

Setting the scene

Parent and carer booklet 1



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Making a positive transition to school

Starting primary school is an important time for children and their families. Children who make a positive start to school are more likely to feel:

- comfortable, relaxed and valued;
- good about themselves as learners;
- and a sense of belonging within the school community.

Transition is not just about the first day; it is a process that happens over time as children and families start to think about and prepare for beginning school. This process continues once children have started school as they adjust and settle into the new environment, form new relationships, and learn about new rules and routines. Early childhood services and schools often provide information and support to children and families during this time.

Transition to school involves a number of changes for children and their families which can be associated with a mixture of feelings. Children can often feel excited about going to 'big school', making new friends and learning new things, but it is not unusual for children to also feel nervous about these changes as they move from one setting to another. Supporting children during transition is important because research suggests that having a positive start to school promotes children's capacity to learn and make and maintain friendships.

Parents and carers play an important role in supporting children to manage the transition into primary school. You can help your child to feel confident about starting school which will assist them to cope with the new social and educational challenges that starting school often brings.

Things you can do to help your child:

- Speak positively and enthusiastically about school.
- Listen to your child's concerns and reassure them that it is okay to feel nervous about change.
- Answer any questions they may have.



Thinking about your child and transition

Even at their young age, it is not unusual for children starting school to have already experienced several transitions, such as starting day care or kindergarten, moving house or going on holiday. These experiences help children develop skills for managing new situations such as the transition to primary school.

As parents and carers you can play a central role in preparing and supporting your child to manage the changes and potential challenges involved in starting school.

What will be the main changes for children as they start primary school?

Physical environment

For example, size of the playground, classroom and school buildings, location and types of toilets, older children in the playground, number of teachers.

Rules and procedures

For example, structured times for eating and toileting, knowing rules in different places such as the classroom and the playground, lining up, putting up hand for speaking.

Relationships

For example, meeting new children and adults, responding to children of different ages, getting to know a range of teachers for different subjects and from different grades.

Learning

For example, more formal learning experiences, structured times and set tasks, increasing independence.



What other changes can you think of for your child as they start school?

School will be different for children in many ways. The physical space may be far larger, there will be more rules and routines for them to follow, relationships will be different, learning experiences will become more formal, and demands on children's independence will be greater. By understanding the nature of these changes you can work with your child to help them to be as well prepared as possible.

We all know that with some preparation beforehand, we are often able to experience a new situation more positively. To begin preparing your child for the changes that starting school may bring, it may be useful to think about:

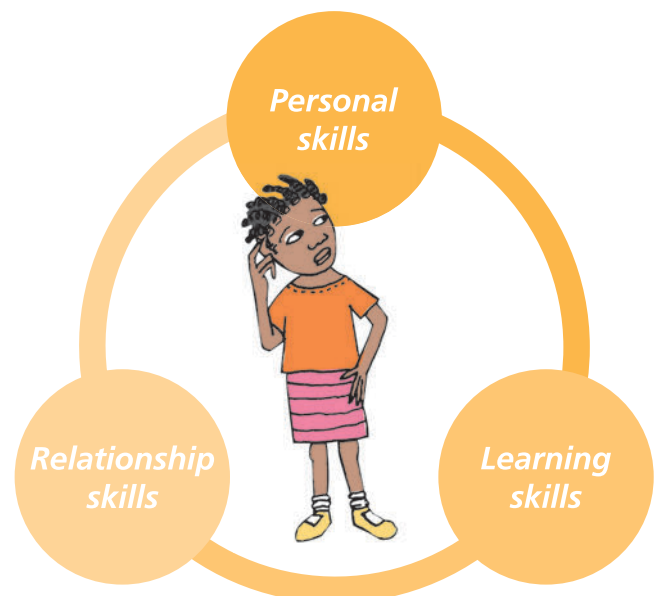
- How your child generally manages change, and how you have supported them through transitions in the past.
- The differences between your child's current setting (e.g., home, childcare, preschool etc.) and the primary school they will be attending, as this can help to identify the changes that you may need to start preparing your child for.

Managing change during transition

Your child's strengths and skills

Throughout your child's early years (i.e., birth to school-age) they have been learning and developing a range of skills. Every child is different, and every child will have their own set of strengths and skills that they will continue to develop as they grow. It is these strengths and skills, along with the support provided by you, your child's current setting (e.g., home, childcare, preschool) and the school community, that help them to manage the changes during the transition period.

This booklet contains some ideas for how you can continue to support your child to develop some of the important skills they will need to manage the changes during transition, and in particular, their personal, relationship and learning skills. Many of the suggestions that follow will be things you are already doing, but you might like to choose one or two to focus more on over the next few months. Choosing a small number of skills is important as you do not want to overwhelm your child in the lead up to starting school.



Supporting your child's strengths and skills

Personal skills

Personal skills are those things that help children to become more independent and to manage a range of situations. You can continue to help your child to develop their personal skills by:

Encouraging self-help skills

Encouraging your child to further develop their self-help skills will give them lots of confidence in being able to do things for themselves. It will also enable them to manage themselves more easily in school. You can help your child to become more independent, for example, in dressing and undressing themselves, eating from their lunch box, going to the toilet, and asking for help.

Promoting a sense of responsibility

Encouraging your child to start or continue to take responsibility for small tasks (e.g., setting the table for dinner, clearing their plate from the table after a meal, putting their clothes in the wash basket) will help them to learn that being part of a group means helping with some of the work.

Encouraging your child to care for their belongings

Encouraging your child to look after their belongings (e.g., tidying up toys, hanging up their coat, putting their pencils in the packet/pencil case etc.) will teach them to care for, respect and maintain their own belongings and the school's equipment.

Involving your child in making decisions

Involving your child in simple choices will give them practise for all the decisions they will be asked to make at school. Start with small decisions, or ask them to decide from a limited number of options such as what they want to wear (e.g., "the red or the blue top"), what to have for a snack (e.g., "an apple or a banana") or what activity they might like to do. This will let your child know that you believe in their ability to decide and will also give them the confidence to make other decisions.

Developing your child's understanding of social rules

Talking to your child about how different settings have different rules (e.g., at the cinema people do not talk during the movie, at family functions there may be different rules around eating, at the swimming pool there are rules to keep people safe etc.) will continue to develop your child's understanding that there will be some new rules they will need to learn, remember and follow.



Relationship skills

Building relationships involves a range of skills that help children to make and keep friends. As they grow and develop, children learn more and more complex social skills from those around them. You can continue to help your child develop these skills by:

Joining in, sharing and taking turns

Playing with your child, following their lead and having fun together will give your child lots of practise in cooperation, turn taking and negotiation.

Playing simple board games or card games with children helps them develop sharing and turn taking skills. Game playing also helps children develop skills for coping with disappointment such as when they do not always win. Making time for play with your child will help to develop their skills as well as strengthen your relationship.

Inviting children to play together

Arranging for your child to get together with other children helps them to establish friendships and practise their social skills. It also provides an opportunity for giving 'on-the-spot' coaching for children if difficulties arise. Providing positive guidance and helping to structure activities (without taking over) can be very important when supporting children to establish new friendships.

Talking with your child about their friendships

Talking with your child about their friendships can give you the chance to hear how things are going and to share your experiences and ideas about how to build healthy relationships.

Teaching your child friendship skills

Demonstrating, encouraging and talking about ways of being friendly and cooperative can help your child to develop friendships (e.g., teach your child how to introduce him or herself to new friends). Playing "pretending" games (e.g., "let's pretend we are at school...") with your child can be a way for your child to put these skills into practice.

Involving your child in conversations

Talking with your child and involving them in conversations can help them to learn about the rules of communication such as waiting for a turn, expressing ideas, listening and not interrupting.

Getting to know other families in the school community

Arranging to meet with other new families in the school community prior to starting school will help your family to develop relationships with other families, and will support you and your child to feel a sense of connectedness to the school community.



Supporting your child's strengths and skills

Learning skills

At this age children will be at many different stages in their learning journey. Some children will be starting to read and write, others will be just beginning to show some interest in letters and numbers. Through various early childhood settings and experiences they will have been exposed to opportunities to experiment with letters, numbers and symbols as well as learning to write their names. All these skills will help children in making the transition to school. It is important to remember, however, that children starting school are not expected to be able to read and write. Most importantly, they need skills that will help them to learn.

These skills include the ability to:

- Focus for a period of time
- Ask questions
- Follow simple instructions
- Complete tasks

You can continue to help your child to develop their learning skills by:

Encouraging your child to focus on small tasks

Sitting with your child doing activities that require them to focus for a period of time (e.g., making a creation with boxes, building a racing track, playing a memory game).

Setting your child small activities to complete independently (e.g., sorting or ordering everyday household items such as shoes or buttons, drawing a picture, building a house from blocks). Check how they are going at regular intervals, and provide encouragement and positive feedback to boost your child's confidence and motivation.

Encouraging listening skills

Reading books with children is a great way to help develop their listening skills - audio recordings of stories are good for this too.

Asking questions about the story can also support your child's understanding and communication skills. For example, ask questions about what has happened, what might happen next, or how characters might be feeling, and why.



Promoting curiosity

Asking your child questions about things that have happened that day, encouraging your child to ask you questions about things they see, and asking open questions (e.g., “I wonder what would happen if...?”, “Why do you think...?”) are great ways to promote curiosity.

Promoting a positive attitude to learning

Providing opportunities to experience new places, such as going to the library to look for books on a variety of topics, visiting places in the community, and following your child’s interests, such as going to the park to find bugs with lots of legs or dropping leaves in running water will show them that learning is fun.

Sharing your own interests - a love for learning can be passed on!

Helping your child to follow instructions

Giving your child practise at following instructions is important. Make it easy to begin with by starting with one instruction at a time (e.g., “Put it in the box.”) and gradually build up the number of steps involved (e.g., “Please take this book and put it on the shelf in your bedroom.”). It is good to keep instructions small initially so that your child can experience success.

Encouraging your child’s play

Learning occurs through every day play and experiences. For example, ‘make-believe’ play when children pretend to be characters or copy things they have seen, encourages their imaginative and creative skills. You can support your child to learn through their play by getting involved and providing opportunities for them to experiment with a range of materials (e.g., different writing materials, empty boxes, old clothes for dressing up etc.).

Encouraging hand-eye coordination

Giving your child lots of opportunities to practise and develop important eye-hand coordination skills for example using scissors, glue and sticky tape, building with blocks, helping with cooking (e.g. stirring and pouring), and throwing and catching balls. These skills help children draw, read, write and to play games and sport more successfully.



How is your child feeling about starting school?

Talking with your child

Supporting your child to talk about their thoughts and feelings about starting school will help you to find out and understand how they are feeling, and what help they may require. At this age children can find it difficult to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Through gentle encouragement and guidance over time they will learn to share what they are thinking and feeling.

It is also important to recognise and accept that there will be times when your child does not want to talk, but may be happy to do so later. By creating opportunities for your child to speak to you about starting school you will also be strengthening your relationship with them and further developing their communication skills.

You can support your child to talk about their feelings by:

Using stories to prompt conversations

Stories can be a good way to discuss feelings as it may be less confronting for children to explore their feelings through characters in books (e.g., “Why do you think the child in the story is feeling like that?”; “I wonder what they could do about ...”).

Make-up stories or use existing stories in books to talk about starting school. For example, choose a picture of a child in a book and ask questions like “I wonder what things that girl was thinking about on her first day?”. Then you might be able to carefully relate the character’s experience back to your own child (e.g., “Have you ever felt that way?”).

How is Tasmin feeling?



Creating places and routines for sharing thoughts, ideas and feelings.

The best times will be when both you and your child are feeling relaxed. These times will differ for every family so choose a time that most suits you. For example:

- During story times
- While driving
- When cuddled up on the couch
- During bath time
- While out walking

Asking open-ended questions

Asking 'wondering questions' (e.g., "I wonder what it will be like to..."; "I was wondering what you are thinking about when...") can help children to express their thoughts and feelings.

When children find such open-ended questions difficult, more targeted questions can be helpful. Some examples include, "What are you looking forward to most about starting school?"; "Is there anything that makes you feel nervous about starting school?"

Using 'feelings' words

Using sentences like "With all this jumping around you seem very excited about..." or "Sometimes I get nervous and my tummy feels funny when I have to do something new..." helps to teach your child how to express their feelings.



What are you looking forward to most about starting school?





TRANSITION TO SCHOOL: PARENT INITIATIVE

KidsMatter Primary information resources

The KidsMatter Primary information resources, designed for parents, carers and teachers, contain information on specific topics that you may also find useful for supporting your child during the transition to primary school. These can be found at: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/information-resources/

The KidsMatter Primary information sheets that relate to this Booklet, and provide further useful information, include:

- Making sense of children's emotions
- How come they're so different
- Everyone needs a friend
- Supporting children's friendship skills – Suggestions for parents and carers
- Supporting children's social development – Suggestions for parents and carers

Further information about other resources for supporting children during the transition to school can be found in the KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative information sheet: 'Other resources on transition to school for families'.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative.

The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at:
www.kidsmatter.edu.au/transition



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