



Getting ready for school

Working with kindergarten programs and schools



How kindergartens help prepare your child for school

KINDERGARTENS PLAY A VITAL PART IN TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Kindergarten programs encourage children to learn through play and develop their confidence and skills. Early childhood teachers provide educational environments that support children to develop the skills that lay the foundations for later literacy and numeracy. Kindergarten programs can be offered in independent kindergartens as well as some long day care settings

Kindergarten programs are a great resource when it comes to helping you and your child prepare for the beginning of school. Some activities kindergartens will often organise to help with this change include:

- Organise joint functions and visits to local schools during the kindergarten year to build children's familiarity with school.
- Develop *portfolios* with photos, drawings and details of activities from the kindergarten year. Parents typically receive these later in the kindergarten year; they may choose to share their children's portfolios with the school that their child will attend.
- Communicate with schools about individual children's needs. Parents should always have the opportunity to decide what information will be shared between kindergartens and schools.



GET INVOLVED IN YOUR KINDERGARTEN

Research shows parent involvement in a wide range of kindergarten activities helps children develop a sense of belonging in their community. Some of these activities are:

- Help out in the kindergarten room, e.g. reading or playing with the children.
- Attend social functions and information sessions.
- Assist with fundraising.

Some parents take on a greater role through involvement on kindergarten committees of management. This can lead to participation later on your child's school council and is a great role model for children.

Having kindergartens, schools and parents all working together is vital in helping children to adjust to the changes that starting school brings. Parents who engage in the process help us to support their children. We always seek permission from parents before we share information about their children with the schools. This ensures the parents are aware of what is going to happen involving them in the process rather than the kindergarten talking to the school without parents knowing what is going on.

We have formed a small network with the principals of the local Catholic and state primary schools to plan activities to support children's transition to school.

What you can do to help prepare your child for school

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT STARTING SCHOOL

Your child is likely to have their own views about going to school. To help them prepare for the changes school will bring, talk to children about school and share accurate information about what happens there. Some ideas for talking to your child about school include:

- Explore your child's expectations of school and encourage their curiosity about school.
- Read books about starting school.
- Answer your child's questions about school.

- Talk about how the school routines will be similar or different to kindergarten, child care and/or home.
- Share your own positive experiences of school and have a positive attitude to school.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Most schools have open days and orientation programs to help children become familiar with the school grounds and teachers. While orientation programs are important, there are other ways for schools and parents to prepare your child and family for school. See the case studies for some great ways schools, preschools and families can work together to prepare for school. You may find the following ideas also helpful:

- Get to know as much about your child's new school as you can, and if possible, talk with adults and children you know who already go to the school.
- If you can, try to find opportunities for your child to play with other children who attend, or will attend, the school. Find out what opportunities the school provides for communication with families.
- Discuss with the school how they communicate with preschool settings such as kindergarten and long day care centres to support children starting school.
- Keep an eye out for, and try to attend, school activities such as orientation activities, information sessions, school visiting days, information sharing opportunities and school social events.
- Some schools allow you to visit the playground with your child after hours or during class time.

Family Case Study

Oliver has always looked forward to being a *big school boy*, and told me that he wouldn't even need to have a birthday party this year, because *I'll be with my friends every day*.

Last year we spoke to the school a lot. We had meetings with the vice principal on enrolment, a good chat with the teacher who, in the end, was Ollie's class teacher, and James had an informal chat with the principal when buying Ollie's uniform. Oliver attended three orientation activities before the end of last year. There was a parents' meeting as well.

Our kindergarten also did a lot of preparation. They talked to the children about school, and had an excursion at the end of the year in which they visited all of the local schools. In Oliver's kindergarten *program book* they included a photo taken of the children who would be at his school standing on the school grounds. The kindergarten teacher prepared transition reports – we received a copy of that report.

Starting school has been a big change for our family. We have had to change our routine and become even more organised. Oliver loves school, and is so excited about playing and learning.

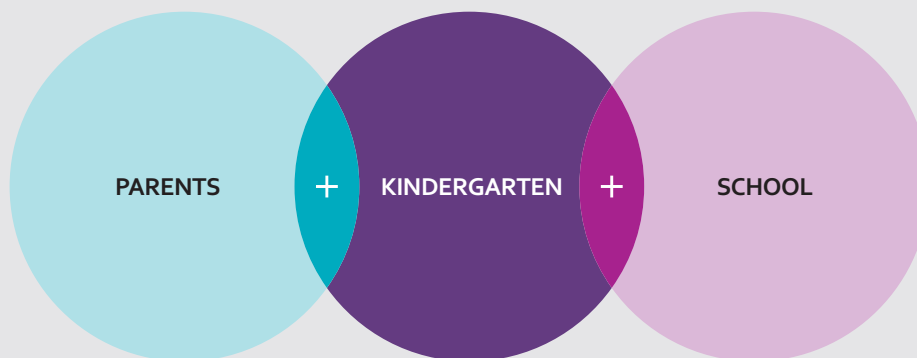
Emily Lee-Ack, Warrnambool

Kindergarten and schools as partners in your child's education

WORKING TOGETHER

Once you have decided when and where your child is going to school, there are a lot of things you can do to make the move to school as smooth as possible for your child and family.

A *partnership* approach between parents, preschool settings and schools can help children to make sense of the changes that come with starting school.



Family Case Study

Charlie is the youngest of my three children and was fortunate to have a kindergarten experience that made a big difference to his life. He is a bright and funny boy who has experienced difficulties with auditory processing and a speech delay. Charlie's kindergarten teacher recognised Charlie's additional needs quickly. She spent a lot of time working with me to develop skills I would need to help Charlie develop so he could attend a local primary school. She quickly worked out that by having him sit near the front and frequently mentioning his name while talking to the class helped Charlie to better understand what was going on. I worked with the teacher to instil the confidence in Charlie to raise his hand for additional help when he needed it.

Later on I sat down with the kindergarten teacher with a lot of notes and material from the year and together we worked out what information should be shared with the primary school. By using the same strategies that we developed at kindergarten, we laid the foundation for Charlie to do well at school. I also spent time in the classroom in the early days which helped reassure Charlie and build his confidence in the new, bigger primary school environment. Two years on, Charlie is having a great time at school, with the staff there continuing to actively support him. One day Charlie came home saying that he hadn't been able to get to his usual spot near the school teacher, but that it was okay, because 'my teacher is so nice, she asked the other kids to make room for me at the front of the class'.

Michelle Corcoran, East Hawthorn

Kindergarten Case Study

Last year we had an information night with representatives from local schools in the area followed by a series of excursions with the children to the local schools. We made sure these visits were fun and relaxed. The first visit simply involved a play in the school grounds, a look around, time playing and reading in the library and a quick snack. At our other visits the school teachers read big book stories including stories like *The Rainbow Fish* to the children. Afterwards all the children made their own rainbow fish artworks. The children were also given the opportunity to play in the classroom and use the computers.

Being familiar with the school environment reassures children and helps them and their families make the transition to school easily – kindergartens play a vital part of this process.

Fleur Hall, Rutherglen Kindergarten



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

ELAA's family information tipsheet *From kindergarten to school? Laying foundations for future learning* talks about how kindergarten programs lay the foundations for future learning by introducing educational concepts and activities through play. It also talks about deciding when might be the right time for your family to send your child to school.