

The transition from early learning settings to primary school

Starting school is a major milestone in a child's life and strong family-school partnerships help make a smoother transition.

The importance of a successful transition

A successful transition from early childhood learning settings to school is important for all children and can have long-lasting benefits. Children who experience a positive transition into their new environment are more likely to feel secure at school and can adjust better to the new environment.

For an introduction to transitions, see [Transitions in learning communities](#).

Understanding behaviour

Common feelings and concerns

Starting school is a major milestone in a child's life.

Children can experience a variety of feelings during the transition such as:

- excitement
- sadness
- anger
- anticipation
- fear or anxiety.

Understanding children's behaviour helps educators to respond effectively and foster a supportive environment.

Trusting and supportive relationships

Strong relationships between children, their families and educators can help child wellbeing.

Trusting and supportive relationships are the foundation of successful transitions.

They can provide children with a safe and secure base at home, in early learning settings and at school. When a child feels emotionally safe, they are more likely to learn and thrive at school – socially and academically.

Strong family-school partnerships can help improve children's transition experiences and support their future academic and social and emotional learning.

It's important for schools to build culturally responsive and positive relationships with families before school starts. Then maintain these connections during and after the transition to school.

Strong links between educators in early learning services and primary schools staff also support positive transitions.

Good communication between settings can facilitate continuity of care and education, for example, through the development of teaching strategies and curriculum based on the needs and strengths of individual children.

Good communication also allows information-sharing about a child's learning and social needs, which the school can respond to.

Early learning services and schools shared responsibility

While families, early years services, schools and communities can work together to help prepare the child for school, educators play a role in bringing all participants together to talk about school and establish transition policies and practices that best meet the needs of the child.

There are various ways to help children adjust to school:

- Listen to and observe the child to understand their interests and concerns. This helps children develop a positive attitude to starting school. Activities such as drawing or painting, or facilitated discussions, allow children to express what they are excited or worried about even before they start school. Behaviours that indicate children are having difficulty adjusting may include complaints of feeling sick, increased worry about school and separating from parents, crying, reluctance to attend school, and sleep disturbance.
- Help children and families become familiar with the processes, rules and expectations of primary school environments. Attending an orientation at school can provide real examples to talk about
- Give families tips and ideas for how they can support and develop their child's social and emotional skills, coping and help-seeking strategies.
- Supporting families to understand that the first few weeks of formal schooling can be very tiring, and children may need earlier nights or fewer after school and weekend activities for a period of time.
- Provide multiple opportunities for children and families to visit their new primary school to help build familiarity and belonging. These can be formal information evenings or orientation days or informal opportunities

(such as after-school access to the playground or school clubs and sporting events).

- Provide opportunities for children and family members to connect with each other before and after they start school to help build a sense of belonging to the school community.
- Develop ways for early childhood settings and primary educators to share information about children and their families. For example, build transition activities (such as home visits, visits to services and schools and family meetings) into roles.
- Build and strengthen community partnerships. Support agencies, child, family and community services and education networks can all play an important role in supporting children and families' transition to school. Teach children, young people and families the skills to support them in the transition period, such as:
 - how to recognise, express and talk about their feelings
 - problem-solving skills such as managing their lunch box, when their best friend is away or it's a different teacher.
 - helpful thinking strategies. For example, "I can do this" or "I can be brave".
 - seeking help when needed.

Primary schools need to be prepared to welcome all children no matter their level of 'school readiness'. It's important to note that readiness is not only shaped by the child, it's something that families, early learning environments, communities and schools can influence.

The significance of equity and diversity

A child's learning and development is shaped by their personal identity and their family and culture.

Transition programs that support diversity help ensure a positive beginning to school for all children and their families.

Recognising diversity, facilitating supportive relationships and promoting identity are

important to help support the transition from early learning setting to primary school.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about diversity and inclusion in the [Include Module](#) of the Mentally Healthy Communities domain.

Children and families living in diverse circumstances

Children and families living in diverse circumstances may need extra support with the transition to primary school.

Targeted responses to reach families may be required for some children. Planning for school transitions and inclusive practices are key to ensuring that all children and families have a successful transition to school.

Be You Resources

Learn more about creating welcoming culturally responsive learning environments in [Reflect, Respect, Respond: Protocols for culturally respectful engagement with First Nations communities](#)

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about collaborating with families to support children and young people, in the [Family Partnerships domain](#).

Bibliography

Visit [The transitions from early learning to primary school](#) for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

External links

[Australian Council of Educational Research – Starting School: A strengths-based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.](#)

[Charles Sturt University – Facilitating children’s transition to school from families with complex support needs.](#)

[Early Childhood Australia – Transition to school: Communication and relationships.](#)

