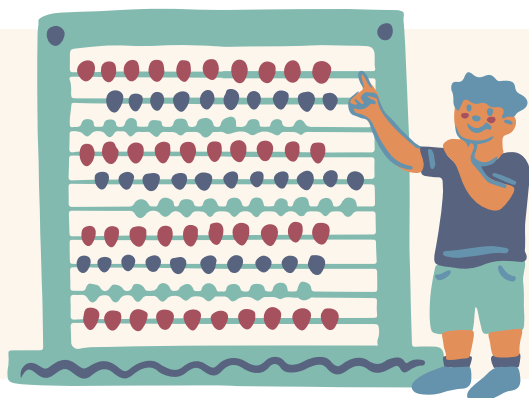


GETTING READY FOR KINDERGARTEN: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS

PARENTS AND CARERS



You've made the tough decision about the 'right fit' school for your child, and the start of the school year is fast approaching!

So, what are the next steps to ensure your child is as ready to start this next chapter as they can be? Let's get ready to start school with a bang!

Starting school is a pivotal moment in the life of children and their families. It is an exciting, but often also a nerve-wracking time - sometimes more so for parents and carers than their children!

This is a practical guide, designed to support you and your child during this important transition.

This fact sheet is designed for parents and carers who have already decided which school their child will attend. Please see our associated fact sheet "Which School? Making Decisions about Selecting a School" for more information about school selection.

>>> One Year Before Starting School

Let your early childhood provider know the school you have chosen, see if any other students are attending that your child may know and encourage your early childhood provider to collaborate and share information with the school.

Make sure all enrolment paperwork is completed, particularly for non-government schools. Confirm the placement of your child (this should be sent by the school in the form of a letter or email).

Discuss funding and support. What paperwork does the school need to ensure funding and support begin from day one of the school year?

Consider booking appointments to have recent specialist assessments for your child when they begin schools. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are most effective when built within a two-year timeframe.

>>> Six Months Before Starting School

Give the school any relevant specialist reports so information is up to date.

Talk to your child about starting school. The more excited and positive you are about this milestone, the more excited and positive your child will be too!

Continue to build social skills - sharing, saying hello, taking turns.

Build connections with the school and relevant organisations - are there fact sheets, online modules or other resources which might assist staff to meet the needs of your child?

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»» Three Months Before Starting School

Practise the school route with your child, whether it be walking to school, driving, or catching the bus.

Practise skills to build independence: getting into uniforms, toileting, unpacking and eating lunch, packing school bag.

Further build independence by having your child spend time away from their primary carer/s.

Take photos (if possible) of the school environment to familiarise your child with their new spaces. This is especially important if your child does not have an older sibling at the school (they will be more familiar with the environment if they have been visiting at drop off/pick up times).

»» Before School Starts

Often, decisions about a specific classroom teacher are not made until a week or two before the end of the previous school year. These decisions may also change at the last minute. When you know the name of your child's teacher, try to arrange a meeting with them before the start of the school year. It is also beneficial for your child to have frequent contact with their future teacher and support staff too.

Have a discussion about communication with your child's teacher. Parents and carers of students with additional needs will need to have more frequent contact with the school in general. Consider how this might work for all parties involved. Some teachers prefer a hard-copy communication book, others will prefer a digital communication method such as email.

Provide your teacher with any therapy or at home strategies to ensure continuity and alignment at school.

Share your own expertise and knowledge about your child. How does your child communicate? Are there resources (such as Key Word Sign posters) which will help the school to communicate with your child? What do they love and what don't they love?

If staff are comfortable, they might provide photos of themselves prior to your child starting school. These are useful for your child to learn names and identify who their 'go-to' people are.

Consider some resources your child may be able to take to school with them to make communicating their needs easier, such as small cards for basic words and signs, or a social story (see our associated resources).

Practice having conversations with your child. These can be to build social skills, such as asking to join a game, or to express a basic need, such as a bathroom break.

Design a morning routine before school starts for the year to ensure a smooth start to the day. Charts can be helpful. Children can move completed tasks, or place a sticker or stamp to show progress (see our associated resources).

Consider creating a one-page profile for your child, for the school to 'get to know' their interest, strengths and goals (see our associated resources).

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>>> The 'Job' of the School

Schools will:

- Apply for funding. This is not the responsibility of the parents or carers, though schools will ask for supporting documentation from time to time, e.g. specialist or GP reports.
- Have a transition program. All schools should have a transition program for all students. Please see 'Transition Programs' below.
- Have reasonable adjustments in place before your child starts school, such as accessibility to classroom spaces and toilets, as well as initial curriculum modifications.
- Have a plan for your child's transition to school. This will look different based on the structure of each school, but may include things like health support plans, behaviour support plans and academic plans. These should change frequently as the school becomes more familiar with the unique needs of your child.

>>> Transition Programs

A transition program (sometimes called "Kindergarten Orientation") is a program all schools should have in place for all students, so students can become familiar with the school environment, routines and expectations. For students with high-support needs, additional transition sessions are essential. If your child's school does not offer this, consider asking for additional sessions as a way to further familiarise your child with the school, and build relationships with the staff. A transition program will include:

- Opportunities for children to spend time in their new classroom space.
- Time with their new teacher and/or support staff.
- Some practise of basic routines, such as sitting on the mat or eating together.
- A fun activity, such as singing, story-time or craft , to ease anxiety and promote school as a fun and safe environment.
- A chance for students to meet and interact with their new classmates. A transition program will also have an information session for parents. This is a crucial event for parents to attend, as it will contain important information about the school, such as routines, tips, policies and procedures.



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We are Here to Help



Down Syndrome NSW has designed a range of fact sheets and practical resources to support your education journey. You can find these at www.downsyndromensw.org.au under Resources.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Association for Children with a Disability: Booklets and tip sheets online, positive education planning resource, partnership approach.

www.acd.org.au

Down Syndrome Victoria: Information about choosing schools, and strategies for transition.

https://www.downsyndrome.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/DSV_TransitionToPrimarySchool_digital.pdf

Raising Children Network: Information about choosing schools, enrolling, school options, school support.

www.raisingchildren.net.au



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