's new school

Names of key people at the school	My child's teacher/s, if known	
	Principal	
	Deputy Principal	
	Librarian	
	Release Teacher, who looks after the class when the usual class teacher has release from face-to-face time	
	Admin Assistant	
	Buddy: If a buddy system exists at the school what is the name of the child's buddy.  is it possible for my child to meet their buddy at orientation?	
	Is it possible to take photos of key people at the school to include in my child's 'My New School' story?	

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

Classroom	Is there a specific name for my child's class? (e.g. K-Blue)	
	Are there any classroom rules that it might help my child to know? For instance: 5 L's of Listening in the Classroom (look, lips closed, listen, hands on laps, legs crossed)	
	Is it possible to take photos of the school and classroom to include in my child's 'My New School' story?	
Playground	What are some of the activities on offer on the school playground? (e.g. climbing frame, balls, sand pit, pretend play)	
	Are there particular school rules such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area's which are out of bounds</li> <li>• Hats must be worn outside or children need to play in the shade</li> </ul>	
What to wear	What uniform do children wear? Does this include a specific school bag they need to use?	
	Does this vary on different days of the week? (e.g. is there a regular school uniform and a sports uniform, and if so, what days does my child wear which uniform?)	
	Can I purchase the school uniform prior to the end of the school uniform so that my child can get used to wearing it?	

School routines	What are the routines for dropping my child at school in the morning?	
	What are the routines for picking them up in the afternoon?	
	What are the routines for daily activities such as morning assembly, morning tea and lunch?	
	What are the names that the school uses for these activities? (e.g. crunch-n-sip, recess, little lunch)	
	Where in the school do kindergarten children line up before school commences?	
	Where in the school do kindergarten children eat recess and lunch? Does this change in wet weather?	
	Where in the school do kindergarten children play at recess and lunch? Does this change in wet weather?	
	Where in the school do kindergarten children go to the toilet?	
	What are the start and finish times for Kindergarten	
	Is there a list of equipment that we need to purchase for school? (e.g, pencils, glue, sharpener)	
	Do children need to bring additional items to school on particular days? (e.g. Library bag, painting smock)	

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

## Who is who at school?

You will interact with many education professionals as you transition your child to school. It can be helpful to know who these professionals are and what they do. Below are some of the professionals that you might encounter.

### School Principal

The school principal has overall responsibility for the whole school.

Responsibilities include:

- Education programs
- Learning outcomes
- Welfare of all students
- Management of staff and staff welfare
- Financial management of the school
- Management of the school property
- Development of partnerships between the school and the community

### Deputy Principal

In larger schools, an assistant or deputy principal has specific areas of responsibility within the school and supports the principal with school management.

There may be an assistant or deputy principal who has specific responsibilities in the area of support for students with disabilities.

### Classroom Teacher

The classroom teacher is responsible for the education of all children in their class.

Responsibilities include:

- Assessing children to find out what they know already, and what their current learning needs are

- Programming for the learning activities in the class based on the curriculum
- Communicating with parents and carers about children's progress
- Co-ordinating particular activities in the school (e.g. sport carnivals or music)

### Teacher's Aide

A Teacher's Aide (also known as a School learning support officer or SLSO) is employed to support the teacher in their teaching role.

### School Counsellor

A School Counsellor assists in supporting the well-being of students in the school. The school counsellor may be invited by the school principal to be involved as part of the team, with consent from a parent.

Responsibilities include:

- Counselling around individual student needs
- Student welfare
- Cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural assessments
- Working collaboratively with your team to develop appropriate school based support for students

### Learning and Support Officer

A learning and support teacher is attached to public schools for an allocated period of time each week. The amount of time this teacher is available to the school varies based on the number of children enrolled in the school.

Responsibilities include:

- Providing direct specialist assistance to students in regular classes with additional learning and support needs and their teachers

- collaborating and consulting with parents and teachers
- Assisting classroom teachers to develop, monitor and assess individual education programs

### Administrative Officer

The administrative officer supports with the administration of the school.

- Responsibilities include:
- Administrative support for the school
- Providing and receiving forms
- Receiving payments and fees
- Providing first aid to children as needed
- Attending to children in sick bay
- Telephoning parents if their child is unwell

### Out of School Hours Coordinator

The Out of School Hours (OOSH) coordinator leads an OOSH service.

Responsibilities include:

- Providing care to children before and/or after school hours
- Supervising (OOSH) staff who are caring for children before and / or after school hours
- Ensuring that an education and care program is in place, based on the National Education and Care Services Regulations and the framework for school aged care
- Communicating with parents and carers about their children's care
- Communicate with school staff as needed

Please note that the titles and roles of school staff that you may interact with as you transition your child to school may vary across each State and Territory.

## Activities to help your child prepare for school

**Getting ready for school is the responsibility of your whole team:**

There are a range of specific activities which can help prepare your child for school. Your team can assist you in the process of preparing your child for school. This is known as a community-wide approach to starting school and is a successful approach. All those involved in a child's team work together, rather than placing the main emphasis on the child's readiness skills.

**Specific activities to assist your child to develop school readiness skills**

School readiness groups may be offered by an early childhood intervention (ECI) service. These are groups where children can practise the skills they will use at school. These include:

- Following a routine
- Lining up to go inside/outside
- Sitting and attending to group time
- Completing table-top activities

### School Orientation sessions

School orientation sessions provide a great opportunity for:

- Staff to get to know your child
- Your child to meet other children who will start school at the same time

You may like to arrange play dates with some of these children over the summer school holiday period. As with any child starting school, supportive relationships with other families and children can take time to develop but they can be worth the effort in the long term.

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

## Additional visits to the school

Additional visits to the school which may help prepare your child for elements of school which may be new experiences for your child. For example, watching a sport lesson or school assembly.

## Other opportunities

Other opportunities to socialise in your local community, for example attending playgroups or story-time at the local library.

## Things you can do at home

As parents you can make a big difference in helping to prepare your child for school.

Consider these suggestions:

### Talking:

- Talk with your child in a positive way about starting school
- Monitor your child's response to conversations about school. Do they react enthusiastically, or with confusion or anxiety? Do they seem to want more information?
- Talk in a way that is meaningful to your child
- Keep in mind that children may find it hard to think ahead about future events in terms of weeks and months. To help your child to understand time concepts, it can help to talk about days of the week and use a calendar to count down the days until school starts

## Books

Books are a great way for your child to become familiar with new routines, including school. Many children benefit from sharing a book that has been made especially for them, about starting school. These are sometimes known as "social stories™"

You can create a story for your child about starting school by:

- Downloading the "My new school" story template and personalise it with photos of your child and his or her new school.
- Reading the "My new school" story with your child regularly during the weeks before school commences
- Being prepared to answer questions that your child asks about school. If you need help with making the book, ask a member of your support team

Children may also benefit from looking at published books about starting school.

## Links to useful books and resources:

- [My First Day at School](#) by Meredith Costain
- [My First School Day](#) by Eve Marleau
- [Bella Goes to School](#) by Ian Whybrow
- [A Special Place](#) by Lynn Garlick
- [Getting ready for school](#): A guide for parents of a child with disability
- [Ten Great Reads for your Primary School Child](#)
- [My Day at Kindergarten](#) video

## Encouraging positive or appropriate behaviour will help your child's learning and social interactions

At school your child will need to be able to do what the teacher asks, follow rules, and interact appropriately with both adults and other children.

One of the most effective ways to encourage positive behaviour is by reinforcing or rewarding behaviour that you want to see. This is known as “positive reinforcement”. By rewarding desired behaviour it is more likely to happen again.

When your child behaves in a positive way, try:

- Giving specific praise (e.g. “great taking turns!”)
- Showing affection and positive emotions (e.g. big smiles, hugs or high fives)
- Tangible rewards (e.g. stickers, stars on a chart, a special game with Mum or Dad)

Challenging behaviour is usually a way that children try to tell us something (e.g. seeking attention, requesting or avoiding something). It is important to determine what the behaviour is telling us so that we can then try to teach the child a positive behaviour to replace the challenging one.

If you have any concerns about your child's behaviour, get support as early as possible. Your early childhood intervention (ECI) or

early childhood education and care (ECEC) service can help you find some assistance or training about how to set up a positive behaviour support plan.

- Set up routines which help your child to go to sleep and wake in time to get ready for school. It may help to use [visual supports for these routines](#).
- Practising skills

Help your child to practice:

- Using public toilets and explain that at school there are separate toilets for girls and boys
- Skills such as opening and shutting toilet locks, pulling up pants before leaving the toilet cubicle, and for boys, using a urinal
- Packing and unpacking the backpack they will be using for school. A visual support can help break down the steps of teaching your child these skills. Make sure that your child's backpack can be easily recognised as theirs by attaching something they will recognise to the bag
- Eating recess and lunch foods out of their school lunchbox (use a lunchbox which is as easy as possible to open and close)
- Opening any packaging that will be used for food at school
- Wearing school uniform
- Taking on and off their school shoes and sports shoes (shoes with velcro rather than laces are easiest to fasten)
- Travelling to and from school during the summer holidays prior to the start of the

# ALL ABOUT SCHOOL

school year

- Games where people have to raise their hand to say something and wait for their turn to participate. Help them understand that not everyone gets a chance to talk every time in a classroom even though they may put up their hand
- Calming themselves when they are upset using age appropriate activities which are soothing (e.g. cuddling a soft toy, squeezing a stress ball, having a drink of water or learning to wipe their own eyes with a tissue) It is helpful to discuss your child's preferred calming activities with the new teacher.

## Finally, when the big day arrives:

- Be as prepared as possible for the "before school" morning routine
- Remain as calm as possible in your interactions with your child. This will help to reduce additional stress which may be caused by being rushed or agitated
- Remember that children pick up on their parents' feelings and behaviour

You will have your own emotional responses to your child starting school, so it might be helpful to have spent some time considering the suggestions to support you and your family. What to expect also provides useful information about school which you can use to prepare your child.

## My New School story templates:

- Assembly at school
- Canteen at school
- Library at school
- Recess and Lunch at school
- Sport at school







*"In our first year at school, I made an extra effort to build a good communication system with my daughter's teacher. She said email would work well for her. I felt it was important to acknowledge and thank my daughter's teacher when she let me know about what was happening at school. It really worked both ways. She would ask what was working for us at home and I would learn what did and didn't work at school."*

**Priya, mother of Shreya**

# 6

## STARTING SCHOOL

**Starting school is a huge step for any child – and for their parents and carers too.**

### **What to expect in your child's first weeks at school**

Many schools will have staggered starts for kindergarten children. This usually means that kindergarten children start on a different day to other students. In some schools, kindergarten students may start with shorter days in the first week of school.

You may wish to think about how your child might react in their first week/s at school and whether a gradual start may be helpful for your child.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7



# STARTING SCHOOL

## Assessments

At some schools, kindergarten children will do an assessment on one of their first days at school. These assessments are intended to provide teachers' with knowledge of where each child's literacy and numeracy skills are at the beginning of kindergarten. This is so they can plan teaching and learning around children's needs.

All children have the opportunity to participate. Teachers of students with confirmed disabilities get additional support to build a profile of the child. This helps them to plan quality learning programs for these students.

Your school can provide you with specific information about how the assessment may be adapted for children with identified disability or additional needs.

## What is likely to happen at school in the first week?

In many kindergarten classrooms, the initial week will involve:

- Teachers emphasising the children's social skills and getting to know all the children and their learning styles
- Children doing a combination of structured activities (such as listening to a story at their desks) and unstructured activities such as free play
- Children learning to move around the classroom in what are often referred to as "rotations" - where groups of children complete activities and then move to another area in the room to complete another activity
- Children becoming familiar with the routines, rules and expectations at school

Below is a [video about the first day of school](#).



Expectations and classroom rules such as the 5 L's of listening (legs still, hands in your lap, lips closed, look at the teacher and listen with your ears) may be taught in group lessons with visual support.

## Developing a positive relationship with the school

Why is a positive relationship between home and school so important?

When schools and families work together they can determine areas of priority and how best to work together. This is more likely to support the child's skills in all areas of their life.

Parents and carers know their child the best. Sharing your knowledge gives school staff a better understanding of your child. They can then build on this knowledge as they learn about how the child reacts to the new and different school environment.

Shared problem-solving opportunities allow for parents/carers and school staff to brainstorm ideas and learn from each other.

When people make decisions together, they are more likely to make a commitment and contribution to following the plan that is developed.

Effective partnerships with schools require effort. Sometimes things may flow smoothly and at other times, it may be more challenging. From year to year teachers will have different communication styles.

## Factors for an effective partnership with the school

Parent and school relationships that work well involve:

- Commitment to work together
- Shared responsibility for your child's education
- Mutual trust and respect
- Parent involvement
- An understanding of everyone's perspective

## Communication

**Communication involves at least two active communicators. It needs to go two ways:**

Respectful communication involves both people listening to each other and also having a chance to be heard as they share their thoughts, experiences and ideas.

**Communicate openly and honestly:**

When communicating about your child, it is important to start with their strengths and what they can do. It can also be helpful to share any needs in a solution focused way for example: "We have found that Jamie responds well to visual communication. When he sees a direction presented visually, he seems to understand it better than when we just say it to him."

**Your role:**

- Share your goals – let the teacher know your priorities for your child's learning
- Try to keep the teacher informed about family priorities as they change and emerge
- Give the teacher some space and be trusted to do his or her job
- Give the teacher time to get to know your child as well as all the other children in their class

# STARTING SCHOOL

- Ask the teacher about what might work best in terms of regular ongoing communication with you

## **The teacher's role:**

- A teacher's first responsibility is to teach the curriculum which is set out by the State or Territory's governing authority.
- In mainstream or regular kindergarten classes, teachers will be responsible for the education of between 20 and 32 children
- Many teachers also have responsibilities outside of their class such as coordinating music or sport for the school
- It is important to have realistic expectations of teachers and understand that their time will be limited.

## **Communication Methods**

Ask the teacher what might work best in terms of regular ongoing communication with you.

Availability and preferred communication methods may vary from one teacher to another.

## **Phone can be used to:**

- Provide feedback on how things are going
- Let parents know about a particular situation (for example a teacher might use text messaging to advise when they will not be at school). This can help you to prepare your child if they benefit from being prepared for changes to routines.
- Check on progress around a particular goal

## **Email can be used to:**

- Provide feedback on how things are going
- Hear about relevant information such as home life; goals and strategies related to therapy that happens outside of school hours

## **Communication books:**

- Some teachers and parents may like to write in an exercise book which goes with the child to and from school to share important information between home and school
- Time constraints may not always permit regular writing within communication books

**Short conversations face to face before or after school:**

- These can work well for brief messages about something that the teacher or parent may need to know about at that time. Teachers usually do not have a great deal of time for detailed conversations immediately prior to and after the school day

**Pre-arranged meetings with the teacher:**

- If a more detailed conversation is needed, it is usually advisable to arrange a specific time that suits you both. The teacher will then have time to listen and talk with you. This may be the best option to establish goals, determine strategies and share information about your child's progress with their teacher. If necessary, it also allows other relevant people such as therapists to attend the meeting.
- By planning ahead you can all be prepared for the meeting and it is more likely to be productive.

**Provide positive feedback to staff:**

- Wherever possible, acknowledge any positive aspects of your child and family's experiences with the school.
- Praising any strategies that have been successful can help to let the teacher know what you feel is going well and this may make it more likely to continue.

# STARTING SCHOOL

## **Becoming involved in the school community:**

- Different parents will be able to be involved in their child's education and the school community in a range of ways based on their available time, personal skills and resources, and other commitments related to their children and work
- See [Parent Engagement in Children's Learning](#) for ideas on how.

## **Share ideas and come up with solutions together**

- When parents and school staff work collaboratively, it is usually easier to come up with ideas and strategies to support children
- By bringing together knowledge of the child at home and at school there will be more information to help find ways to support them

## **If concerns arise:**

- If you raise concerns or questions clearly and without blame or criticism, people will usually respond more positively.
- It may also be important to think about which concerns are a priority and whether it is the right time to raise them. See the trouble-shooting guide.



## **Remember:**

In Australia it is a requirement for all education providers including schools to comply with the [Disability Standards for Education](#) (2005). These standards clearly state the need for all educational institutions to consult with the student or an associate of the student (e.g. parent, carer, or advocate) regarding how a disability affects the student's ability to access education or training. Consultation is also required when determining what individualisation of teaching will be made to support the child's access to programmes.

## Calming activities for home

Many families may find that their children, both with and without a disability, become quite tired by the end of the school day. For some children this may result in them sleeping and eating better. Others may have difficulty winding down. They may become easily emotional and over-tired which may affect how they adjust and behave at school and home.

“Down time” after school is important especially during the early days of attending school. Many families try not to arrange formal after school activities especially for the first term or so while their child is adjusting to the new routine of going to school each day.

Children may benefit from some calming activities before and after school. This can help them to be in a calm and alert state ready for learning and playing at school and relaxing at home. You may like to plan some time for some calming activities in your morning and after school routine. It may be helpful to use visual schedules to show your child when calming activities will happen in their routine.

[Click here](#) to view an example of a visual schedule for after school routine.

### Remember:

What is calming for one child may be different to what is calming for another child. Try a range of activities to find the ones that work for your child. Physical activity such as bouncing on a trampoline, riding a scooter or bicycle can help to release nervous energy and help a child to relax.



# STARTING SCHOOL

## Examples of calming activities

### Listening to:

- music through headphones or a stereo
- a recorded relaxation or meditation DVD which may include prompts to breathe deeply and tense and relax muscles

### Breathing activities - taking deep breaths in and out. Use fun activities, such as blowing:

- a pin wheel
- whistle
- harmonica
- an inflated balloon across a table
- bubbles with an easy to use blower

### Deep pressure touch activities such as:

- being rolled up like a “sausage roll” in a blanket
- squeezing their torso between two large cushions
- squeezing a firm stress ball
- massage

### Tactile sensory play such as:

- sand
- water
- play dough
- plasticine
- Rocking or swinging in a:
  - hammock
  - swing
  - rocking chair

### Playing with favourite, comforting toys

### Screen time may be calming for short periods of time.

- watching a relaxing favourite television show or DVD
- playing a familiar game on the computer or tablet

Monitor your child's response to particular games or programmes, as some may have a more exciting effect than a calming one.

It is generally not recommended for children to have “screen time” in the hour prior to bed time, as this can impact on children's capacity to fall asleep.

### **Modelling calmness**

Starting school and adjusting to the new routine may elicit a range of emotions for parents too.

When parents are able to show their children how they manage their own stress this in turn helps children to learn how to regulate their emotions and calm themselves.

It is hard to help your child calm themselves when your own stress levels are high, so it may be important to work out what supports might be helpful to help you remain calm. See 'Section 7: Supporting yourself and your family' in this guide book, which includes information about well-being and self-care for parents and carers.



# STARTING SCHOOL

## Being actively involved in your child's education

### Why is it important to be involved in the school community?

Different parents will be able to be involved in their child's education and the school community in a range of ways based on their:

- available time
- personal skills and resources
- other commitments (e.g. children and work)

Sometimes, grandparents or other family members are able to help. Even a small amount of time can have benefits for your own child as well as for the school community more generally.

Benefits include:

- becoming more familiar with the routines, experiences, and curriculum which can help you to support your child's adjustment and adaptation to their new school
- providing opportunities to meet your child's peers and their parents
- helping the school

### How can I be involved in my child's school life?

Even parents with little spare time can be involved in the following ways:

- Participate in meetings with your child's teacher and any support professionals to discuss goals and strategies for their Individual Education Program (IEP). This is a valuable opportunity to share your priorities and your knowledge of your child and adapt the goals in their IEP as your child develops and changes. These meetings may only be held a couple of times a year.
- Communicate regularly with your child's teacher. You can share what you are working on with your child at home including any changes to routines, new goals, progress, or concerns. Maintaining regular contact will also help you learn about what the school is focusing on, so you can reinforce your child's learning at home.
- Arrange play dates outside of school time which can help to strengthen your child's friendships.
- Practise particular skills that the teacher may suggest at home

*"Our whole family are very involved in the whole school. This helps us get to know other children and the staff. I know I can't rely on the teacher to do everything, because of all of her responsibilities so we can help with some things as a family. I couldn't imagine not being involved. We've always been very involved. I also had regular meetings with his teacher which helps the teacher to be reminded of what he needs help with."*

**Peter, father of Mitchell**

- Talk about current classroom topics or current areas of focus with your child at home (e.g. animals in the zoo)

### For those with a little more time

Ask your child's teacher how you can be involved. This can help you to match your own skills, interests and availability to the needs of the school. If you aren't able to help, maybe grandparents or other family members can. Children love knowing that their family is involved in their school.

### Volunteering to:

- listen to children read in the classroom
- make visual supports or "social stories™"
- cover school books or sharpen pencils
- help in the classroom during Literacy (also known as L3) rotations
- assist with art or craft activities
- be involved in the school's Parents and Citizens (P &C) Association
- assist with fund-raising events
- help at sporting events and carnivals
- attend school excursions
- join the roster for the school canteen

*"Because the school was more curriculum focused, I would ask what they were doing in class and then say we could work towards this at home too. I let the teacher know I was there to support what needed to happen to help my child learn."*

**Hyun Jae, mother of Kwan**

*"Getting involved in the school was really important, for example P & C activities, reading, fund-raising. This gives you a nice presence in the school and allows you to give back."*

**Karen, mother of Jason**

# STARTING SCHOOL

## **If things don't seem to be working out**

There are times for all children when things do not go so smoothly at school. Times which may be more difficult for some children than others include:

- When there is a change of teacher or class
- When friendships change
- As the school week or term progresses and your child becomes more tired
- When what is being taught becomes harder for your child
- When there is additional stress or anxiety in the classroom or at home.
- When your child is feeling unwell

When a challenge occurs, it is important not to panic, and lose hope. If you work with your team to think of new ideas and strategies to try the situation may improve.

## **What if I am worried that this school isn't working out for my child?**

Before making big decisions such as changing schools:

- talk with trusted members of your team and go through the process of trouble-shooting and thinking of new strategies to try
- remember every school will have its good and challenging points.
- think about whether the reasons you are considering changing schools will be resolved at a different school or not.

If, after talking with your team and considering all options in the current school, you decide that a change of school is best for your child and family.



# STARTING SCHOOL

## Troubleshooting Guide

Even with the best planning, there may be times when challenges or issues arise which require additional thought, discussion and input from different team members.

- You can discuss concerns and come up with solutions with the school by:
- having some hope that the situation can improve
- being able to move forward from feeling overwhelmed by the situation
- taking some time to think through how to express what you want to say
- being able to look past a specific issue and look towards making a plan

On the next page you will find an outline to help you to assess the reasons for problems, tackle challenges and come up with possible solutions.

It may help to consider the issue at hand in relation to this "SOLUTION" acronym:

- S - Start with what is happening now
- O - Observe and outline what is working and what could be adapted
- L - Listen to all involved and get some different perspectives
- U - Understand the problem and be realistic about what can be changed
- T - Tactics and strategies
- I - Implement a plan to monitor change and progress
- O - Outcome: set an achievable goal or outcome
- N - Now and next

*"I think the relationships are the most important thing. Being aware that there often is not funding allocated for each child, but knowing that you can advocate anyway. Expecting that things might go smoothly for a while and then you may need to revisit certain strategies or change strategies."*

**Lisa, mother of Jake**

S

**Start with what is happening now:**

- What is the challenge? Is it communication? Is there a need to work on additional skills at home or individual opportunities with our child to support learning at school? Is it behaviour? Is there a need for training for school staff?
- If there are many challenges, it may help to start with the one which is impacting most at the moment
- What strategies are already in place?
- What has worked in the past for your child?
- Similar concerns may have arisen in the past, and there may be some strategies which have helped previously

O

**Observe and outline what is working and what could be adapted:**

- Observation may involve the class teacher and/or other professionals
- An early childhood intervention (ECI) professional who is part of your team may be able to observe your child
- Observation notes should include an outline of what is currently happening in the classroom or playground when the issue of concern is happening
- If the concern is a behavioural issue, notes should include what is happening before the behaviour and after the behaviour usually occurs. This helps to identify any patterns, triggers and accidental rewards for the behaviour

L

**Listen to all involved and get some different perspectives:**

- It is important to listen to what all parties have to say and make sure they feel heard
- It can be helpful to allow others to express their concerns without blaming
- By listening and gathering information from different people, it becomes easier to see the big picture and identify how to move forward

U

**Understand the problem and be realistic about what can be changed:**

- Gathering information about a particular challenge and why it may be occurring, helps to understand the problem
- Understanding the nature of a problem can help to find a solution
- It is important to be realistic about what strategies can be used

T

**Tactics and strategies:**

- Gather ideas from across your team and brainstorm all possible strategies

I

**Implement a plan to monitor change and progress:**

- Make a plan with a few possible strategies
- Work out which strategy should be trialled first
- Decide on when to check whether things are improving, before trying other ideas
- Write down the plan, including who in the team will be responsible for doing what

O

**Outcome – set an achievable goal or outcome:**

- Think about and write down what positive change you would like to see
- It is important for any goal you set to be as realistic and achievable as possible
- When goals are realistic, they are more likely to succeed and motivate everyone to continue working together.

N

**Now and next:**

Work out...

- What steps need to be carried out to put your plan into place
- When you will re-visit the goal to check progress
- When to review the plan to see how things are going

# SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Identifying sources of support to call on can help to maintain your health and well-being.

## Supporting yourself

There are many positive aspects to commencing school.

For some families, enrolling their child in one educational setting five days per week may reduce some of the juggling of different appointment times, early childhood settings and finances.

For some children, the greater consistency and structure of a school setting may have benefits for their learning and routine.



STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

The transition to school process may go relatively smoothly for some families, however for others it can be a source of increased stress.

Families play a crucial role in their child's development, preparation for school, and their ongoing learning.

However, you need not feel that all responsibility is on you to "get your child ready" for school or that you need to do everything at once.

The additional responsibilities and energy required as a carer for your family when your child has a disability or delay means that maintaining your own health is vital, for your sake and your child's.

Identifying people and sources of support for your family to call on can help to maintain your health and well-being.

Some examples of those around you who can provide support are:

- Your family and close friends
- Those who know what you are going through, such as other parents of children with disability and/or developmental delay
- Professionals such as your early childhood intervention practitioners, early childhood education and care workers or counsellors.

## Support from your family and friends

Some parents will find that they are able to draw on their relationships with close family and friends for support at this time. Often one parent will have had more direct involvement in their child's early childhood intervention (ECI) programme and have taken a more active role in looking at the various school options.

Talking through the options with a partner and/or a supportive friend or relative can: provide another perspective help you feel clearer about your priorities allow the responsibility of decision-making to be shared

Where possible, this person could attend meetings with you to provide moral and practical support. Asking them to be an "extra set of ears and eyes" and take notes, can help relieve the pressure on you to remember everything that is said at meetings.

## Parent to parent support

It is common for parents to feel anxious as well as excited about their child starting school. Many parents say that speaking with other parents and carers of children with similar needs provides practical and emotional support.

*"The networking with each other (in a parent/carers support group), talking and getting things off my chest and learning from others' experiences really helped."*

**Mary, carer of Katie**

*"Parent support has been the most helpful thing I have experienced."*

**Jane, mother of Bethany**



## SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Some early childhood intervention organisations offer information sessions or school readiness group programmes which may provide opportunities to connect with other families.

You could also ask your early childhood intervention professional to put you in contact with another family, with a child with similar needs, who has already had experience with starting school.

### Things that may help to maintain your health and wellbeing

- Regular breaks away from family responsibilities
- Interests outside the family
- Contact with other adults
- Regular physical exercise
- Healthy diet
- Help with home responsibilities e.g. a cleaner, Lawn mowing service
- Talking with your GP and considering a Referral to a counsellor or psychologist
- Exploring what is available from organisations who support those who care for a child with a disability.

### Thinking about what is helpful to you

- What have I found has helped during stressful times in the past? For example: watching a movie, talking with a friend, going for a walk, getting take away food for dinner
- Who can I call on? For example: a trusted friend who is happy to listen, respite for a break, Home Care for cleaning help
- How could I ask others for the type of help I need? "I just feel I need to offload a bit, don't feel you need to give any advice, I



really appreciate the way you listen” or “is there a good time I could chat to you?”

- What steps might I need to take to put some stress-relieving activities in place? For example: respite, asking people close to me for the type of help I need, setting up a regular time for a break

## Supporting siblings

### Taking care of other children in the family

Parenting can be stressful, particularly with the extra demands in having a child with a disability. Different family members will respond in their own way to their emotions and any stress in the family.

Siblings (brothers/sisters) of a child with a disability often have more complicated home lives or are exposed to stress more frequently than many children of the same age. Research about siblings of children with disabilities indicates that if they have appropriate support they can develop a range of positive qualities such as: resilience, compassion, and understanding of difference.

Siblings may feel a wide range of emotions in response to having a brother or sister with additional needs including:

- confusion about disability
- guilt

- grief
- fear
- anger
- jealousy
- resentment
- embarrassment

As a parent you may recognise that your other children need support, but it may be difficult to know how to respond to their feelings and questions. When you are dealing with your own strong emotions and learning about your child’s disability this can be even harder.

### How you can support other children

- Treat children as individuals
- Recognise and praise their strengths to build their sense of self and self-esteem
- Ensure they have opportunities to develop their own identity, interests and friendships outside of home

Think about:

- How can I make sure my child has an opportunity to make and spend time with their own friends if they want to?
- Would my child like to become involved in some community activities e.g. sport, music, drama, Cubs, Brownies etc?
- Would they want to do this with/without their sibling with a disability?
- Talking and listening

*"It was hard especially at the beginning to know how to deal with what my daughter (without a disability) was feeling when my own feelings were so raw. Sometimes I just wished she would understand and be more patient with her little brother, but then she was only little too. It was also hard because my husband and I had very different ideas on how we should handle things. It was helpful to speak with a counsellor when things were tough to help us talk through problems."*

**Julie, mother of Chloe (8) and Brett (5)**

## SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Provide regular opportunities for your children without a disability to talk about their feelings and any questions or concerns they may have.

These may include:

- Need for accurate information about their brother or sister's disability
- Feeling they get less attention from parents
- Perceived pressure to be perfect
- No outlet for their emotions
- Additional responsibilities
- Social difficulties

There may be other trusted adults with whom your children may wish to share their emotions e.g. aunts, uncles, family friends, grandparents etc.



"I found that my younger son really needed a chance to say whatever it was he felt in relation to his older brother (with global developmental delay) even when it was negative. I had to help him find a place where he could express himself. Over time, we were able to help our older son to say what frustrated or worried him while still remaining respectful of his brother."

**Kamli, mother of Abdul (4) and Ali (6)**

Think about:

- How comfortable is my child with talking about their brother or sister's disability?
- Would it help to talk at home about how they might like to answer any questions from other children about their brother or sister's disability?
- Would it help to schedule individual or one-on-one time with other children to reinforce their sense of value and place in the family?
- Make decisions about school options to suit the whole family

When families choose a school for their child with a disability, it is important to consider the possible impacts of your decision on your whole family, and in particular upon any siblings.

Whether your children attend the same school, or different schools, letting their teacher know they have a sibling with a disability is important. If the teacher is aware of what is happening at home, for example, disrupted sleep or inability to sometimes complete homework, they may be more understanding of your children's needs.

Think about:

- Is the school we are considering suitable for any other child/children in our family?
- Would my children like to invite friends from school to our home?



## SOURCES OF SUPPORT



## **Remember siblings are still children**

Think about:

- How can I ensure my child does not have too many additional responsibilities in relation to their sibling with a disability?
- How can I make sure that they have choices about how involved they would like to be?

## **Signs your child may benefit from additional support**

If your child:

- Expresses strong emotions over a period of time
- Shows attention seeking behaviour at school and/or home
- Withdraws from usual activities and interactions

If you feel your child may benefit from support some resources include:

- School counsellor - a referral can be arranged through the school principal
- Siblings support groups
- Fun activities designed especially for siblings of children with additional needs
- Online sibling networks

### **Websites for siblings:**

- [Young Carers NSW](#): A project of Carers NSW which aims to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people who may help to support a family member who has a disability (or other needs). This includes a “young carers’ club” where members can chat and get news relating to young carers.
- [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#): Child Family Community Australia (CFCFA) is the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) information hub for evidence, resources and support for professionals working in the child, family and community welfare sector, and has some information on support needs of siblings of children with disability.

### **Websites, information and videos about supporting siblings for parents:**

- [Raising Children Network](#): An Australian parenting website which provides ad-free parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts.
- [Siblings Australia](#) includes links to organisations who run specific groups, camps, workshops and activities for siblings of children with additional needs.

# SOURCES OF SUPPORT

## Advocacy

### What is advocacy?

Advocacy is:

- Speaking, acting, or writing on behalf of a person who may not be able to do so for themselves
- Promoting, protecting or defending the best interests of the person

Parents and carers are usually the first and most important advocates for their children. As a parent advocate, you can uphold the rights of your child with a disability. For example, advocating to make sure your child's right for the school curriculum to be individualised is upheld.

### Why would I need to advocate for my child?

- As a parent, you know your child better than anyone and will be involved in your child's life for the long term. You are therefore best placed to represent their interests
- You will have thought about what is important to your family in terms of your child's education and inclusion in his or her community (also known as your "vision" for your child) and it is important to share this with others involved in your child's life. See also developing a vision for my child
- Different people involved in your child's education will have varying levels of understanding of your child's strengths and needs. You play an important role in educating people about things they may need to know about your child. For example, you may need to advocate about what works best for your child during transition to school, or when your child starts in a new class or with a new teacher within the school

### How you can be a good advocate for your child:

- Ask friends and people in your community to support you
- Build positive, collaborative working relationships with those involved in your child's education
- Know your rights as a parent, and the rights of your child
- Communicate clearly and with confidence
- Be assertive, while being respectful and polite
- Find out how the education system works

- Ask questions
- Actively listen to what others have to say and focus only on one or two areas at a time
- Think about what you, your family and your child want or need, or what you might want to say
- Be prepared and organised for meetings
- Help teachers come up with practical suggestions and/or ask others for strategies
- Provide positive feedback to people working with your child when something goes well

### Who can help me to advocate?

Some parents find it helpful to take along a friend or other support person to meetings in order to hear what is being said and get across any important messages you may want to share.

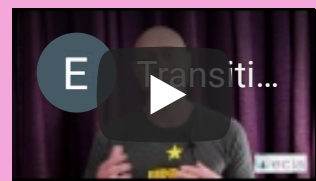
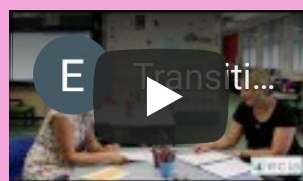
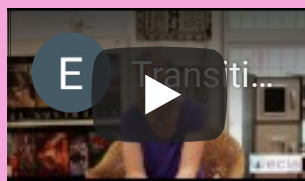
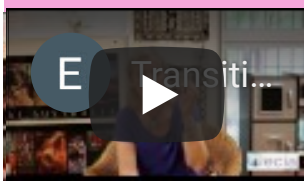
There are a number of organisations that can provide support, training and telephone advice to you about how to best advocate for a family member who has a disability including [Family Advocacy](#).



# READY.SET.SCHOOL!

## Videos for Parents and Carers

Click on the panels below to access five short videos of one family's story of their child with a disability and their team, in their child's transition to school journey.



## The Ready.Set.School Guide Book Series



ECI



SCHOOLS



PARENTS



ECEC



COMMUNITY



The team at Reimagine Australia wish you the very best as you transition your child to school!



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