

Getting help when starting school

You may have some concerns about how your child will cope when starting school. Perhaps they had a particularly hard time adjusting into their early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting and the educator has raised some concerns with you. Or despite the planning and preparation you have done in helping to get your child ready for school, they may be having difficulties adjusting to their new school setting.

You know your child best, and if you are at any time concerned about your child, a good place to start is sharing information with your child's educator or teacher. They are there to support families as well as the children in their care. They have a lot of knowledge about child development and learning, and have observed your child during the day with children of the same age. Even if the school has not yet met your child, raising any concerns early can help them get the assistance your child needs before starting school.

As children transition to school, a change in behaviour is quite common. Children are adjusting to a new setting and forming new relationships with staff and other children. They may also be feeling a sense of loss after leaving their previous setting where they may have formed important relationships with peers and early childhood educators. (See the Starting School *Understanding behaviour* information sheet for further information about some of the behaviours that are common during the transition to school.)

What can you do?

You may need to get help at any stage during the transition to school. This includes the year before school begins, during the transition period and in the weeks or months after school has begun.

The following tips may be helpful:

- If you are concerned about your child, take time to observe them in a range of situations or settings (eg when visiting friends, at the shops). Take note of when, where and how often your child is showing the particular behaviour or emotion of concern.
- Talk to your child's early childhood educator, school teacher or others who have regular contact with your child and find out if they have any concerns.
- Discuss any strategies that you have found useful in responding to your child's needs with the early childhood educator or teacher. They may also have suggestions about what strategies they have found helpful to support your child.
- Get to know what types of assistance may be available for children and families in your area.



What types of assistance may be available?

Assistance does not always mean a referral to a professional service. There are many different levels of assistance and support, and it is important to find the right one for you and your child.

These include:

Within the ECEC service or school: This can include educators, support staff, family and peer networks, an early childhood advisor in your ECEC service or wellbeing staff within your child's school. Your child's ECEC service and/or school may also have information, resources and activities available.

Within the wider community: This can include GPs, paediatricians, psychologists, counsellors, family and friends. Members of the wider community may also run information sessions on activities and groups that your child and/or family can attend. Making an appointment with your GP may be a good place to start as they can help you decide if there is a need for specialist support and refer you to an appropriate children's mental health specialist if required.

Why is seeking help important?

Keep in mind there are lots of different ways to access help for your child (eg talking to a friend, talking to an educator or teacher, visiting the doctor) but if you are worried it is important to talk to someone so that you and your child can get the support you need. The earlier you access help, the better, so that your child receives the best support possible.

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:

- *Getting help*
- *Seeking help for children's mental health difficulties*
- *Accessing support:
Suggestions for families and staff*
- *Supporting children's mental health:
Suggestions for families and staff*

KidsMatter Primary information sheets:

- *Knowing when to get help*
- *How mental health difficulties affect children*
- *Recognising mental health difficulties:
Suggestions for families*



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