SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD TO START SCHOOL IN 2022

Starting school is a major life transition for children and their families. Challenging and exciting, it is a time of change in which children and families adjust to new routines, relationships, and environments. Transition to school may feel like an even bigger adjustment for children starting school in 2022 due to the impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Children transitioning to school in 2022

In the year before school, all children continue to develop a range of skills and abilities that form the basis for their further learning at school. All children are different, and even if your child has had less time at kindergarten in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions, it does not mean that your child won't thrive at primary school.

Families and carers are their children's first teachers, and you are already doing many things at home with your child that will be contributing to their learning and development and preparing them for school. The best way to support your child's learning and development is through **play**.

When children are playing, they are developing life-long skills in maths (classifying, sorting, grouping, sizing), discovering nature and science, and becoming involved in the creative arts. Children are also learning about emotions and developing their language and literacy skills.

Schools are flexible, adaptable, and responsive to individual children, as well as providing access to additional support and specialist staff when needed. Schools are aware that many children starting in Prep/Foundation in 2022 will have had a disrupted four-year-old kindergarten year due to COVID- 19. Schools will be ready to support children wherever they are in their learning journey.

What is a positive start to school?

A positive start to school leads to better learning and wellbeing outcomes for your child both during the transition and beyond. It helps to support your child's learning at school and supports them to feel safe, confident, and connected to new people and places.

Some of the most important elements of helping children to be 'ready for school' relate to their health and wellbeing, and their confidence that school will be a positive experience for them and that they will feel supported by positive relationships. When children are happy to be at school, they feel valued and are motivated to keep learning.

Developing strong and trusting relationships is central to this. Children are best able to develop a positive attitude to starting school when they have opportunities to talk about what it will be like and are given realistic information about school experiences and expectations. Participating in kindergarten and school transition to school programs are a great way to help achieve this, even where activities are conducted online to comply with public health requirements.

What can I do to support my child to prepare for school?

Many activities that your child is already doing at home will be contributing to their learning and development and preparing them for school. Here are some further ideas and tips to support you:

- **Predictable routines:** Knowing what is happening next helps children to regulate their emotions. Doing things at the same time establishes consistent routines. This makes it easier for children to cope with the routines of school. Establishing and maintaining a routine for bedtime is particularly important, for example – having dinner, a bath, putting on pyjamas, brushing teeth, reading books, and then going to bed.
- **Everyday activities:** Activities such as cooking, helping to set and clear the table, sorting the washing, putting clothes and toys away, and caring for plants and pets, all provide opportunities for learning. During these activities, you are helping your child learn when you ask questions such as '*How many cups of flour do we need?*' or '*Can you find the matching socks?*'.
- **Games and activities:** There are some simple games you can play at home to support children's learning and development. Many of these activities can happen inside or outside. Games such as UNO, Snap, Memory, I Spy, and Hide and Seek also teach children to take turns.
- **Build with blocks and create with art and craft materials:** Giving children opportunities to build with blocks (Lego, wooden blocks, cardboard boxes) and use art and craft materials helps to develop children's creativity, fine motor skills, and ability to solve problems.
- **Dress up**: Put some old clothes in a case or box, especially pieces of clothing that can be used in a number of ways, such as shawls, hats, and scarves. Encourage the rich conversations children have when they are in character or playing different roles.
- **Music, movement, storytelling and dance:** Children can develop their language and literacy skills by listening and dancing to music, going on a treasure hunt to find objects around the house or garden, reading, and telling stories using books and other props.
- **Play outside:** Activities such as climbing, going to the playground, building cubbies, throwing and catching a ball, hitting soft balls with a tennis racket or soft cricket bat, digging in the dirt and mud, going for a walk and riding scooters or bikes, all help children to learn and develop.
- **Investigate and ask questions:** Parents can support children's learning by asking open-ended questions during play. For example, *'Can you describe..?*', *'I wonder what would happen if..?*', *'How could you answer that question..?' , 'What if..?'*

Children learn by being curious, confident, creative, enthusiastic, resilient, and imaginative. Their learning is supported when they continue to develop skills like problem solving, experimentation, researching, and investigating.

You can support your child to have a positive start to school by encouraging their participation in everyday routines, playing games, reading together, and talking to about the what the transition might look like.

Make school a familiar place

Your child's school is perhaps a new and exciting environment for the whole family. There are some simple but effective things you can do to support your child become more familiar with the new environment, even if restrictions prevent on-site school visits and tours.

- Practise the journey to and from school.
- Wherever possible, in line with current health advice, arrange play dates with families or friends who will have children at the same school.
- Encourage independence – skills like dressing, packing and carrying a bag, applying sunscreen, going to the toilet, and washing hands.

- Be positive, get your child excited about school, and talk about any worries they have.
- Visit a library, or 'click and collect' if the library is closed and read books about starting school with your child.
- Talk about and practise any after school care arrangements.
- Check school start and finish times and where to drop off and collect your child.
- If you can, start using the name of their new teacher to help build familiarity.

Transition Statements

You may be aware that your child's kindergarten teacher is completing a Transition Learning and Development Statement (Transition Statement) for your child, and you may have already been asked to complete some sections of it.

Transition Statements summarise your child's abilities and strengths as they start school and are sent to your child's future school, giving their Prep / Foundation teacher an idea of your child's individual approach to learning, what your child is interested in, and how they learn best.

Contributing to the Transition Statement is a great way for you to share information about your child with the school, as well as giving your child the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings.

Further information

- Tips for starting school (education.vic.gov.au)
- Moving from kindergarten to school (education.vic.gov.au)
- How to choose a school and enrol (education.vic.gov.au)
- Starting school: preparing your child | Raising Children Network
- A Healthy Start to School - Better Health Channel