

SECTOR CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

Supporting Positive Transition to Preschool for Families



Starting or returning to preschool is a significant transition time for young children and families. For some children, it may be the first time they are away from their family and in the care of other adults and being with a large group of children. There are many ways that your family can support a smooth start or return to preschool. Your child is more likely to have a positive experience of starting preschool when you are able to think ahead and plan for this transition.

Sharing important information with educators

- ▶ Your preschool will have asked you to complete enrolment forms to gather some information about your child and family to help them to prepare and gain a picture of each child. There may be additional information that it is important to share with the preschool team such as therapy reports, medical and dietary information. Children adapt best to new experiences best when educators listen to and work in partnership with families.

Parents and carers can:

- ▶ Share any significant things happening in your lives with the preschool team. For example, moving house, new baby, going on a holiday, a death in the family (including pets), relationship breakdown/challenges etc. Knowing this information helps educators to have a better understanding of what is happening for your child emotionally and if there are any changes in behaviour and be able to support them and respond more appropriately.
- ▶ Raise any questions or concerns about any areas of your child's development or health. If your child is seeing any therapists, the preschool can work collaboratively with them to support your child's inclusion. Your preschool can also share contacts for support, assessment or therapy with your family as needed.
- ▶ Let the preschool know where your child is up to with toileting so they can support your child e.g., still in nappies, needs reminders to use toilet, needs help to wipe.

Emotions around starting preschool

- ▶ Consider your own needs as an adult. You may be feeling understandably nervous about your child starting preschool. Being as calm and positive as possible will help your child feel more confident about starting preschool.
- ▶ Check with the preschool about whether your child can bring a comfort toy/item from home. This may be reassuring for your child and maintain a connection between home and preschool. Check with the preschool if your child could bring along a family photo. Even if these items stay in your child's bag, your child

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knowing they are there, and that they can look at them, hold them etc. may bring comfort.

- ▶ Your child may feel a range of different emotions about starting preschool. It is a good idea to talk positively about starting preschool and to acknowledge and label the feelings that your child may be experiencing.

Becoming/staying familiar with preschool

- ▶ Visits – take some time to walk past the preschool grounds, stop and have a look and talk with your child about preschool. Doing this through the holiday break will help keep this connection in your child’s memory.
- ▶ Look at story books or videos that talk about starting preschool. Hearing stories can support your child to understand what happens at preschool. Ask your local library to help you find books about going to preschool.
- ▶ Many preschools may have a story that they have put together about their preschool. This story might include photos of the educators and preschool environment that you can talk about with your child in preparation to starting preschool.
- ▶ Your preschool may also have photos of their space on their website, Facebook or Instagram page that you can look at and talk about with your child over the summer holidays.
- ▶ Your child may feel unsure about the changes around starting preschool. It can help to highlight the things that are staying the same when your child starts preschool (e.g. Saturdays and Sundays they are still with their family).
- ▶ Support your child to recognise and open their own lunchboxes and any packets of food. Encourage your child to help you prepare their lunch/morning tea, so they have a visual understanding and some choice around what has been packed.
- ▶ In a relaxed, playful way, engage your child in practicing greetings (e.g. waving, using a visual support, thumbs up, using a key word sign or saying “hi”). Please note, it may take some time for your child to make eye contact or talk with their new educators and peers.
- ▶ While visiting the preschool, or on the first day, ask if you can take your child to the preschool toilet and remind them of the steps (e.g. pants down, sit on toilet, do wee or poo). A visual support of the routine may also be helpful. You may like to discuss any individual toileting information about your child with the preschool team.

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Arrival and departure at preschool

- ▶ Think of a ritual (if you don't already have one) about how you will say goodbye to your child when you leave preschool each time. For example, you might like to look at a book with your child before you leave, and/ or there might be a spot in the preschool playground that would be a good place for your child to wave to you from as you leave. Rituals create predictability and a feeling of security for children. How you re-connect when you arrive in the afternoon is also something to consider. Don't forget to let your child know at what time of the day in the preschool routine, they will be picked up. If another family member or carer will be collecting your child, let your child and the educators know about this to help prepare your child.
- ▶ It is important that you say goodbye to your child, even if this may mean some tears. Sneaking away when they are distracted or playing will lead to anxiety and will make building trust with their educators more challenging.
- ▶ Your preschool may have a visual routine or "rhythm of the day" board that helps children understand the main times in the preschool day. You may like to look at this with your child on arrival and departure.