

About the Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets

All children with a disability can benefit from a year of kindergarten before they start school

Inspired by parent stories such as *Dream come true*, *A fantastic year* and *Towards independence*, this series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets is designed to provide parents of children with a disability living in Victoria with information about kindergarten.

With the day-to-day demands of being a parent of a child with a disability, sometimes it can be difficult to find the time and energy to plan ahead for the following year.

A successful year of kindergarten requires planning and input from parents and a positive approach towards including children with disabilities from kindergarten teachers and everyone involved in kindergarten programs.

A *Planning guide for the year before your child starts kindergarten* is included as part of the tip sheet on *Planning with the Program Support Group*.

We hope this series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets helps you with planning ahead for your child's participation in kindergarten, and that you and your child enjoy the many benefits of a positive kindergarten experience.

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'Disability'

The word disability means different things to different people

Some people and organisations try to avoid using the word 'disability', preferring instead phrases such as 'special needs', 'additional needs' or 'children of differing ability'.

In these sheets we use the word disability but we understand and respect that some people prefer not to use the word disability to describe their child.

Disability doesn't have to be a negative word.

It is important to acknowledge and understand the difficulties and limitations that disability can place on your child and family.

It is also important to focus on your child's strengths and abilities.

We might use different words to describe our situation, but what brings us together is a shared belief in our strengths as parents, as we strive for what is best for our children and families.

Acknowledgements

The Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets were developed by the Association for Children with a Disability in partnership with the Victorian Government's Office for Children and Early Childhood Development within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

Thanks to the DEECD staff who provided helpful assistance with the development of the tip sheets.

Thanks also to the many parents and early childhood professionals who provided comment and input.



The Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets are available free of charge

With the assistance of funding from the Victorian Government, our Association is able to provide copies of the Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets free of charge to all families of children with a disability in Victoria.

Copies are available on request to the Association office and from our website www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

We provide information, support and advocacy to families who have a child or young adult with any type of disability or developmental delay across Victoria.

Our Association is run by parents so we know what it means to have a child with a disability. We understand issues from a family perspective.

Our services include free telephone information and advocacy support for families. Our member magazine *NoticeBoard* includes family stories that are a great source of strength and inspiration for other families and professionals who work with families.

Other free publications include :



*Helping You and Your Family:
Information, support and
advocacy for parents of children
with a disability in Victoria*

Language interpreters

If you need a language interpreter to access our service, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50.

Tell the operator your preferred language and that you want to speak to the Association for Children with a Disability on 03 9818 2000. This is a free service.

Association for Children with a Disability
Suite 2, 98 Morang Road, Hawthorn VIC 3122

Phone 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers)

Fax 03 9818 2300 Email mail@acd.org.au

Web www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

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Dream come true

parent story

This year has been an incredible year for us, in more ways than one

I gave birth to a healthy baby boy (Harry) and my five-year-old son Jack, who has special needs, attended our local kindergarten in what has been a wonderful experience.

While it hasn't all been clean sailing, it has still been very worthwhile, with enormous benefits to Jack and our family. It has also deeply touched all the children who attend the kindergarten, their families and the local community.

What makes this story so special is that it started many years ago, before we even had children, when we first looked at buying our house. Part of the attraction of this particular house was the beautiful kindergarten at the end of our street.

It was built in the 1940s, with high ceilings that ooze natural light, a playground filled with gum trees and an old set of monkey bars. I would often admire its beauty and dream of my children being part of it one day.

Back in those days, I looked forward to my future with great optimism, much hope, excitement and an expectation that it was going to fold out a certain way.

When our beautiful baby boy was eight months old our life changed forever in a single doctor's visit. We learned that Jack has spinal muscular atrophy, a genetic degenerative neuromuscular condition that results in muscle wasting.

We were also told that our son would never walk, that he would need gastrostomy feeding and probably not survive past the age of two. My dreams of Jack attending that beautiful kindergarten suddenly seemed quite out of reach.

Jack has benefited greatly from attending an early childhood intervention service. It has been pivotal to his development and he has improved in leaps and bounds.

Early last year when early intervention staff suggested that Jack would do really well at a kindergarten program the following year, my initial thoughts were, "No way!" I didn't want my child or myself going on display to anyone, let alone my local community.

I didn't want Jack sitting in the playground all alone while the other kids played around him. That's not how I imagined my child's kindergarten experience to be. But after giving it some thought for a term or two, I decided to do it.

After my first conversation with the kindergarten teacher, I was already feeling positive about the move. She invited me to come in and complete the application for funding with her, which was a great opportunity for her to get to know what Jack's needs would be.


By completing the application forms together with her, it also ensured that the application represented Jack's needs fairly. This saw the outcome to be favourable, with the application attracting the highest level of support and funding.



The main reason why Jack's inclusion has worked so well is because the additional assistant was the right person for the kindergarten. The fact that she fitted into the kindergarten made it even easier for Jack to fit in.

She is a beautiful person who has enabled Jack to gain wonderful experiences at kinder while always maintaining his dignity and ensuring his medical needs are met.

Once the additional assistant was appointed, we attended the introductory sessions at the kindergarten. The parents sat as a group with the teacher while we went through the rules, regulations and policies of the kindergarten. Parents got to introduce themselves and this is where I was first able to educate them about Jack. >



> At the conclusion of these sessions, parents went home with their policy manuals and an open letter from our family, introducing Jack and explaining his medical conditions and disabilities.

It was a very friendly letter I wrote on Jack's behalf, 'Hi, my name is Jack, I am four and will be coming to kinder this year one day a week ...'

I also included our phone numbers and encouraged people to ask questions up front and not to be shy.

I attended the evening information session and spoke about Jack, what his needs would be and what we hoped he would get out of his kindergarten year.

This worked really well and on the first day of kindergarten, all the children and parents were aware of who Jack was and they were not shy in approaching him or me.

These are the things that set the foundation for a very successful year at kindergarten, but they didn't just happen by osmosis! They are the result of careful planning, consultation and ongoing communication between the kindergarten staff, committee, early intervention staff and myself.

At times, this has been quite time consuming with most of the consultation taking place after hours. I am in complete awe of the dedication and commitment from all parties to ensure a good and safe outcome for Jack and I am truly grateful to the kindergarten staff for taking the time necessary to make sure this worked.

We only had one hiccup during the year, when Jack's care needs changed and it was my wish to introduce the use of a suction machine to his daytime care needs. This was something the kindergarten had not come across before and it brought up lots of questions about liability, lines of responsibility and accountability.

I am pleased to say that we worked through this issue, but only because the lines of communication between the staff and myself were kept open. At all times, Jack's needs were kept as the top priority.

I always knew Jack would enjoy going to kindergarten but what I didn't know was how much being part of this kinder would impact on others.

The children have accepted Jack and they are aware and considerate of his differences while caring very deeply for him. They all came away with an awareness and tolerance of others who are different to themselves.

On a personal level, I now know my neighbours, and have made friendships that I'm sure will last longer than the kinder year. As a family, we feel like a valued and respected part of our community.

So dreams do come true. My little boy attended kindergarten just like I dreamt all those years ago. I am grateful and glad that I had the courage to put myself, my family and Jack out there because the outcome has been wonderful. It has left us and many others with very special memories.

Lisa Evans

A fantastic year

parent story

Our life was already busy with two small boys in the family and another baby on the way

Our oldest child, Lincoln, has Down syndrome and wears hearing aids. We attended an early intervention program and spent a lot of time going to medical appointments and hospital.

At the suggestion of early intervention staff, we decided to send Lincoln to four-year-old kindergarten. We wanted to make the most of any opportunities that could provide stimulation and enrichment.

I rang and visited a number of kindergartens. What I remember most about the one we eventually chose was the kindergarten teacher's positive and reassuring tone when I spoke to her on the phone that very first time.

I had the feeling that she believed so much in what she was doing and that she enthusiastically welcomed all children. I felt that she really wanted Lincoln to attend her kindergarten.

We briefly discussed Lincoln's needs in our initial phone call and I was left with a very good impression that the teacher, Leanne, would look after him.

We followed up with a meeting to discuss Lincoln's needs in detail and I felt very reassured by Leanne's positive approach. There were no negatives, no uncomfortable moments and there was no hesitation. Leanne listened to everything I had to say and I felt very at ease with her ideas and her calm, confident attitude.

My initial instincts rang true as the year progressed. Lincoln was a bit anxious at first but Leanne was great at settling all the children.

He made friends, went to birthday parties and participated in all the activities with the other children, even though there were times when he wasn't all that keen.

One day Leanne rang me to discuss her concerns that Lincoln was stubbornly refusing to do any drawing, cutting or painting. Lincoln has always found fine motor activities difficult, but I was taken aback because he seemed to be progressing well in this area at early intervention.

With discussion and input from the staff who knew Lincoln from early intervention, we all agreed that Leanne should continue to gently push Lincoln along with these activities.

Leanne looked for ways to help Lincoln achieve these tasks or made them more manageable for him using some strategies that we all agreed on.

Leanne and the kindergarten assistants were all wonderful. They kept a watchful eye on Lincoln to make sure he participated in everything, as he is inclined to be passive and quiet and can easily be overlooked.

I never felt that Lincoln was being 'baby sat'. He was actively engaged in everything from singing and stories to climbing and games.



The end of year concert was a very special affair. Lincoln had completed a wonderful year at kinder and there he was dressed up with all the other children, ready to take his spot on the stage to sing and dance and entertain. Our beautiful little boy was going on to the big wide world of school the next year.

I still can't thank Leanne enough for that fantastic year. But somehow I think that she is the type of person who took it all in her stride, did not expect any fanfare, and probably feels that she did for Lincoln what any good kindergarten teacher would do for any child.

Janice Chan

 **Association for Children with a Disability**

This series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets was developed by the Association for Children with a Disability in partnership with the Victorian Government's Office for Children and Early Childhood Development.

Towards independence

parent story

My daughter has fairly high needs and going to kinder really helped to develop her confidence and a little independence

Stella has cerebral palsy which makes her speech difficult to understand and she uses a walking frame to get around.

Before she started kinder, her main form of mobility was crawling, which gradually gave her independence around the house and in other indoor settings.

In the early years, we did just about everything together and I was always around to assist her physically or to interpret what she wanted to say.

We went to early intervention, which seemed to be as much about teaching parents as it was about assisting children.

Just about everything she did required my active participation such as swimming lessons, playgroup, social activities, trips to the park and so on.

I felt some trepidation about leaving Stella in the care of others. I was worried that staff at the kindergarten may not be up to speed with her needs but I was quickly reassured.

Stella was with the same staff and children every day and they quickly came to love Stella and understand how to meet her needs and help her to be included in the group.

I felt confident that she was safe, well cared for, and above all, that she was in a great early education environment that was stimulating and helping her to develop a range of skills.

She made friends and learned how to get by without me in attendance to interpret her speech, assist her with mobility and meals. These small steps towards independence were an important foundation for starting school.

It took Stella quite a while to feel confident that her needs would be met if I wasn't around. Kinder was the first step in this process and the kindergarten staff were wonderful at including and reassuring her, while still being firm about making her let me go.

So much happened in Stella's kinder year that really laid the foundation for her starting school.

She began her first tentative steps in her K-walker, she began to use an electronic communication device, we set up regular visits from a physiotherapist, speech therapist and an occupational therapist, all of which flowed fairly easily into the following year at school.

In no time at all the year was over and Stella had made new friends, gained confidence in her ability to eat, communicate, and walk in her walking frame, and both she and I were as ready for school as we were ever going to be.

Sarah Barton



 **Association for Children with a Disability**

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Kindergarten is a program for all children



Going to kindergarten is an exciting time for children and families

A kindergarten program gives your child an opportunity to mix with children of the same age, learn new things and have some fun.

If your child has a disability, the busy demands of everyday life may already include medical appointments and involving your child in Early Childhood Intervention Services. You may not have had much time to think about kindergarten for your child.

All children with a disability can benefit from participating in a kindergarten program.

Learning new things

A kindergarten program can give your child some new experiences where they can discover and explore the world around them.

Your child will have an opportunity to develop social skills such as learning how to co-operate with others, language skills, gross motor skills developed through physical games and activities, and fine motor skills such as making things in art and craft.

Early Childhood Intervention Services and kindergarten

If your child is involved with an Early Childhood Intervention Service, it probably feels like a safe environment where everyone shares a common understanding of issues particular to families who have a child with a disability.

A kindergarten program is different from early childhood intervention but it also offers a safe and caring environment where your child can take part in a variety of activities with other children.

It is common for children to attend a kindergarten program and continue early childhood intervention at the same time.

This provides an ideal opportunity for the kindergarten teacher and early childhood intervention specialists to communicate with each other, so that the benefits to your child may be maximised by the two programs complementing each other.

Starting age

Your child must be at least four years old by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten.

Kindergarten programs

In Victoria, kindergarten is not compulsory but every child is eligible to attend a four-year-old kindergarten program in the year before they start primary school.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development funds services to provide kindergarten programs in a range of settings including community kindergartens, children's centres, long day care centres and some schools.

Sessional kindergartens

Sessional kindergarten services are often managed by local councils, not-for-profit groups or volunteer parent committees.

Benefits of kindergarten

A kindergarten program will support your child's development by giving them new experiences in an environment where they can:

- explore the world around them and practice new skills
- establish friendships with children of their own age and relationships with other adults
- share and care for materials and equipment that belong to everyone

They usually offer a minimum of 10 hours of a kindergarten program in short sessions over a few days each week.

There are four terms of a kindergarten program each year which are usually 10 weeks long. Kindergarten terms run at the same time as school terms.

Integrated kindergarten in long day care

Many child care services offer State Government funded four-year-old kindergarten programs either in short sessions or as part of an integrated long day care program.

Kindergarten programs in schools

Some independent and government schools run funded kindergarten programs either in short sessions or as part of an early learning program.

"My son loves kindergarten. He had so many new experiences this year. He is part of a group of children who paint together, paste together, chat and giggle together. I've been able to stand back and watch him develop new friendships and belong to a group of his peers."



Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Most kindergarten services charge a fee in addition to receiving funding from government.

If you or your child has a Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card, you are eligible for 10 hours per week of a kindergarten program for free, or a longer program at low cost through the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

You are also eligible if you have a Visa 785 (Temporary Protection) or a Visa 786 (Temporary Humanitarian Concern Visa).

Ask the kindergarten teacher for more information about whether you are eligible for the subsidy.

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy does not apply if your child attends a kindergarten program within a long day care service that is approved for the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit.

School exemption

If your child turns six years of age during the kindergarten year, you must get a school exemption from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

This is done by completing the *Exemption from school due to attendance in kindergarten program* form and sending it to the regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Once a decision is made, the regional office will complete the bottom section of the form and return a copy to you. You must then show this to the kindergarten service.

Support for kindergarten services to include children with a disability

A range of support is available for kindergarten services to include children with a disability in their program.

For more information see the tip sheet on ***Overview of support for kindergarten services to include children with a disability.***

For more information

Office for Children and Early Childhood Development
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian chapter)
Phone 9509 5584
www.eciavic.org.au

Raising children network
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Kindergarten Parents Victoria
Phone 9489 3500 or
1300 730 119 (rural callers)
www.kpv.org.au

School exemption process
Phone 1800 809 834
www.education.vic.gov.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

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Choosing a kindergarten service



Every family is different, and the kindergarten you choose should meet the needs of your child and family

Start thinking about choosing a kindergarten service as early as possible.

This early planning will also assist with exploring options for additional support that may be required to include your child in the kindergarten program.

See the tip sheet on *Planning with the Program Support Group* which includes a *Planning guide for the year before your child starts kindergarten*.

Your Maternal and Child Health Nurse and local council can give you information about kindergarten programs in your local area.

You may also have heard about other kindergarten programs outside your local area which interest you.

Visit the kindergarten service

Once you have a short list of kindergarten services, make appointments to visit and meet the kindergarten staff.

There are some general things to look for when you visit a kindergarten service, such as how the staff interact with parents and children, the facilities and equipment, and the types of activities.

You will then have specific questions about how the service can meet your child's needs.

This may include discussion about your child's medical needs, physical access, and other issues depending on your child's disability.

Kindergarten certificate

All State Government funded four-year-old kindergarten programs in Victoria must display the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development kindergarten certificate.

This means that the kindergarten program is funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and is planned and taught by a qualified early childhood teacher.

Approachable staff

You should feel confident that kindergarten staff can keep your child safe and meet their needs.

A positive approach from kindergarten staff will go a long way towards making kindergarten a great experience for your child.

Staff with a positive approach tend to:

- focus on your child's abilities
- engage directly with your child, not just through you
- work with your child at their own level and pace
- make time to meet with you and any relevant specialists
- think about creative ways to adapt the kindergarten program to include your child

By asking the kindergarten teacher about their experiences with children with a disability you may get a feel for how the service might go about including your child. A teacher who does not have experience teaching children with a disability may also be a good teacher for your child if they are welcoming, enthusiastic and positive.

Things to look for when you visit a kindergarten service

- Kindergarten certificate
- A warm welcome when you and your child arrive
- Positive interaction between the kindergarten teacher, parents and children
- Secure grounds that are clean and well maintained
- Children who are well settled and engaged in activities
- Opportunities for children to play in groups and alone
- A balance of indoor and outdoor activities
- Enough equipment for all the children
- A welcome invitation to visit at any time

Physical environment

When looking at a kindergarten service, your first impression will probably be of the physical environment.

As well as being safe, clean and well equipped, you will want to know that the kindergarten service can cater for the physical needs of your child.

"After my first conversation with the kindergarten teacher I was already feeling positive about the move. She invited me to come in and complete the application for funding with her, which was a great opportunity for her to get to know what my son's needs would be."



The kindergarten teacher, Preschool Field Officer or Early Childhood Intervention provider can offer suggestions for modifications, equipment and education resources.

Minor modifications, such as grab rails and ramps, can be provided through Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services. For more information see the tip sheet on *Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages*.

Program modification

Ask the kindergarten teacher how your child can be included in the program. For example, how a child in a wheelchair could be included in outdoor physical play, or how a child with limited hand movement could be included in table activities.

While the kindergarten teacher may not have all the answers, you should feel reassured that they will explore ways to include your child in all program activities.

Complex care needs

If your child has complex medical or personal care needs, ask how the kindergarten service can meet these needs. You will want to be reassured that your child will be cared for safely and with dignity, privacy and respect.

Other things to think about

Think about the broader needs of your family as well as the specific needs of your child, when choosing a kindergarten service.

Other things that can influence your decision may include which kindergarten service older siblings attended, how far you want to travel and whether children from your chosen kindergarten tend to go to a particular school.

Registering and enrolling

As there is high demand for places in kindergarten programs, it is a good idea to register as early as possible at your preferred kindergarten service.

Places are offered to children according to certain criteria, often on a 'first in queue' basis.

Enrolment procedures vary, so ask the kindergarten service or your local council about the enrolment procedure for the kindergarten service you are interested in.

Try to visit a number of kindergarten services and trust your own instincts. You need to feel comfortable that the service you choose will be responsive to your child and family.

A kindergarten service should never decline to accept your enrolment due to perceived difficulties associated with your child's disability.

If you believe that your child's disability has been a factor in you being denied access to your preferred kindergarten service, you should seek advice and advocacy from the Association for Children with a Disability or another disability advocacy service.

For more information

Find-a-kindergarten
online directory
www.dhs.vic.gov.au/findakindergarten

Links to local council websites
Municipal Association of Victoria
www.mav.asn.au

Office for Children and Early
Childhood Development
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Kindergarten Parents Victoria
Phone 9489 3500 or
1300 730 119 (rural callers)
www.kpv.org.au

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Overview of support

for kindergarten services to include children with a disability

Support is available for kindergarten services to include children with a disability in their program

With good planning and the right support, all children with a disability can have a positive kindergarten experience. Your child may be eligible for some or all of the following supports.

Program Support Group

All children with additional needs can benefit from the active involvement of a Program Support Group.

The Program Support Group is made up of key people involved in your child's attendance at kindergarten.

The Program Support Group is central to all of the planning and decision-making for a child with a disability to participate fully in the kindergarten program.

For more information see the tip sheet on *Planning with the Program Support Group*.

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services support children with disabilities and additional needs in State Government funded kindergarten programs through two components:

- Packages of support for children with severe disabilities to enhance their access and participation in kindergarten; and
- Support from specialist early childhood staff known as Preschool Field Officers (PSFO).

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages assist children with a severe disability to participate in kindergarten programs.

They provide flexible, individually tailored support for children in State Government funded kindergarten programs.

For more information see the tip sheet on *Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages*.

Preschool Field Officers

Preschool Field Officers support the inclusion of children with additional needs in State Government funded kindergarten programs. This can include:

- children with additional needs ranging from mild developmental delay to multiple disabilities as well as behavioural issues
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with additional needs

Preschool Field Officers are experienced qualified early childhood teachers who may also have qualifications in special education or a related area.

Preschool Field Officers provide assessment, information, consultation and support to assist kindergarten staff with strategies to support children with a broad range of additional needs.

Referral to a Preschool Field Officer

Families can be referred to a Preschool Field Officer by a kindergarten teacher, therapist, paediatrician, maternal and child health nurse or by self referral.



Support to include children with a disability

- Program Support Group
- Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services
- Preschool Field Officers
- Early Childhood Intervention Services
- Commonwealth Childcare Inclusion and Professional Support Program
- A second year of kindergarten

The Preschool Field Officer may also become a member of the Program Support Group.

The Preschool Field Officer service is auspiced by a range of agencies within local government and community service agencies.

The kindergarten teacher can tell you how to contact your local Preschool Field Officer. You can also ask for a copy of the auspice agency's handbook.

Early Childhood Intervention Services

Early Childhood Intervention Services provide support to families of children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school entry.

This may include specialist educational and therapy services which give families the support, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of their child and family.

"The Preschool Field Officer gave the kindergarten teacher lots of advice and support. She also organised some respite with Home and Community Care through our local council so I didn't need to bring the kids to meetings and could concentrate without any distractions. Mostly, she did a lot of listening and supported us all."



In Victoria, these services are delivered by approximately 60 agencies, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Specialist Children's Services in each region.

Your child can continue to receive Early Childhood Intervention Services in the same year that they go to kindergarten.

Role of Early Childhood Intervention Services in kindergarten

As part of their role, an Early Childhood Intervention Service supports local kindergartens to include children with a disability or developmental delay in the kindergarten program.

Your Early Childhood Intervention Service provider should become a member of the Program Support Group. They can provide information and support to the kindergarten staff, and contribute to planning and goal setting.

The Early Childhood Intervention Service can also assist with applications for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services.

Commonwealth Childcare Inclusion and Professional Support Program

The Commonwealth Childcare Inclusion and Professional Support Program provides support for children with a disability for the child care hours in long day care.

This is in addition to any other support your child may receive.

For more information talk to the co-ordinator of the child care service.

A second year of kindergarten

Some children may be eligible for a second year of kindergarten.

For more information see the tip sheet on ***A second year of kindergarten.***

For more information

Office for Children and Early Childhood Development
Phone 1300 731 947
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian chapter)
Phone 9509 5584
www.eciavic.org.au

Child Care Access Hotline
1800 670 305 or TTY 1800 639 327

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
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Planning with the Program Support Group



Through the Program Support Group, parents and staff work together to include your child in the kindergarten program

Good communication and planning by the Program Support Group (PSG) can lay the foundation for a positive kindergarten experience for your child.

Planning with the Program Support Group involves a series of regular meetings to plan and review your child's kindergarten experience.

All children with additional needs can benefit from the active involvement of a Program Support Group.

The Program Support Group should meet well before your child starts kindergarten.

See the *Planning guide for the year before your child starts kindergarten* at the back of this spread for an overview of tasks and activities to keep in mind during this time.

Members of the Program Support Group

Parents are key members of the Program Support Group. Your knowledge, experience and ideas are crucial to the success of the Program Support Group.

Members of the Program Support Group may include:

- one or both parents
- the kindergarten teacher
- early Childhood Intervention staff
- the Preschool Field Officer
- other professionals or therapists
- the Koorie Preschool Assistant

Each of these people is recognised as having skills and knowledge that will assist your child.

Program Support Groups aim to bring together key people with knowledge about your child to share ideas and develop a plan to maximise your child's experience of kindergarten.

Understanding your child's needs and abilities

During Program Support Group meetings you will have to talk about your child's diagnosis, medical issues, and development. Talking about your child's needs in detail isn't always easy, and you may feel a range of emotions during this discussion.

Try to focus on what your child can do but also be clear and specific about the type and level of support your child will need.

Working together

As a parent, you are an equal partner in supporting your child at kindergarten. You know your child better than anyone else.

By sharing information with the kindergarten staff you will help them to support your child to have a positive kindergarten experience.

Working together means listening to all points of view but you should feel comfortable to question anything you are unsure about.

Regular communication

The Program Support Group should communicate regularly so that there is a co-ordinated approach to your child's program.

Program Support Group (PSG) meetings

Regular Program Support Group meetings are an opportunity to:

- celebrate your child's achievements
- monitor your child's progress
- plan for the next term
- discuss issues or concerns

A regular Program Support Group meeting once a term is an opportunity to share important information about your child. This is in addition to the quick chats you will have with the kindergarten teacher.

Find a quiet moment before each meeting to write down the things you want to talk about.

If you want to take a friend or advocate with you for support, make sure you tell the other members of the group beforehand.

While you will have formal meetings together as a group, you may also have informal contact with each of these people on various issues.

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages

If your child is eligible, the Program Support Group will assist the kindergarten teacher with an application for a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services Package.

For more information see the tip sheet on *Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages*.

“There were a number of things that set the foundation for a very successful year at kindergarten but they didn’t just happen by osmosis! They were the result of careful planning, consultation and ongoing communication between the kindergarten staff, committee, early intervention staff and myself.”



Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan

The Program Support Group should develop a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan for your child.

The plan should identify the goals, resources, strategies, services and actions needed to include your child in the kindergarten program.

Setting goals

Children learn and acquire skills at different rates and every child is valued for the contribution they can make.

The Program Support Group should have a positive approach to setting goals and understand that your child will learn at their own level and pace.

The goals should be realistic and achievable within the time your child is at kindergarten, which will be about 10 hours a week.

When setting goals with the Program Support Group, keep in mind:

- your child’s learning strengths
- what motivates your child
- your child’s interests
- things your child can do without assistance
- how your child communicates

Keep an open mind about the goals and how they might be achieved. Others may offer good ideas that you may not have thought about.

Agreeing on goals is a group decision, but don’t be afraid to speak up if you disagree with a suggestion.

Resources

Equipment in kindergartens is designed to support the needs of all young children. Your child will have an opportunity to use a wide variety of equipment and materials available to all children in the program.

The Program Support Group should identify any modifications, equipment or other resources that will assist your child’s inclusion and independence at kindergarten.

This includes finding out how to access these resources and making sure they are in place for the start of the kindergarten year.

If needed, equipment can be specifically designed to assist your child with communication, understanding their environment, standing and mobility, and fine motor skills.

Strategies for learning

The Program Support Group should develop strategies that will help your child achieve their learning goals.

This can include staff training, changes to the kindergarten program, plans for managing complex care needs or behaviours, equipment and modifications.

Staff training can include learning more about your child’s disability or medical condition, using equipment such as standing frames and communication aids, supporting your child to actively participate in activities and assisting their mobility.

Changes to the kindergarten program can include a range of things, depending on your child’s needs.

For example, a child with a hearing impairment can be seated so that they can see the teacher’s face when they are speaking.

A child who is unable to stand independently might use a standing frame outdoors while the other children are on the climbing frames.

A child who is unable to use scissors independently might be able to use spring loaded scissors.

Other services

The Program Support Group might want to explore additional support from services and professionals not directly connected with kindergartens.

These may include services such as a toy library or equipment hire service, respite care, support group or playgroup.

As services are changing all the time, ask the Preschool Field Officer or your Early Childhood Intervention Services provider for up-to-date information about these and any other services available to your child and family.

Actions

The Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan should clearly state what needs to be done, by whom and when.

The plan will only be as good as the actions that follow. If agreed actions don’t seem to be happening, follow up with the kindergarten teacher.



“We only had one hiccup during the year, when my son’s care needs changed and it was my wish to introduce the use of a suction machine to his daytime care needs. I am pleased to say that we worked through this issue, but only because the lines of communication between the staff and myself were kept open.”



Children with complex care needs

Thoughtful planning and good training will be needed to make sure staff have the skills and confidence to look after your child’s personal care needs.

Conditions that need complex care can include epilepsy, percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) feeding, tracheotomies, anaphylaxis, behaviours of concern or other conditions where staff need specific skills and training beyond general first aid.

Some kindergarten services will take the attendance of a child with complex care needs in their stride, while for others it may be a new experience.

Planning

All of your child’s care needs should be discussed with the Program Support Group (PSG), and included in the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan for your child.

Planning should identify staff skills and training needs, responsibility for tasks, the storage of medication and care supplies, and anything else needed to ensure the service meets your child’s complex care needs.

The Program Support Group should plan for specific facilities if required, such as an area where your child can have privacy for personal care.

Your child’s medical and personal care needs are confidential, and your child is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity.

Kindergarten services must record details of any medical conditions and attach a copy of management procedures for the condition in your child’s enrolment record.

Management procedures are often developed together with your child’s doctor. Families are responsible for providing all personal care supplies.

Training for staff

All staff should be trained to provide care for your child. This ensures that your child’s attendance at kindergarten doesn’t depend on the availability of just one staff member.

If your child has complex care needs, they may also be eligible for a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services package which may cover the cost of staff training.

The Program Support Group should also review the kindergarten’s emergency response plan in light of the care needs of your child. The reviewed emergency response plan should be part of the training plan for all kindergarten staff.

Medication

There should be clear processes in place for the use and storage of medication. Changes to medication must be formally written up, signed and dated.

Check with the service as to how they record this information. Many kindergarten services have a form to complete which is then included in your child’s kindergarten record.

For more information

Office for Children and Early Childhood Development
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Children’s Services Guide
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
www.education.vic.gov.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Regular communication

Follow up with the kindergarten teacher and staff regularly to see how they are managing, and if they have any questions about the care they are providing for your child.

In addition to talking to kindergarten staff, using a communication book is a good way to keep staff up-to-date with any changes to your child’s care needs.

Your child’s care needs should also be reviewed in regular Program Support Group meetings.

With good planning and staff training, you should feel reassured that your child will be in good hands.



"We followed up with a meeting to discuss my daughter's needs in detail and I felt very reassured by the teacher's positive approach. There were no negatives, no uncomfortable moments and there was no hesitation. The teacher listened to everything I had to say and I felt very at ease with her ideas and her calm, confident attitude."

This planning guide is a quick reference to the tasks and activities that you and the Program Support Group will need to keep in mind during the year before your child starts kindergarten.

Planning guide

for the year before your child starts kindergarten

Term 1: February – March

- If you haven't already done so, decide on a kindergarten service and enrol your child as early as possible.
- Start planning with the Program Support Group for your child's inclusion in the kindergarten program.

Term 2: April – June

- If your child has a severe disability, familiarise yourself with the application process for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services.
- Go to one of the regional information sessions about Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services.

Term 3: July – September

- If your child is eligible, the kindergarten service should submit an application for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services by the end of Term 3.

Term 4: October – December

- Kindergarten services are advised of the outcome of Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service applications in late October.
- The kindergarten service and the agency funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide support should organise to have this ready for your child to start kindergarten the following year.
- Attend kindergarten orientation sessions together with your child.
- Further develop and refine your child's Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan to make sure that all elements of the plan will be implemented from the start of the kindergarten year.

 **Association for Children with a Disability**

This series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets was developed by the Association for Children with a Disability in partnership with the Victorian Government's Office for Children and Early Childhood Development.



Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages



Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages can provide flexible, individually tailored support for children in State Government funded kindergarten programs

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages are designed to provide targeted assistance for a range of children defined as having a severe disability and requiring support to access and participate in a kindergarten program.

Support can include:

- specialist training for staff
- additional resources to support your child's participation in the kindergarten program
- specialised assistance for kindergarten staff to identify program needs and adjustments for your child
- support to develop social relationships between all children in the group
- additional staffing support

The kindergarten teacher, Preschool Field Officer or Early Childhood Intervention Service provider can give you information about how the service works in your area.

The Program Support Group is responsible for developing a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan for your child. The Program Support Group also co-ordinates any applications for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages.

Eligibility

There are detailed eligibility criteria for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages. The main criteria include:

- The child and parent or guardian should meet the eligibility criteria for Carer's Allowance
- The child has a severe disability and requires support to access and participate in a kindergarten program, and has at least one of the following:
 - they are at significant risk of serious injury to self or others and/or
 - they are extremely restricted in their capacity for movement and/or
 - they have exceptional support needs that require immediate medical intervention for life threatening situations

Applying for a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services package

The kindergarten teacher will complete the application form with you and the Program Support Group as part of planning for your child's year at kindergarten.

The application has four parts: your child's details and the service they will be attending, details of persons completing the application, eligibility criteria, and the development of a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan.

It is a good idea to keep all of your child's medical and therapy reports together, so that you have all the information and contact details in one place, ready for the application.

Support in child care

If your child attends a kindergarten program that is part of long day care, the service may be eligible for support for the child care hours outside the kindergarten program through the Commonwealth Childcare Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

Application kit

The full eligibility criteria for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services are outlined in the *Information and application kit for kindergarten inclusion support services for children with severe disabilities* available from www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Due date for applications

Applications should be sent to the convenor of the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services Regional Advisory Group (RAG) by the last day of Term 3 in the year before your child starts kindergarten. You will be advised of the outcome early in Term 4.

The approved supports will be provided by an agency in your region which receives funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services.

Information sessions

Information sessions about Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services are held once a year in every region and provide information about the application process.

“By completing the application forms together with the kindergarten teacher, it also ensured that the application represented my son’s needs fairly. This saw the outcome to be favourable, with the application attracting the highest level of support and funding.”



Additional staff support

Additional staff support of up to 10 hours a week is available as part of the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services package.

This additional staff support is intended to allow the kindergarten staff time to work with all children in the program. This shared responsibility means that your child will be included in the group and not only associated with the additional staff support.

The kindergarten teacher will co-ordinate additional staff support working with the auspice agency in your region. They will make sure that any additional staff are able to support your child’s needs, which may include complex medical needs and assistance with personal care.

The auspice agency and kindergarten teacher should be able to arrange for you to meet the additional staff support before the start of the kindergarten year.

Training

If additional staff need special training, this should be included in your planning with the Program Support Group and arranged before the start of the kindergarten year.

Hours of support

Many children with a disability will not need 10 hours of additional staff support, while others will need the full amount. Some children may not need any additional staff support at all.

If the Program Support Group believes that more staff support is needed than has been approved, the group should request a review of the package.

Contact the convenor of the Regional Advisory Group (see the application booklet) if you want more information about the application process and the outcome for your child.

If this does not result in increased hours, think about creative ways to make the best use of the additional staff support time that is available, or ways to source more support. For example:

- Your child might settle in happily for the first and last half-hour of each session and not need additional staff support during these times
- A friend or family member could volunteer to provide additional staff support for a short period of time each week

Kindergartens are creative and supportive environments and should have innovative ideas about how to support your child in the kindergarten program.

Families and kindergarten programs can also access secondary consultancy, support and advice from Early Childhood Intervention Services.

Appeals process

If your application is not successful, you may lodge an appeal. Appeals will only be considered on the basis of new or additional relevant information, which may not have been available at the time of application or if your circumstances have changed.

If you have a concern or complaint, all services and Department regional offices must have a grievance process in place and you should receive information about this process.

For more information

**Office for Children and Early
Childhood Development**
Phone 1300 731 947
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

**Association for Children
with a Disability**
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

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Communication



Good communication creates a shared understanding of your child's needs and abilities

In addition to the more formal communication through the Program Support Group meeting once a term, you should also have ongoing communication with the kindergarten teacher.

Working with the Program Support Group

All members of the Program Support Group must have a good understanding of your child's needs and abilities.

While you will have formal meetings together as a group, you may also have informal contact with each of these people on various issues.

Working together means listening to all points of view but you should feel comfortable to question anything you are unsure about.

Regular communication

The Program Support Group should communicate regularly so that there is a co-ordinated approach to your child's program.

A regular Program Support Group meeting once a term is an opportunity to share important information about your child. This is in addition to the quick chats you have with the kindergarten teacher.

Find a quiet moment before each meeting to write down the things you want to talk about. If you want to take a friend or advocate with you for support, make sure you tell the other members of the group beforehand.

Effective communication

Parents of a child with a disability often communicate and work closely with the kindergarten teacher.

Before the start of the year, set up an arrangement for communication that suits you both.

It is good to have more than one way of communicating for the times when you can't wait, or need to discuss something in private or in more detail.

Quick catch-ups in person

You will be as keen as other parents to hear about your child's day. If you are able to wait with the other parents who want to speak to the kindergarten teacher, you can get feedback straight away.

Phone calls and email

Scheduling a phone call at the end of the day or sending each other an email can let you communicate without the hustle and bustle of drop-off and pick-up times.

Communication book

A communication book is a notebook that travels between home and kindergarten in your child's bag.

Both you and the kindergarten teacher can leave messages for each other in the communication book every day, or as needed. A communication book can work well if you both remember to check it regularly. Others, such as Early Childhood Intervention Service providers, may use the communication book as well.

Make sure you keep the kindergarten staff up to date with what is happening for your child at home.

Keeping kindergarten staff up to date

You can use a communication book to update the kindergarten staff on significant family events, your child's progress at the Early Childhood Intervention Service, and changes at home.

Issues and concerns

If you have any issues or concerns, speak to the kindergarten teacher first. Your concern should be treated with respect and managed in a professional, positive and constructive way.

Talking with the kindergarten teacher will help you figure out the best way to resolve the issue. You can also ask them for a copy of their complaints and grievance policy.

It may also be helpful to have support from your Early Childhood Intervention Service provider who will have a good understanding of your child's needs.

Take a few minutes beforehand to make sure you are clear on what the issue is and the outcome you seek. Stay focused on getting the best outcome for your child.

Listen to what others have to say but be clear about the things you feel strongly about. Also be prepared to consider reasonable compromises.

If you are not satisfied with the way your concern has been dealt with, contact a Children's Services Adviser at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional office.

"I got the kindergarten's email address so that I could email the kindergarten teacher about any issues that came up during the year. This was good because it allowed both of us to make thoughtful comments rather than trying to have hurried conversations at drop-off or pick-up times."



Parent advocacy

Being an effective advocate can be one way to work towards getting the best outcomes for your child and family

It isn't easy being an advocate for your child. Sometimes emotions take over. Advocacy can also be exhausting!

But with persistence and the right support, parent advocacy can help you get what you and your family need.

To be an effective advocate:

- Be clear about what you want
- Find out who is responsible or accountable for the decision and action you seek
- Listen to other people's points of view
- Think about the points that others may raise and how you might respond
- Don't always expect conflict but be prepared with a positive strategy if you do strike conflict
- Be open-minded, others might suggest solutions that you may not have thought of or suggest different ways of doing things that may be just as effective
- Draw on strong emotion if you need to
- Ask a friend or professional to help you with advocacy if you need some support

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission can help people resolve complaints by offering a conciliation process that is confidential, impartial and free.

Association for Children with a Disability

Our Parent Support Service provides free telephone support for families of children with a disability. If you need a language interpreter to access our service, call the Translating and Interpreter Service on 13 14 50.

Regional Parent Support Workers

Our Association works in co-operation with a network of Regional Parent Support Workers who can give you information about services and support in your local area.

For contact details of the Regional Parent Support Worker in your region, contact the Association office on 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers) or visit www.acd.org.au

For more information

Office for Children and Early Childhood Development
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Phone 9281 7111 or 1800 134 142
www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

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Encouraging your child's independence



Encouraging your child's independence helps to build confidence and self-esteem

In preparing for the kindergarten year, you can begin to reflect on the achievements your child has made.

Your guidance and encouragement has given your child confidence to try new things and to keep trying even if things seem too hard for them.

Finding ways for your child to do some things on their own or with minimal assistance will help your child to develop confidence in their own abilities.

Developing independence is an important goal for all children. Every child has the potential for some degree of independence in their daily life.

Setting goals

Together with the Program Support Group, you will set new goals for your child and identify how kindergarten staff can assist them.

Planning with the Program Support Group should include identifying any equipment, resources, staff training or program modifications that will maximise your child's independence at kindergarten.

This may include training staff in 'active participation' which encourages your child to do as much as they can on their own and to only get assistance with more difficult tasks and activities.

There are also some simple things that you can do to prepare your child for kindergarten and encourage their independence.

Kindergarten orientation

Children usually feel more comfortable going somewhere new if they have visited before and met the people involved.

It is important to talk to your child about going to kindergarten so they have some idea about what will happen.

Speak to the kindergarten teacher about the orientation program available to all children starting kindergarten in the following year.

The Program Support Group might suggest further orientation sessions for your child or other ways to help them adjust to their new surroundings.

Settling in and saying goodbye

It's natural for both you and your child to feel a little anxious at the start of the kindergarten year as you both settle into a new routine.

You can stay with your child as long as you wish. You may want to stay until your child settles into an activity.

Before you say goodbye, reassure your child that you will return at the end of the session. Remind them that kindergarten will be fun and exciting, and that the kindergarten teacher and other grown ups are there to help them.

If your child finds the hustle and bustle of drop-off and pick-up times too stressful, try arriving a few minutes earlier or later around these times when the kindergarten room is more settled.

Find a routine that suits your child and discuss this with the kindergarten teacher. Most children settle quickly once their parents leave.

Personal belongings

- Choose a bag for your child that they can easily identify as their own
- Label your child's bag, lunch box, drink bottle and any items of clothing that they may take off, such as jackets

Talk to the kindergarten teacher if you are concerned that your child is not settling in.

Kindergarten staff are skilled in comforting children who are upset and may suggest other ways to help your child to settle in more easily.

Food and drink

Your child may need to bring their own snacks and drink in a lunch box. Sometimes they may need to bring lunch as well.

Choose a style of lunch box and drink bottle that your child can manage on their own. An occupational therapist might be able to suggest a suitable size or design.

Pack your child's snack or lunch so that they can manage as independently as possible. For example, if plastic wrap is difficult for your child to open, try paper wrap instead. Include a napkin if your child is a messy eater.

Do some practice runs with the lunch box over the holidays. Your child can help pack their lunch and then practice eating from the lunch box later in the day.

"Because our daughter was very anxious about change, the kindergarten teacher arranged for her to attend 'sneak preview' visits to the kindergarten room before the beginning of each term. That way she could see the changes to the room as it was decorated with a new theme each term."



Personal care

Send your child to kindergarten in clothing that is easy for them to manage when they need to go to the toilet. It can also be a good idea to pack a change of clothes in their bag.

If your child is not toilet trained, the Program Support Group should develop a management plan for the kindergarten staff to follow.

A discreet area should be identified where your child's personal care can be supported with dignity and privacy.

Excursions

Many kindergarten programs offer an excursion during the year. This is an important time for the children to experience new and exciting things together.

Plan ahead with the Program Support Group to make sure that any transport requirements and care needs can be catered for.

If you decide to go on the excursion as a parent helper, try to give your child space to enjoy the experience with their friends. You can also use this time to get to know other children and parents in the group.

Remember that you can discuss your child's needs with the kindergarten staff, Preschool Field Officer or your Early Childhood Intervention Service provider.

They may be able to offer good suggestions for ways to encourage and develop your child's independence and help them to get the most out of the kindergarten program.

Celebrate your child's achievements

Taking the time to talk to your child about their day at kindergarten, admiring the artwork they bring home, and praising their achievements big and small all help to build your child's confidence and self-esteem.

Most children feel encouraged when their parents show interest in even the small things they have done.

This can help your child to develop the confidence to try again with difficult tasks and to try new things that challenge their skills.

For more information

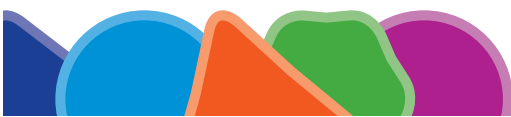
'Welcome to kindergarten booklet'
Kindergarten Parents Victoria
Phone 9489 3500 or
1300 730 119 (rural callers)
www.kpv.org.au

Raising children network
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

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Being part of the kindergarten community



Being part of the kindergarten community can benefit your child and family as well as your local community

When your child starts kindergarten it can be a great time for you, your child and family to develop new friendships.

You will meet new people who you and your family may cross paths with over the years at the local shops, library, school, and sports clubs.

Your child will benefit from belonging to a community that acknowledges them, watches out for them and supports them when they are out and about.

Your family's participation also broadens the community's diversity, and helps to develop greater understanding about disability.

Settling in

If possible, start your child at the beginning of the kindergarten year with all the other children. They will get to know each other, be part of the group and share new experiences together.

It may be suggested that a child with a disability starts kindergarten later in the year or that they attend for less time than the other children. All children have the same right to participate and will benefit from attending all sessions.

Social invitations

There will be many new families starting the kindergarten year with you and it will take time to get to know each other.

Try to accept social invitations when you can. Once other parents get to know you they will be more likely to feel comfortable approaching your child.

Inviting other children to play at your home can also help to strengthen friendships, as children are generally very accepting of each other.

Getting involved

Taking part in kindergarten activities also gives you and the kindergarten community a chance to get to know each other.

Kindergartens welcome family involvement in a variety of ways. Families may be asked to participate in working bees, on duty rosters, management committees and other voluntary activities.

You may also be interested to actively participate in the kindergarten session by reading stories, playing a musical instrument or sharing a special interest or hobby with the children.

You should feel like a valued member of the kindergarten community whatever level of involvement you choose.

Helping others to get to know your child

It is important that others understand that your child is much like any other child and that they will progress and have achievements.

Talk with the Program Support Group about ways to share information that might help them understand your situation while still maintaining a level of confidentiality and privacy.

There is often a social event at the start of the year to welcome new families, which can be a good time to meet new families and break the ice.

"I now know my neighbours and have made friendships that I'm sure will last longer than the kindergarten year. As a family, we feel like a valued and respected part of our community."

For more information

Kindergarten Parents Victoria
Phone 9489 3500 or
1300 730 119 (rural callers)
www.kpv.org.au

Raising children network
www.raisingchildren.net.au

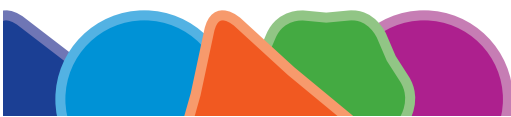
Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Your local community

Playgroups, story time at your local library, events run by community centres or your local council are all opportunities for you and your family to participate in community life and for the community to get to know your family.

Association for Children with a Disability

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Looking after yourself

Looking after yourself can mean many different things

With all the other demands and responsibilities in life, parents often put themselves at the bottom of the list.

Exercise, eating well, catching up with family and friends and taking time out for yourself can all help to give balance to your life.

Time to yourself

Involvement in your child's kindergarten program is important, but when your child goes to kindergarten it may be the first chance you've had for some time to yourself.

It can be a good opportunity to recharge your energies knowing that your child is safe and enjoying the company of other children.

Filling in the time

Many sessional kindergarten services offer short sessions of 2–6 hours. You might find that once you have dropped your child off there isn't much time left before you have to go and pick them up again.

Try not to cram too many things into this time. It can be a good opportunity to have some time to yourself. You could go for coffee with other parents or friends, or go for a walk to clear your mind and get your blood circulating.

Going back to work

Once your child starts kindergarten you might decide to return to paid employment. This can contribute to your own sense of well-being as well as your bank account.

If returning to work is a priority for you, consider choosing a kindergarten program within a child care service that offers an integrated long day care program that can provide work-friendly hours of care.

Accepting help

Many people in the community want to reach out and help families of children with a disability. For example, a local community group might want to raise funds for a piece of specialised equipment for your child.

This could be an opportunity to strengthen links between your family and those who could support you informally over the years to come.

Counselling

The early years of having a child with a disability can be extremely busy and stressful, and this may impact on your family life.

You may have unanswered questions about your child's disability, or want to strengthen your role as a parent.

When your child goes to kindergarten it may be the first time you have an opportunity for reflection. It may feel like a good time to have some individual, couple or family counselling to work through issues that may have built up over time.

Free counselling is available by referral to the National Carer Counselling Program through Carers Victoria. Services are also available through the Family Relationship Services Program.

If you are experiencing a great deal of distress or emotional difficulty you may want to consult your doctor who can refer you for appropriate assistance.



Taking time out

Looking after yourself can sometimes seem like an impossible task, and involve a lot of planning and organisation, but the benefits are worth it in the long run.

Siblings

Although the lives of siblings are often enriched by the experience of growing up with a brother or sister with a disability, they also face some unique challenges.

A sibling's level of understanding of their brother or sister's disability will change as they grow and develop through childhood.

Parents can support siblings by communicating openly and giving them an opportunity to ask questions that help them to understand their experiences.

Siblings may also find it helpful to connect with other siblings by sharing their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Respite

Respite is a term used to describe services that can give families a break from the caring role.

Sometimes you can organise to have a break by using child care or by asking family or friends to look after your children.

There are also specific services that are funded to assist you to identify respite options.

"I used to feel guilty about this thing they called respite but I don't anymore. It gives me time to relax and recharge my energy levels. I look forward to it now as a positive thing for everybody."



Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres co-ordinate access to respite services in your local area.

They can work with you to plan an individual approach to respite and other support needs, and they also have an emergency 24-hour response line.

Other organisations have programs such as the Interchange Host Program, where families in the community volunteer their support to families who have a child with a disability.

This usually comes in the form of an overnight stay once a month with the volunteer host family.

Regional Parent Support Workers

Our Association works in co-operation with a network of Regional Parent Support Workers who can give you information about services and support in your local area.

For more information see the tip sheet on *Communication*.

Other support

There are also programs for families who have a child with a disability which offer a flexible approach to meeting the needs of your family.

These programs are often referred to as Flexible Support Packages.

Different agencies provide these programs in each region. Your Early Childhood Intervention Service should be able to give you information about the Flexible Support Packages that may be available in your area.

You might also benefit from contacting your local council for information about local support options for families of children with a disability.

Taking regular time out for yourself is good for your own health and well-being. By looking after yourself, you will be more able to look after your child and family.

For more information

National Carer Counselling Program, Carers Victoria
Phone 9396 9500 or 1800 242 636
www.carersvic.org.au

Family Relationship Advice Line
Phone 1800 050 321
www.familyrelationships.gov.au

SiBs resources for siblings
www.sibs.org.au

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres
Phone 1800 059 059

Interchange Victoria
Phone 1300 300 436
www.interchange.org.au

Early Childhood Intervention Flexible Support Packages
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

This series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets was developed by the Association for Children with a Disability in partnership with the Victorian Government's Office for Children and Early Childhood Development.



A second year of kindergarten



Some children may benefit from a second year of kindergarten

Children develop at different rates and not all children are ready to start school at the end of their four-year-old kindergarten year.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development supports eligible children to attend a second year of a funded kindergarten program.

Eligibility for a second year of kindergarten

The kindergarten teacher must assess your child as having delays in at least two areas of development:

- self-care
- the ability to speak and/or understand language
- cognitive (intellectual) development
- social development
- emotional development

If you think that a second year of kindergarten will help to strengthen the development of these skills then it may be worthwhile.

You should consider what benefits your child will gain from a second year of kindergarten. Working together with the Program Support Group will ensure the best planning possible.

Don't be afraid to raise questions and ask for explanations. You are an expert on your child and you will add valuable input to the discussion. As a parent, you need to feel comfortable with the decision you make.

Application process

The kindergarten teacher must make a detailed assessment of your child and complete a *Declaration of Eligibility for a second year of funded kindergarten* form. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development must receive the form by the last day of Term 3.

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services for a second year

The kindergarten service may be eligible for a second year of support through Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services but this cannot be guaranteed. A separate application must be made for the second year.

School exemption

If your child will turn six (compulsory school age) while attending a second year of funded kindergarten, you must get a school exemption from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

You must complete an *Exemption from school due to attendance in kindergarten program* form and attach a copy of the completed *Declaration of Eligibility for a second year of funded kindergarten* form.

You must then send both forms to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional office by 1 November in the year before your child turns six.

Once a decision is made, the regional office will complete the bottom section of the form and return a copy to you. You must then show this to the kindergarten service.

"Going to school is a big step and we just weren't sure our daughter was ready to start school the following year. We talked to the kindergarten teacher and after weighing everything up, we decided that a second year would help her to consolidate some skills and develop a bit more independence."

For more information

'Does my child need a second year of kindergarten' information kit and application form for a second year of a kindergarten program
Office for Children and Early Childhood Development
www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

School exemption process
Phone 1800 809 834
www.education.vic.gov.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

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Going to school



One of the biggest decisions you will make as a parent is where your child goes to school

As for kindergarten, it is important to start planning and getting organised for school well in advance.

Give yourself plenty of time to investigate school options for your child before they are due to start.

As well as visiting and enrolling in a school, there are funding applications to be completed for eligible children, school orientation sessions to attend, and preparing your child for the school year ahead.

School starting age

Students must be at least five years of age by 30 April of the year they start primary school. Attendance at school is compulsory for all children from the age of six years.

School options

There are many things to consider when deciding on a school. In addition to your child's specific needs, you may also want to think about travel time, finances, whether you want all your children to go to the same school, and before and after school care.

Government schools

All children of school age in Victoria have the right to go to their local primary school.

Many children with a disability go to government primary schools and there is support available to facilitate this.

Government specialist schools

There are over 90 government specialist schools across Victoria for students with a disability.

Specialist schools have criteria which must be met before you can enrol. Students who live within the school's designated transport area are eligible for travel support to the school.

Independent and Catholic schools

There are many independent and Catholic schools throughout Victoria as well as a small number of specialist independent and Catholic schools.

If you are likely to send your child to an independent school, keep in mind that there may be a long waiting list.

Dual enrolment

Some children enrol at both a local primary school and a nearby specialist school and spend part of the week at each. This is known as dual enrolment.

Some parents choose dual enrolment so that their child can benefit from the different experiences and resources that mainstream and specialist schools have to offer.

Home schooling

In Victoria, home schooling is a recognised alternative to attending school. Some parents choose home schooling because it provides an individually tailored environment.

If you choose home schooling, you will assume overall responsibility for the planning, implementation and assessment of your child. You must also register your child with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

School options

- Government schools
- Government specialist schools
- Independent and Catholic schools
- Dual enrolment
- Home schooling
- Distance education

Distance education

In Victoria, students from prep to Year 6 can access distance education if they meet the eligibility criteria in one of four categories: Distance, Medical, School referral, and Traveller.

Some students may also be eligible for Assistance for Isolated Children which helps families with a primary or secondary student who is unable to attend an appropriate State school on a daily basis because of geographic isolation or because the student has a disability or special health-related or education need.

Choosing a school

School open days and tours will give you a general feel for a school and some idea of the facilities.

You will get a sense of whether the school is right for your child from the welcome you receive, how staff interact with parents and children, the approach of the principal and the responses to your questions.

Make an appointment with the principal to discuss how the school can support your child. You may also want to talk to the kindergarten teacher about how to share important information about your child with the school.

“Funding is essential to provide the support that my child needs at school, but just as important is a positive approach, which flows from the principal through to all staff and students.”



Support for children with a disability at school

There is a range of support for children with a disability at school.

Student Support Group

A Student Support Group (SSG) is a co-operative partnership between the parent/carer, school representatives and professionals to ensure co-ordinated support for your child's educational needs.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have developed guidelines for Student Support Groups. You should familiarise yourself with the guidelines so that you understand the educational planning processes.

Individual Learning Plan

The Student Support Group should develop an Individual Learning Plan that identifies your child's learning needs.

Members of the group should agree on your child's learning goals and any changes that need to be made to the curriculum.

The Student Support Group should meet regularly to monitor and evaluate your child's Individual Learning Plan.

Student Support Services

In government schools, there is support available from Student Support Services Officers such as guidance officers, psychologists, social workers, visiting teachers (for students with visual, hearing and physical impairments), speech pathologists and curriculum consultants.

Funding for students with a disability

There are specific funding programs for students with a disability in school. The level of funding available varies between government, Catholic and independent schools.

Ask the school what funding is available and how to apply.

It is up to the Student Support Group to plan how these funds are used and to make recommendations to the principal.

Language Support Program

In government schools, the Language Support Program supports schools and teachers to improve the oral language skills of students with a severe language disorder.

It aims to create a link between classroom programs and the intensive speech and language programs provided by speech pathologists.

Commonwealth Special Education Program

The Commonwealth Special Education Program is a one-off grant for children who are unable to attend school due to a severe disability. It is used to supplement the cost of accessing home-based educational programs and assist with strategies to help children get back to school.

Ask for more information

This is only a summary of information about support for children with a disability at school. Ask the schools you are interested in for more information about their eligibility criteria, processes and resources.

For more information

‘Welcome to school booklet’
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
www.education.vic.gov.au

Schools Online - a listing of all Victorian government schools and links to Catholic and Independent schools
www.education.vic.gov.au/schoolsonline

Program for Students with Disabilities
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/disabil/index.htm

Catholic Education Office
www.ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au

Association of Independent Schools
www.ais.vic.edu.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
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