

A change for the whole family

Starting school is not only a change for your child. Amid the excitement and preparation it can be important to take a moment to think about how this change affects you and your family. As you help your child to prepare for the changes ahead, it is important to monitor your own feelings. Having your child start school may lead to a new routine for you and your family. There may also be a period of adjustment as you begin to connect with the new school community and feel the loss of strong relationships formed at your child's early childhood education and care (ECEC) service. Thinking a little about how things are going to change for everyone can help you to make sure the whole family is ready for starting school.



Mixed emotions

Starting school may bring about a range of emotions for you and your family. Think back to your own experiences of starting school and some of the emotions you felt.

As your child reaches this milestone, you may be feeling a sense of loss as they are spending more time out of the family home and in somebody else's care. Or perhaps you are worried about how your child will settle into their new setting, cope with new learning tasks and make friends. You may also be feeling excited and proud as your child is growing up and starting a new phase in their life. If you have other children in the family, they too may be experiencing a mix of emotions about their brother or sister starting school.

It is important to monitor your own reactions and consider what you may need during this time. Try to recognise when you are feeling stressed and the potential causes. This will help you to respond appropriately and think about what else you might need to do to prepare for starting school. Planning some enjoyable or relaxing activities to help you manage your own emotions can be really helpful. Your child is also likely to be aware of how you are feeling and this can influence their reaction to school. If you appear confident about the challenges ahead and express a positive outlook, this will help your child to feel confident about starting school.

A new family routine

As your child prepares to start school, take some time to think about how your family will adjust to the new routine. If you are a working parent, you may need to consider arrangements for before and after school care, or how you will organise school pick-up with your partner or other family members. You may need to allow more time in the mornings as you drop off one child at an ECEC service and the other at school. If your primary role has been mainly at home looking after your child, there might be a period of adjustment as your child is away from you for longer hours. Your child may also feel exhausted with all the changes they are experiencing, and you may consider adjusting or holding back on after school activities.

Supportive relationships

Supportive relationships can help everyone cope with challenging or difficult times. Talking through your concerns with your partner, friends and family, or your child's early childhood educator, can help to support you during your child's transition to school.

It can be really helpful at this time to connect with other families at your child's school. It's likely that they too are experiencing similar emotions. Sharing your concerns, hopes and experiences can be comforting and you may learn some useful tips or ideas. On your child's first day of school, it can be helpful to join in any social activities your school has on offer or arrange to meet up with some of the other parents.





Connecting with your child's school

As well as experiencing a mix of emotions about your child starting school, you may also experience a change in the strong relationships formed within your child's ECEC community. This is a good time to start linking in with your child's school community, which will help your family to feel supported and allow you to develop new relationships. Building connections between your family and the school will also help your child adjust to their new setting as you are able to provide and share valuable knowledge about your child. There may be opportunities where your child's school will seek information about your child. At other times you might find opportunities to communicate with them and take steps to become a part of the school community.

In preparing for starting school, it will be helpful to:

- Attend information nights and transition sessions held by your school.
- Share information about your child and their previous environment. One way to do this is to provide the school with a picture book about your child in their ECEC service (see the Starting School *A picture book about me* online resource). It's also a good idea to find out what information your ECEC service has passed onto the school.
- Speak with school staff if you are concerned about a particular issue (eg your child's fear of using school toilets, separation anxiety) and plan how you will address it before your child starts school.

Once your child has started school, there are many different ways you can continue to build connections. It is important to be involved in a way that suits you and your family. It can be helpful to:

- Maintain regular communication with your child's teacher and school staff. This includes talking to the school about your child's needs and interests, and discussing ways that the school can support your family.
- Stay informed through attending information evenings and activities at the school.
- Look out for social opportunities where your family can build relationships with other families throughout the school year.
- Take an interest in your child's learning. Talk to your child's teacher about what they are learning and how you can support this at home. Ask your child about their day and acknowledge their efforts in learning tasks.
- Look out for opportunities to share your knowledge, ideas and experiences with the wider school community (eg volunteering, sharing cultural traditions and customs).

Remember, everything you do makes a difference in supporting your child's learning and development, and building a positive relationship with your school community. If you are not sure how to be involved, ask your child's teacher or other families for ideas.

Starting school is a huge milestone for your child, but the changes also have an impact on the whole family. It is important to monitor your own emotions and consider how your routine will change. Supportive relationships and building connections with your school community will help your child and family during this time.





For more information

If you would like more information, KidsMatter has produced a range of resources to support your child through early childhood and primary school. The following information sheets related to this topic are available online at

www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/information-sheets

KidsMatter Early Childhood information sheets:

- *The building blocks of healthy family relationships*
- *Family relationships:
Suggestions for families and staff*
- *Supporting parents and carers to look after themselves*
- *Promoting self-care:
Suggestions for families and staff*

KidsMatter Primary information sheets:

- *Belonging at school makes a difference*
- *Why connect at school?*
- *What makes a positive school community?*

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Starting School information sheets for families. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool



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