

STARTING PRIMARY SCHOOL

Positive transitions to school see families, schools, and communities doing all they can to create partnerships that really boost children's confidence and support them to adjust well. In particular, home-school partnerships create a priority for opportunities to share information and work together in ways that support children to be happy and successful learners.

For every parent, the moment when their child puts on their school bag and walks down the school path on their first day is filled with mixed emotions.

Some parents see it as a culmination of years of preparing their child to take on independence and move into the brave new world of 'formal' learning. For others, it is the heart-wrenching moment when their 'baby' leaves the nest. Emotions can run from pride and excitement to anxiety, fear and loss.

Choosing a school

When choosing a school, it is helpful for you to consider:

- What will work best for your child's personality, strengths, needs and interests?
- Does the school have a good feel to it? How does a school's culture and values fit with your family values and family life?
- What opportunities are there for parent and family involvement with the school?
- How is communication managed between home and school?
- What does the school expect of its students?
- Do you agree with its expectations and student policies?

It is a good idea to make an appointment to visit the schools that you think might suit your child, and to take a tour - preferably in school hours - so you get a feel for an average day.

Ask for a meeting with the principal or enrolment officer.

Attend open days and other events to help you get a feel for these schools and the attitudes of staff, students and parents.

Your child may not be accepted into your first school of choice. Don't let this get you down. It is important to be excited for your child.



Preparing for school

In preparing for school, it will be helpful for you to:

- Attend information and transition sessions.
- Organise a few playdates if you know some other children who will be going to the same school so that they will feel good together when school starts.
- Attempt to get to know other parents at the school.
- Prepare your child by speaking positively about the move to 'big school'.
- Start getting your child familiar with opening lunchboxes and drink bottles, taking care of their belongings, identifying their bag and hat, and knowing their uniform.

- Work out a morning routine that will work for all the family, and especially your child.
- Share information about your child and their early learning environment. It's also a good idea to find out what information your early childhood service or kindy has passed onto the school.
- Speak with school staff if you are concerned about a particular issue (e.g. your child's fear of using school toilets or separation anxiety). Plan how to address this before your child starts.
- Look at the parent information on the Australian Curriculum for Foundation year (https://acaraweb.blob.core.windows.net/resources/Information_for_parents_Foundation_year.pdf).
- Visit your child's classroom and involve yourself in some activities in the first two terms so that your child's teacher gets to know you and you get to know them.

Supporting your child

Research show that children who make a positive start to school are more likely to:

- Feel comfortable, relaxed and valued
- Feel excited and motivated to learn
- Have good relationships with others, and
- Develop a sense of belonging within the school community.

Schools are very aware of the importance of supporting young children to transition into school smoothly, and have supports in place, including for students with additional education needs.

From a family perspective, research suggests you can support your child's transition by:

- Engaging in reading and telling stories, singing songs, colouring, doing puzzles, explaining what you are doing, and playing maths, science and computer games. These things prepare children for some of the activities and demands of formal schooling.
- Encouraging your child to practice and persist. This helps them to develop what is called a 'growth mindset' and to be willing to tackle new challenges in their school learning. Children are better prepared when they understand that effort matters.
- Aligning daily family routines and daily sleep times.
- Discussing and fostering healthy expectations about learning and behaviour boundaries (both physical and online).
- Fostering a warm relationship. It is important to communicate acceptance and love, and to discuss anxious feelings they may have about school. Don't disregard their emotions. Explore them with patience.
- Involving them in a limited number of structured activities outside of school (e.g. clubs, music and dance). Positive participation contributes to children's learning and wellbeing.



Starting school is an emotional time of change for children and families. Supporting children to feel confident and positive about school is an important foundation for successful learning.

Be involved and stay engaged in your child's learning

Even if you are experiencing mixed emotions and finding the whole transition thing challenging, it is important to start linking in with the school community. This will help you to feel supported and to develop new contacts and relationships.

Building connections between your family and the school also helps your child to adjust. You will be able to share important knowledge about your child, and the teacher(s) will be able to give you useful information about what your child is learning and how you can support this learning at home. You will also be communicating to your child that you are interested in their education.

Many things you do at home, with your wider family and in the community make a difference to your child's early learning and development. Building positive connections and relationships within their new school community is an important 'next step'. This does not mean you have to be involved in lots of things. It is about being present or participating when you can, given your other responsibilities and commitments.



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