



From kindergarten to school

Laying foundations for future learning



Families and the transition from kindergarten to school

THE INDIVIDUAL NATURE OF TRANSITIONS

Kindergarten programs allow children to learn through play and develop their confidence and skills – encouraging their development as lifelong learners. Kindergarten programs can be offered in independent kindergartens as well as some long day care settings.

Early childhood teachers plan environments and experiences to support children's learning through play. **Teachers provide a safe environment for children to learn about themselves, to relate**

to other children and adults in a positive way, to solve problems and to have the ability to be independent sometimes.

Parents are the first and most important teachers of their preschool aged children. Kindergarten provides opportunities to reinforce this role, encouraging parents to participate in their child's education and to build stronger links in their local community. This might include taking part in a kindergarten committee or other roles such as fundraising.

Before reading and numbers

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Attending a kindergarten program helps children and families lay the foundations for future learning. For example, kindergarten programs provide a literature rich environment. By sharing interesting stories and books, children learn that print has meaning, writing is made up of words, words are made up of letters, letters represent sounds and that pictures help to tell the story. This is the preparation for reading children will draw on when they enter school. They do not need to have reached a specific level of ability in reading and writing. School teachers are skilled at working with children who have a wide range of experiences, skills and knowledge.

Like reading and writing, children do not need to show a particular level of mathematical ability before they arrive at school. Children do their initial maths learning through play and other everyday experiences.

Kindergarten programs build on what families do by talking, questioning and discussing mathematical concepts with children. At kindergarten children engage in activities that encourage them to investigate and understand shapes and objects and counting for example. Children at kindergarten may begin to identify numbers, describe and use informal measures like 'more' or 'less'. They may learn simple measurement terms for length, mass, capacity and time, collecting, sorting and classifying things and much more.

This basic understanding of the concepts that underpin reading and mathematics is what creates the foundation for more formal learning at school.



Experiencing a positive move to school is about everything that makes up the life of a child and their family – their friends and relatives, any early childhood settings they have been to, schools, and neighbourhood. **A positive start to school is about much more than what a child has or hasn't yet learned.**

Parents are usually in the best position to weigh up their child's personality and skills and to decide whether or not to send them to school. Deciding the time is right for your child to start school is a decision that affects the whole family. **There is no one size fits all formula.** People hold different views about when is the right time for children to start school.

Family Case Study

Lucas is a bright, curious and reserved boy. Over the past few years his predominantly Greek-speaking grandparents have cared for Lucas while mum and dad are at work. Lucas was younger than most of the children in his kindergarten class but he loved kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher was skilled at helping Lucas to try new games and take risks like learning to use the swings.

I was surprised mid-year when the kindergarten teacher mentioned Lucas might benefit from delaying school for another year. I wanted to do everything 'the right way' for Lucas but I knew this would be an expensive option for our family. Withdrawing him from the funded year at kindergarten didn't seem a good option. We also worried that Lucas was becoming bored and restless in his grandparents' care. What would that look like in another year?

My partner and I made the decision that Lucas should go to school alongside his kindergarten friends. He has settled in well and is excited about it 'at school there is a language book and a maths book and we sometimes go to the art room!'

Hercules Bantas, Footscray

Starting school affects the whole family

In Victoria the law requires that children must have turned 5 years of age by the 30 of April in the year they start school. Your child's age is just one of the things about your child you might want to take into account when looking at starting school. Other considerations may include maturity, social skills, physical well being and independence.

It is worth remembering most children are more developed in some areas and less developed in others.

Your child's kindergarten teacher will be happy to talk to you about whether your child is ready to start school. The teacher's opinion is likely to be useful. In particular they may be able to advise whether funding is available for a second year of kindergarten for your child. Remember though, that the teacher only sees the child while they are in the kindergarten program. They may not have such a good understanding of the range of other experiences your child has had. Your teacher also may not be aware of broader matters that may be important to your family in making this decision – things like family finances, care arrangements and other factors may be relevant.

Family and friends may offer useful opinions. However again **don't forget you are likely to have the best understanding of all the aspects of your child's life.** Parents are usually in the best position of all to make the decision of whether or not to send their child to school.

Kindergarten connects



Family Case Study

Milly's birthday is in March. I made the decision before she was born to send her to prep turning 6, like I did with her older brother. My youngest child will do the same. My reasons for waiting are mainly to do with the social development of the children – it gives them more time to learn sharing ideas; thinking about others; choosing activities independently; playing with a variety of friends; seeking adult support when she needs it. Milly's time at kindergarten helped her develop in these ways in a fun, play based environment.

Milly starting school has been exhausting for all the family! In the early days of school my son needed food, bath and bed not long after getting home.

Milly has not been as tired – but she certainly found 'saying goodbye' in the morning difficult. She says 'I love school but I still miss you!'

Vanessa Kenny, Croydon

Kindergarten Case Study

Children in our kindergarten programs develop skills while having fun and being with other children. Learning and practising developing skills through play is an important part of kindergarten. Three and four year old children are not equipped to learn abstract ideas – play activities provide real life examples that help them learn.

We sometimes get children to use their own bodies to build an awareness of space and develop their motor skills. We introduce concepts and words such as between (my eyes), under (your chin), and on (his head). This activity helps children develop in ways that will one day support future learning in mathematics and literacy. At the same time it develops their physical skills.

Another more complex activity shows how our kindergarten provides learning opportunities for children in a fun, supportive environment. As part of setting up a pretend hairdresser's service the children kept an appointment book and had pretend 'haircuts'. This activity introduced ideas and words for time and procedures, waiting turns and following steps.

Karen Horne, Lady Huntingfield Children's Centre, North Melbourne



Off to school?

Starting school is a unique experience for every child and family. This information sheet highlights a few of the issues families think about when making this decision.

SOME OF THE QUESTIONS PARENTS HAVE TO ANSWER

Do you want your child to start school?

How suitable will your current care arrangements be for another year?

What would it mean to change these arrangements?

What is the financial cost of your child starting school compared to not starting school?

Does your child have older brothers or sisters attending the same school?

Will you be able to access a second year of funded kindergarten?

Once you have made the decision to send your child to school, there is a lot you can do to help the transition to school go smoothly for your child and the rest of the family.

ELAA's Family Information Sheet *Working with kindergartens and schools as partners in your child's education* provides suggestions for a positive move from kindergarten to school.