Transition matters
A resource about starting school for early childhood educators and school staff
About this resource

Transition matters is all about supporting children throughout one of the most important milestones in their young lives – starting primary school. Children often need adults to help them make the transition to school, regardless of where they are coming from or where they are going to.

If you work at an early childhood education and care (ECEC) service or primary school, this resource is especially relevant for you. You may be considering a review of existing transition to school programs in your setting, or you might be starting to think about formal transition practices for the first time.

Either way, Transition matters can support you throughout your process. It covers understandings derived from current research and literature about how vital a successful transition to school can be to children’s social, emotional and academic success.

Transition matters is organised into three sections to guide your ECEC service or school towards supporting a successful transition to school.

Starting school

This section will provide you with key information about the transition to school period, and the theoretical basis on which to implement or modify your transition policies and practices. The information will also help you to make decisions about how you tailor these ideas to your unique community.

Planning for transition

This section focuses on ideas and strategies that will assist you to implement policies and practices that facilitate children’s successful transition to school.

Planning Tool

The Planning Tool can be used to evaluate your current transition practices and to develop a plan of action for improving transition policies and practices.

Please note that there are a number of additional resources and tools that accompany this booklet. They can be freely downloaded from www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool.
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How to use this resource

Getting started
• Read the background information (pages 4-15)
(Once you have identified your transition team, ask members to read the background information to support the planning process)

Reflect on your current practices
• Consider how the background information fits with your current practice (see page 15 for reflective questions)
• Discuss as a team

Gather ideas
• Read pages 16-33 for ideas and strategies to use during transition
• Reflect on how these fit with your current practices
• Discuss as a team

Planning
• Use the planning tool to identify your strengths and possible areas for development
• Choose stakeholder/s to focus on and review in more detail
• Create your action plan

Implementing
• Begin implementing your plan
• Monitor progress and adapt as needed

Review
• Document and celebrate achievements and learning
• What worked?
• What else needs to be done?
• What’s next?

You may also want to return to an earlier point

Transition matters A resource for starting school
About KidsMatter

Background information

KidsMatter is an Australian mental health and wellbeing initiative set in primary schools and in ECEC services – like preschools, kindergartens, family day care, and child care centres. It’s not a program, but a framework that helps early childhood educators and staff in these settings to help take care of children’s mental health needs by focusing on:

- creating positive ECEC and school communities
- teaching children skills for good social and emotional development
- working together with families
- recognising and getting help for children with mental health problems.

KidsMatter was developed by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society, the Principals Australia Institute, and Early Childhood Australia. It was developed by experts – mental health professionals, early childhood professionals and staff in schools – in response to the high rates of children with mental health difficulties and the problems they face getting help.

Growing healthy minds

Research clearly shows that children who are mentally healthy are better able to meet life’s challenges. They are also better learners and have stronger relationships.

Good mental health in childhood lays the foundations for the future, and it is never too early for families to start supporting the mental health of children. KidsMatter was developed to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in children, and to help prevent and identify mental health problems early in life.

KidsMatter has already made a big difference to the lives of Australian children because it unites all the people that influence their mental health most – families, early childhood educators and school staff.
1 Starting school

What is transition?

Transition to school is not just about the first day of school; it is a process that happens over time. It begins when families start to think about and prepare for school, often with support from ECEC services (such as kindergarten, preschool and child care) and primary schools.

This brings about a big change for children and families as they leave familiar settings and the relationships they established with early childhood educators. The process continues as children settle into their new school environment and adjust to new relationships, rules and routines. Some children adjust quickly to school, while others can take many months to adjust. Children will make many transitions during their lives, and supporting them with this important milestone will have long-term benefits.

Importance of transition

Starting school is an important milestone for a child. A positive experience has long-term benefits for future learning and relationships.

Supporting children and families to learn effective skills and strategies during this time will assist them to navigate and manage future transitions.

Whilst transition to school can be different between states and territories, it often marks the point of first engagement with formal schooling for children and families. Research has identified transition to school as a time of potential challenge and stress for children and their families. It involves children and families negotiating and adjusting to a number of changes including a new physical and learning environment, rules and routines, social status and identity, and relationships.

The transition often marks a time of great excitement for families, and many children settle well into school. Other children may experience some adjustment difficulties during the transition period. Research suggests that approximately one-third of children experience some difficulties as they transition from their ECEC service to school. These issues can have social and academic implications if they are not addressed. In addition, the patterns of behaviour and achievement that are established in the initial stages of school can often remain stable beyond the early years. It is important, therefore, to give children positive social and academic experiences from the outset.

Transition to school represents an important time for working with families to support a positive start to school and to promote children’s mental health and wellbeing, social and academic success.
Continuity of learning and transitions is a key focus of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS), which is based on the EYLF. As children make transitions to new settings, early childhood educators and schools commit to sharing information about each child’s knowledge and skills so learning can build on these foundations.

Working with families

The transition to school period is an ideal time to develop positive relationships between families, ECEC services and primary schools. Families play a central role during the transition period and beyond. For example, the literature highlights that parental involvement is an essential part in the successful transition of young children to school. Furthermore, the role of families is a critical factor in fostering children’s mental health and wellbeing. Children with good mental health are better able to learn and develop stronger relationships with teachers at school.

How does KidsMatter support children starting school?

KidsMatter provides a number of evidence-based resources and materials designed for early childhood educators, school staff, and families. It can be accessed direct or to the support the transition program you may already have in place. The following materials may be downloaded freely from www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool:

- Films about starting school – A series of films covering a range of topics with a number of useful ideas and strategies to help children and families make a positive start to school, as well as information on where to get further help if necessary.
- Support guides – Short guides to accompany each film, providing specific suggestions and ideas on how ECEC services and schools can use the resources with families.
- Family information sheets – Information written specifically for families to prepare their child for starting school, containing useful tips, strategies and support.
- This resource, Transition matters.

What ECEC services and schools can do

You have a key role to play during transition. Supporting children as they navigate the move from their ECEC service into primary school has potential to aid their social, emotional and cognitive development. It can also equip children with invaluable skills that help them to deal more effectively with the many additional challenges and transitions that lie ahead through their journey from childhood to adulthood. By working together, families, ECEC services and schools can support children to make a smooth transition to school.

Continuity of learning and transitions is a key focus of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS), which is based on the EYLF. As children make transitions to new settings, early childhood educators and schools commit to sharing information about each child’s knowledge and skills so learning can build on these foundations.
Successful transitions

The KidsMatter transition to school resources can be used to support and add to your ECEC service or school’s existing transition policies and practices. Successful transitions involve considering a range of aspects within your community.

As highlighted in the literature, positive relationships are especially important. The KidsMatter resources are designed to support families, ECEC services and schools to build positive relationships and work together during this important time. Transition matters also contains further ideas for building relationships with families and the wider community.

A child’s transition to school is influenced by their relationships with and between:
- peers
- parents and carers
- ECEC educators in their prior-to-school setting
- staff in their new school
- the wider community.

As early childhood educators and school staff, you can act as the pivotal point between all of these participants; bringing them together to establish transition policies and practices that best meet the needs of all children. Transition is more likely to be successful when these relationships are characterised by reciprocal communication and inclusion, and are responsive and flexible to the needs of all the individuals in the school community.

Reciprocal communication, inclusion, responsiveness and flexibility do not occur naturally. They require a commitment on behalf of your community, with early childhood educators and school staff playing an active role, to work toward building a place where everyone feels a sense of belonging and connection. Working in partnership with families and children requires a commitment to developing transition policies and practices that seek to:
- understand and address their needs
- value their perspective
- provide opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes
- take into account contextual aspects of the community, which all contribute towards building a positive early childhood and school community.

Fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community for children and families not only supports children’s adjustment during transition, but helps to promote long-term mental health and wellbeing.
The KidsMatter model of successful transition to school*

As highlighted in the model, a successful transition for children includes having a sense of belonging to the school community, feeling comfortable and secure in the school environment, and enjoying learning.20–23 The model emphasises that successful transition to school is facilitated by layers of support from families, ECEC services and schools, as well as from the wider community. There are three important aspects to this support: reciprocal communication, responsiveness and flexibility, and inclusion that enable these key people to work together effectively and promote a positive transition. These aspects will be explored in more detail in the following pages. By working together, the whole community can contribute to children’s social and emotional development and foster positive attitudes to self and learning.

*Informed by Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model19
Building positive communities

Creating an early sense of connection with the wider community often begins for families within the ECEC service their child attends. Working collaboratively and developing strong relationships with early childhood educators can enable schools to build on existing connections with families. With conscious and sustained effort, schools can support the further development of meaningful and sustained partnerships with children and their families.

Research shows that family involvement is typically high when children are commencing school. The transition period provides an optimal time to promote children’s and families’ sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community because it is more likely that parents and carers will participate in some part of the transition activities.

Working in partnership and developing positive relationships between and among children, families, early childhood educators and school staff provides a strong foundation for transition, and fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness to the ECEC/school community. This sense of belonging is not only important during transition, but is also a protective factor for children’s mental health.

Building positive relationships is assisted when activities and communication about transition are inclusive, family-friendly and sensitive to the diverse range of cultures, abilities and family circumstances in your ECEC or school community.

Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

This framework recognises that learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when early childhood educators work in partnerships with families.

The EYLF describes childhood as a time of belonging, being and becoming. It highlights that belonging – “knowing where and with whom you belong” – is central to human existence and children’s development (page 6).

A positive school community

Positive relationships at ECEC services and schools enable children and families to feel they are places where they will be welcome, where they will be listened to, and where they can contribute. A positive school community helps children feel that school is a safe place where their needs can be met.

Dockett and Perry argue that the degree to which children, parents and carers adjust to school is influenced by their sense of belonging. It follows that strong connections between parents and carers, ECEC services and schools can help to create a sense of belonging and ease children’s transition to school.


My Time, Our Place – Framework for school aged care in Australia

This framework builds upon the Early Years framework for school staff. It recognises that experiences of relationships and participation in communities contribute to a child’s sense of belonging. School aged children are increasingly involved in a range of communities, including families, schools, school aged care settings, and local communities.
Key aspects of a successful transition

Reciprocal communication

Establishing ongoing communication between the home, ECEC service and school enables everyone to work together effectively to help children achieve a positive start to school.

What is reciprocal communication?

Communication is a two-way, shared process. We communicate with others to make our ideas, needs and desires known, and others communicate back to us to acknowledge and respond to our needs. Truly reciprocal communication develops where there is a sense of mutual respect and empathy between those involved.

Within ECEC services and schools, this communication is driven foremost by the interests and welfare of the child. Transition to school provides an opportunity for schools to establish the practice of good communication with families, supported by existing relationships between schools, families and ECEC services.

For transition to be most successful, it is important that all stakeholders are part of the communication process.

Reciprocal communication is enhanced by positive relationships

Strong lines of communication between families and ECEC services/schools benefits everyone, including families, children, early childhood educators and primary teachers.

Communication can occur on many different levels, for example it can be:

• direct and explicit (e.g., words or writing)
• less explicit (e.g., body language)
• indirect (e.g., the ECEC service or school environment such as wall displays, posters etc).
Communication is most effective when it is:

- clear and consistent
- inclusive and accessible for all families
- reciprocal (i.e., messages are given in both directions with acknowledgment that the message is received)
- evaluative (i.e., it is verified that the message is received and understood)
- flexible (i.e., alternative strategies are used when another is ineffective).

Communicating for a positive transition

Greater communication and a shared understanding between early childhood educators and school staff helps to bridge the differences between these contexts. Transition to school can also be eased when there is continuity in children’s learning experiences. This involves ongoing communication and clear expectations between the home and ECEC service/school settings.

Children

Understanding children’s perspectives about the transition to school are a vital part of planning, as their mental health and wellbeing is central to the transition process. Children have a whole range of thoughts, feelings, emotions and expectations (both positive and negative) about the move from an ECEC service to school. Their perspectives are often quite different from those of adults. Capturing these and incorporating them into transition policies and practices highlights both to the child and their families that their communication is valued.

Families

Regular contact and communication with families can foster positive relationships. Families have a great deal of knowledge and understanding of their child’s needs. For schools, it is crucial to begin building relationships with families as early as possible to ensure this knowledge is incorporated into transition planning. When ECEC services and schools work together, they can build on existing positive relationships with families to help facilitate their participation in the transition process. It helps to foster trust and ongoing reciprocal communication with staff when families feel supported and confident their child’s needs are met.

Some things to consider

- Are there particular points in time during transition when reciprocal communication could be fostered?
- Are children and families actively encouraged to collaborate with early childhood educators and school staff about transition?
- What are the different ways your ECEC service or school communicates?
- Are all your messages to families consistent (e.g., saying: “You can contact me anytime”, but then being difficult to contact due to time commitments)? Do you need to be more clear with set times that are best for you?
Communication within your setting

It is important to ensure that reciprocal communication is valued and practiced within your own ECEC service or school. This includes working together collaboratively with all educators or staff in your setting on shared school transition goals.

Communicating openly will not only assist to delivering positive transition practices, it will also show the wider ECEC or school community that staff members interact in a respectful, open manner and that the voices and opinions of all are valued. It models the type of communication that ECEC services and schools seek to promote in their own community.

Prior to developing or modifying your transition policies and practices, it is helpful for early childhood educators and school staff to consider what they believe is important in supporting children to make a positive transition to school. Reviewing the practices you already have in place will help foster reciprocal communication between early childhood educators, school staff, children, families and relevant community members.

Some things to consider

- **What provisions are there for the voices of children, families, early childhood educators and school staff to be heard and considered to help facilitate a successful transition to school?**
- **How does your service or school share, acknowledge and incorporate the contribution of previous learning and experience?**

### Wider school community

ECEC services, schools, children and families exist within a broader community. A community is influenced by social values, notions of rights and responsibilities, cultural understandings, political institutions, and policies and ideologies. Having knowledge and understanding about the way in which your setting’s broader community influences children and their families will help to create relevant and targeted transition policies. It also fosters important relationships with the members of the broader community, including the health and community sector. Establishing communication between settings and the wider community helps to promote and increase access to health and community services, and assists ECEC services and schools to further understand appropriate referral pathways for children who may be experiencing difficulties.

### Possible channels of communication with educators/staff during transition may include:

- a regular agenda item addressed at staff meetings
- new or updated information during staff briefings

### ECEC services and schools sharing information

A child’s ECEC service provides a rich source of information on the child’s development, needs, strengths and interests as well as the learning environment in which they have been involved. ECEC services will have supported the transition of families into their service, and will have information about what helped the child or family with this process. Although communication between ECEC services and schools centres on the child’s wellbeing, it must also value the benefits of working together to provide continuity in learning and positive relationships. Reciprocal communication can help a child to make a successful transition to school.

When effective reciprocal communication occurs between ECEC services and schools, each setting can feel confident that the wealth of information they contribute can be utilised and valued by the other. It creates a foundation for an ongoing relationship based on respect for each other’s contributions.

Transition matters - A resource for starting school
Inclusion

Inclusion is another key aspect in developing transition policies and practices. Inclusive practices foster reciprocal communication by acknowledging and respecting the diversity of each ECEC and school community.

Dockett and Perry\textsuperscript{15} emphasise:

“The contexts in which children live are influenced by issues such as socioeconomic status, geographical isolation, cultural diversity, parent work patterns, language backgrounds, disability and other special needs. While it is important that this diversity is reflected at a general level in the transition policies and practices, it is imperative that the differences among individuals and individual families within each community are recognised and valued for the richness they bring.” (page 9)

Diversity comes in many different forms including diversity in practices, beliefs and cultures, family structure, additional needs and so on.

By celebrating and promoting the diverse backgrounds of children, families, early childhood educators and school staff, you can make a positive difference to children’s mental health and wellbeing. It will help promote values of mutual respect and understanding. Armed with a broad insight into the needs of families, you will be able to tailor your ECEC service or schools transition policies and practices to acknowledge and value diversity and to be inclusive of all children and families.

Some things to consider

- Are the perspectives of families valued and respected?
- How do you respond to requests made by families (e.g., respecting celebrations, dietary requirements)?
- How do you support staff to understand and respect the beliefs and traditions of various cultures (e.g., through presentations from community members, structured/informal opportunities to share information about cultural backgrounds)?
- Is your transition information (and other materials) presented in modes that are inclusive?
- Do the modes occur at different times and locations?
- Does your ECEC service or school support relevant cultural events?
Things to consider for additional funding

What opportunities have been explored for further funding?

Consider various options:
- community grants
- government agencies
- local sponsorship
- fund-raising.

This may tie in well with your links to the local community and facilitate working relationships.

Some things to consider

- In what ways are your current transition practices responsive to diverse community members?
- Are families invited to participate in ways appropriate to them (e.g., language, culturally respectful)?
- How are transition activities organised to accommodate the various needs of families?
- How does your ECEC service or school cater for individual differences and for the child to experience success in their development and learning?

Responsiveness and flexibility

It will greatly assist the transition process if policies and practices are responsive and flexible to the needs of the ECEC or school community and the individuals within.

Looking closely at the policies and practices throughout all the stages of the transition process will help to assess whether the needs of each child are met. Policies and practices that are adaptive to the needs of children as they arise will generate a sense of trust from families. For instance, ECEC services may focus on practices that facilitate the orientation of children into schooling. In turn, schools may have responsive practices that promote a child’s integration into the setting well before school commences. Families will then see that the ECEC service their child is attending as well as the school they have chosen for their child is focused on their welfare and wellbeing.

Consistently listening to and hearing the voices from all members of the community will show families that the ECEC service or school is open to adapting to everyone’s needs.

Allocation of resources

Adequate resources are necessary to achieve responsive and flexible policies and practices. This includes providing early childhood educators and school staff with time to build relationships and gather resources to help support all key people involved in transition.

In addition, early childhood educators and school staff need time to plan and implement the policies and practices. Funding is often scarce, so ECEC services and schools may need to think creatively about how best to run comprehensive practices. Well-resourced transition practices will help communicate to families that the ECEC service and school is prepared to commit to ensure their children have the best possible start to school.
Thinking about your setting’s philosophy and practices

It is important to consider how the aspects discussed above sit within your ECEC service or school’s existing transition philosophy, policies and practices before you begin any further development. The questions below can help you critically evaluate your environment. Whilst doing so, you may wish to think about how the philosophy and values of your setting might impact on your relationships with stakeholders.

Reflect on your ECEC service or school’s philosophies and values, considering the following:
- What do the practices and processes within your setting communicate to all educators and staff about what is valued?
- What are your expectations of families that are communicated within the ECEC service or school?
- What are the elements that are important in helping children to transition, adjust and develop positively within your setting?
- What role and level of involvement do you want families, early childhood educators, school staff and community members to play in supporting children to transition into school?

After examining your setting’s beliefs, you may wish to ask:
- How are these beliefs documented within your policies?
- How are they translated into action?
- How are they communicated to children and families?

Once you have a clear understanding of your ECEC service or school’s beliefs about helping children and families transition, you can review existing policies and practices. This involves assessing whether they effectively reflect your ECEC service or school’s beliefs, and if they foster a sense of connection for all stakeholders in the transition process. The Planning Tool (page 40) can be used to guide you through this process.

You might also like to consider whether there is a written policy outlining the objectives and procedural requirements of your transition practices, and if it was developed in consultation with all the stakeholders involved in the transition process.

After completing a review of your current policies and practices, you will now be in a position to identify areas for further development and improvement. Allocating time and personnel for planning, developing and implementing the practices will demonstrate a commitment to helping children make a positive transition to school.
2 Planning for transition

So far, a range of questions has been provided to prompt reflection about your ECEC service or school’s transition practices. Along with the Planning Tool (page 40), these questions may be a useful starting point for you to think about what your ECEC service or school presently does well and what areas could be further developed.

It is recommended that your ECEC service or school looks at transition practices that are sustainable, and that tasks are staggered in time, beginning when children are still attending their ECEC service through to the end of their first year of schooling.

After considering the important aspects of transition policies and practices, the next step is to review and modify your practices so that they best meet the needs of your community. In order to do this, your ECEC service or school may like to set up a dedicated transition project with key people to oversee this task. As it takes time to plan for and undertake transition activities, it works well to share the tasks amongst a range of team members.

The next step is to review and modify your practices so that they best meet the needs of your community.

Key aspects of transition policies and practices include:

• reciprocal communication between all stakeholders, including children, families, early childhood educators, school staff and community members
• ensuring policies and practices are inclusive of a diverse community
• flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the individual and the ECEC and school community
• adequate/appropriate allocation of resources.
Who will be involved?

Identifying key people in your ECEC service or school who can work together to review existing transition policies and practices will help to ensure transition is a priority. It communicates to the whole ECEC or school community that there is a strong commitment to supporting children make a positive start to school.

If you are already involved in KidsMatter, members of the school Action Team or ECEC Leadership Team can organise the project as part of their KidsMatter planning. They can also liaise and coordinate with other key people, such as the early years coordinator, the principal/director, other educators, families, and welfare or support staff. The Leadership or Action Team will have likely already established networks with the wider ECEC and school community, whose views will help to inform new processes.

Key people working on the project could collaboratively discuss and work through ideas about how to make the transition policies and practices as effective as possible.

You may like to allocate a key person to coordinate and guide the team through the project.

Some things to consider

- How will the information be shared with the wider community?
- How will consultation be incorporated into the transition policies and practices?
- What additional supports and resources are required for the project to be successful?

Those involved in the project could meet to:

- Discuss how to establish or review your ECEC service or school’s transition policies.
- Engage in consultation with key stakeholders and the wider community.
- Plan transition activities. The Planning Tool (page 40) will assist ECEC services and schools to:
  - critically evaluate current practices and identify strengths and any gaps
  - identify and set specific goals
  - brainstorm strategies
  - discuss any concerns or barriers and means for overcoming them
  - create an action plan
  - evaluate progress.

The team can also act as an advocate for the rest of the ECEC service or school as well as the wider community about the importance of supporting families during transition.
Transition programs are about ensuring children experience a positive start to primary school. The transition represents a big time of changes for children and families as they leave a familiar setting that they may have been involved with for a number of years. It is important that children’s ideas, feelings and perceptions about starting school are used to inform the development and implementation of a transition program. You may like to use the ‘Picture book about me’; ‘My first week at school’; and ‘I am starting school’ templates available at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool. Giving children a voice and spending time talking about what will happen and why helps them to orient to the school environment, relationships and interactions they may encounter. Having the opportunity to get to know children’s strengths and interests will help to establish positive relationships between school staff and children.

Transition practices to fit your community

Transition programs that are tailored to the needs of their individual community are more likely to be successful. Transition does not just impact children and families. It is also a time of change for early childhood educators and schools as they see families come and go. The following section provides a range of strategies and ideas to assist ECEC services and schools to incorporate the key aspects of a successful transition — reciprocal communication, inclusivity, responsiveness and flexibility, and resource allocation between all stakeholders into their existing or new transition policies and practices. These ideas have come from both the literature around starting school and focus groups conducted by the KidsMatter team with parents and carers. You may be doing many of these things and more already.

It is important to remember that these strategies and ideas are not a checklist of all the things that your ECEC service or school need to implement in order to ensure success — not all of the strategies will be applicable to every setting. Furthermore, ECEC services and schools can retain any effective practices that are already in place. These strategies are intended to guide and inform the development of a transition program that meets the needs of the members of your setting, and to support children in making a positive transition to school. This approach will help ensure that your ECEC service or school’s transition program is meaningful and relevant to those in your unique setting.

Discuss how to establish or review your ECEC service or school’s transition policies.

Children

Transition programs are about ensuring children experience a positive start to primary school. The transition represents a big time of changes for children and families as they leave a familiar setting that they may have been involved with for a number of years. It is important that children’s ideas, feelings and perceptions about starting school are used to inform the development and implementation of a transition program. You may like to use the ‘Picture book about me’; ‘My first week at school’; and ‘I am starting school’ templates available at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool.

Giving children a voice and spending time talking about what will happen and why helps them to orient to the school environment, relationships and interactions they may encounter. Having the opportunity to get to know children’s strengths and interests will help to establish positive relationships between school staff and children.
Some things to consider to promote collaboration

- How will you incorporate children’s voices into your transition planning?
- How will you use the KidsMatter films and resources with families?
- How will you support children and families in maintaining continuity of learning, using children’s strengths and previous experiences?
- What feedback do you receive from families regarding the transition process? How will this help inform future practices?
- How could you organise for children to be involved in the transition program with friends from prior settings?
- How does your service or school provide a welcoming environment for families? How does it represent the diversity present in your community?

Ideas for early childhood educators

- Invite children to share their feelings about starting school in any way they like, for example: Drawing, writing, or dictating to an adult. This helps children become more comfortable with the idea of going to school, helps you know what support they might need and can also inform the development of transition programs.
- Invite families to share their thoughts and concerns around leaving a familiar setting and relationships that they have already formed.
- Where equipment is available and parental consent is given, consider recording children talking about starting school. These recordings could be passed onto the school, and could even be used for future transition sessions for families.
- Invite children to share information about themselves, what they like, what they are good at and what they are interested in. This can then be passed onto schools to help staff get to know their new students.

Ideas for school staff

- Invite staff from local schools to visit your ECEC service.
- Find out what you can about the policies and practices of the schools children are going to – that way you can start to practise routines and prepare children for that particular context.
- Provide children with a number of opportunities to visit the school, to meet teachers, and to familiarise themselves with their classroom and school activities before starting school. This will help them start to feel part of the school community.
- Send each of your new children a short note before the start of school to welcome them, and to let them know you are looking forward to meeting them.
- Send your new children a birthday card.
- Provide opportunities for your new children to communicate with you – consider setting up a classroom post box where children can write and send you letters or drawings.
- Give new children a ‘welcome to school pack’ that includes fun activities, a social story about your school, photos of staff and the school grounds.
- Get to know the ECEC service children attended. What was the learning environment like? How was the room set out? What was their typical daily routine?
- Get to know the early childhood educator to help to build children’s trust and sense of security.
- Invite children to visit the school one afternoon per week for the whole of term four.
- Visit children at their ECEC service.
- Invite early childhood educators to visit your school service after children have commenced.
- Invite current school students to be involved during transition (e.g., a buddy system, tour guides).
- Invite children to the school assemblies before school commences.
- Create a visual map of where children live using photographs to link each child’s family into the school community.
What do families say?

• “[The teacher] knew she could talk to him about the sorts of things he really liked doing where he was comfortable and just knew the dynamic of the family. That was really good.”
• “We saw a video of what the children the previous years had done... that was a bit exciting... [you] were seeing what your child might be doing.”
• “...this whole school show bag idea was a great idea where the children were also receiving things as well. I think that’s a brilliant thing.”

Reciprocal communication with families

Working with families has the potential to lead to better outcomes for children both during the transition period and beyond. As highlighted earlier, it involves respectful two-way communication where information is shared and received in both directions. This may be about a child’s development and progress, and events and circumstances at the ECEC service/ school or child’s home.

Communication with families can take many forms, whether it is face-to-face, on the phone, emails or written updates. It may be a good idea to discuss preferred ways to give and receive information with families, and ideal times in the day or week to do this. Looking at a range of ways to touch base can help keep the lines of communication open on a regular basis.

The nature of the communication that ECEC services and school staff have with families can set the tone for the newly-formed relationships. For ECEC services, it can help to speak positively and enthusiastically about school and school staff. As children settle into school, staff members finding ways to communicate good news regularly can help build relationships with families. This helps prevent communication only coming at times when there are difficulties or problems that need resolving. Good news items can include the types of things children are learning (e.g., current curriculum topics), their progress, and ways parents and carers can assist their child’s learning.

Families

Preparing for the transition

The ECEC service and school plays a key role in assisting families through the transition process. Providing information about what is involved and discussing the changes their child is likely to encounter can enhance the confidence of parents and carers and, in turn, their children.10,31,32

A welcoming environment

Creating a welcoming environment helps families feel that they belong to the ECEC service or school community. Your ECEC service or school might like to think about what kind of first impression you give to new families, and how they can be involved in the room or classroom. The way the environment presents to new families can create a lasting impression. It can also affect their sense of belonging and connection to the service or school.
New families and ECEC services can come into contact with the school many times in the lead up to their child’s first day of school. Each encounter is an opportunity for schools to learn about new families and about their needs and expectations.

To facilitate reciprocal communication ECEC services and schools can support families to:

- share any questions or concerns as their child prepares for transition to school
- join in discussions with other families with children starting school
- discuss the school they have chosen for their child
- talk about how they are supporting and encouraging their child at home
- introduce themselves to their child’s teacher and encourage them to keep in contact before, during and after the transition period
- give feedback when their child is enjoying something or finding a particular topic interesting
- attend school events, where possible, to build relationships with, and between, families, children, and school staff
- volunteer and help in the classroom or with other school activities if they are comfortable to do so (e.g., excursions, fetes) as a way of having regular contact
- provide ideas for how ECEC services and schools can increase family involvement.

ECEC services and schools can support families to communicate with them by:

- Providing spaces and places for the voices of families to be heard.
- Developing positive working relationships/partnerships. Receiving positive feedback (e.g., thanking them for their contribution) can help families who are less confident to build a positive and trusting relationship.
- Planning to contact each family during the weeks prior to and after starting the school year to tell them something positive their child has done. This could be done in person or with a phone call or email. Some settings use websites and blogs to communicate general information about what is going on.

Communication timeline

Reciprocal communication can occur:

- when families decide which school their child will attend
- when families prepare to leave the ECEC service
- on orientation day
- at enrolment
- in the entry interview
- during transition activities
- at the end of the year prior to commencement
- in the week prior to commencement
- on the first day
- during the first week of school
- within the first month
- throughout the first term
- on an ongoing basis.

Some things to consider

- What information and communication might families, ECEC services, schools, and children each want at these various points?
- Is your ECEC service or school meeting these needs?
• Holding regular family forums to share thoughts and ideas on a range of issues including starting school. Alternate forums between the daytime and evenings so those with time constraints can attend and you can reach a wider range of families. Be mindful of language and cultural needs that may impact on participation.

Of course these are just some suggestions. Finding out about your families and how they feel comfortable communicating with you and each other will be an important first step.

You may also like to refer to www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool for a useful tool for educators and teachers to track their communication with each child’s family.

Is communication in your setting reciprocal?

• What methods of communication do you currently use?

• How do you ensure communication accessible for all families? Do you need to provide information in different languages, or via verbal communication?

• How well publicised are the transition activities?

• How do you encourage families to share their views and contribute to the ECEC service and school’s decision-making? Think about different ways they can contribute their views (e.g., discussion groups, suggestion boxes, parent resource room).

• How can families communicate with their early childhood educators and school staff?

• What opportunities are there in the materials and meetings within your transition practices that allow children and families to share information about themselves and their hopes and expectations of starting school?

Communicating regularly with families

• Host information sessions with a number of different speakers on a range of topics.

• Use communication diaries or books.

• Compile photo journals of children engaging in a variety of activities noting alongside any comments, questions and comments children generate.

• Send home short notes and notices to keep families up-to-date.

• Use email, short phone calls and face-to-face meetings to communicate with families.

• Send newsletters or updates to help keep families aware of important upcoming dates for their child.

• Create a communication board that contains spare copies of newsletters, notices, permission slips and other important information.

• Use whole-service or school gatherings and assemblies to showcase all the great things children are doing and working on. Early childhood educators, primary teachers and children themselves can be invited to present their works.

• Make space for a family resource space where information can be displayed.

• Provide a suggestion box.
Encouraging family involvement

Maintaining transition policies and practices has been associated with improved academic achievement and greater self-initiated parental involvement in a child’s first year of schooling. Parental involvement has implications for children’s long-term academic success. The literature suggests a collaborative approach is more likely to result in substantial and sustained improvements for children when families, ECEC services, schools and other organisations work together to promote social and emotional learning. Therefore, investing time and effort into supporting families during transition to school not only has the potential to support better outcomes for children in their first year of schooling and beyond, but could also be viewed as an optimal time to encourage ongoing family involvement. Such involvement allows families to connect, get to know other community members, and gain a sense of satisfaction from contributing to their child’s school.

Involvement can come in many forms – all of which are perfectly valid. Talking to families and finding out how they would like to be involved will help to strengthen your relationships and encourage families to be involved in a way that is right for them.

Some families may choose not to be involved in certain activities within your ECEC or school setting for a range of reasons – for example, a lack of time, lack of confidence, or difficulties with transport. In such cases, you may need to look at other ways to create a sense of belonging. Collaborating with families about ways that they can be involved in their child’s care or education at home can enable more parents and carers to participate. Research has found that while parental involvement at school may decline over the years, involvement in their child’s learning at home remains stable.

Being proactive and reaching out to families will enable ECEC services and schools to understand how families can be supported to engage on a level that is appropriate for them. Regardless of how families participate, they have an integral role in their child’s social, emotional and academic learning. It is helpful for ECEC services, schools and families to work together to promote social and emotional learning.
Over time, family involvement in your service or school may help to build a collaborative partnership.

themselves to recognise and value this role. Over time, family involvement in your service or school may help to build a collaborative partnership. This is where families, ECEC services and schools can work together to promote the mental health and wellbeing of a child.

This can be done by identifying both the families who attend the ECEC service or school regularly, as well as those who are rarely seen. If a pattern emerges, it can help you to consult with the families who are rarely seen to try and find ways to create connections.

Continually assessing the manner in which you communicate and engage with families can help to ensure your efforts are effective. Communication about developmental or learning tasks being undertaken enables parents and carers to work with their children at home to support children’s development and learning.

The involvement of families is important for children during transition and also throughout their schooling. See page 30 for more information on barriers to communication and involvement, and some strategies for reducing these.

Some other ideas

• Send parents and carers photos of their child engaged in activities in the setting/classroom by email.
• Nominate a designated place where families can meet informally (e.g., a parent’s room or local café).
• Schedule social events (e.g., picnics, sausage sizzles, barbeques).
• Provide name tags at events.
• Provide a range of creative options for families to connect (e.g., online social networking).

Supporting relationships between families

The transition to school is also an opportune time for developing relationships between families, which can improve parental social support and reduce social isolation. These networks can be encouraged within the ECEC service and carried through into school. The positive interactions associated with family support networks can help to build parental capabilities and confidence in supporting their children’s social competencies, reduce family stress, and have a positive impact on children’s wellbeing.

Social events organised by the ECEC services and schools can be a useful means to facilitate social connections. Giving thought to how families are supported to build connections at these events, rather than assuming it will occur naturally, will help to ensure that all families feel included.

Some things to think about

• How would families in your ECEC service/school community like to be involved?
• Does your service/school offer a range of activities (structured and unstructured) for families to become involved?
• Are resources made available to support family participation (e.g., childcare, transport, translator etc)?
Parents and carers

“I think we’re very lucky here with the canteen as a cafe... I think that provides for informal opportunities, that you just happen to be sitting around a table with someone you haven’t met yet.”

“But then again of course those new parents have to be identified and other people have to be willing to go up and say hi...”

“...when you’re new, you don’t feel like you can waltz up. There’s already a community there and you want to be part of it...”

“Matching families [in a ‘buddy-system’] is quite a good idea I think.”

ECEC services and schools working together

Fostering reciprocal communication to meet the needs of all children

Continuity of learning between the ECEC service and school promotes positive transition practices. Both settings working together collaboratively helps to promote a smooth transition. ECEC services have often developed a wealth of knowledge regarding a child’s abilities, strengths, and what helps them to learn best. Consulting with, and passing this information onto schools, enables schools to better understand the meet the needs of children and families who will be commencing. This may include the child’s previous environment, their interests, and key members of staff. Sharing information can assist schools to develop knowledge and awareness of the needs of new children and their families.

When schools visit ECEC services it can help children to build connections with their new teacher. It also gives children and families a chance to meet school staff in a setting in which they already feel comfortable. It allows teachers to develop a working relationship with those who have been with the child in the year prior to starting school.

Maintaining communication with school even after the children commence can also be very helpful. This enables early childhood educators to get a sense of how their transition preparation worked in helping children to move to school positively. It also creates an atmosphere in which early childhood educators can be consulted in the case where a child and/or family are finding transition difficult. This knowledge of the child and family could prove valuable in considering why difficulties have arisen and what strategies may work to navigate any challenges.

Finding the time and resources to develop these relationships can prove challenging. Schools and early childhood educators may wish to choose one or two suggestions from page 28 as a way of working towards ongoing communication between both settings.
Exchanging information between ECEC services, families and school

A standard template is one way to transfer transition information consistently between ECEC services, families and the school. This ‘transition statement’ provides an opportunity for children, families and educators/staff to contribute and have their views reflected.

A transition statement could include:
1. Important information about the child and their family.
2. Some background information on the child’s family, family members, languages spoken at home.
3. The child’s strengths and interests.
4. The child’s learning style.
5. The child’s environment prior to school entry (e.g., childcare, kindergarten, family day care).
6. The child’s views on starting school (e.g., the things they are looking forward to).

By creating a standard template, teachers will have a better understanding of the child. This can help plan their learning program, to support a positive start to school for each child. It can also be used as a tool for communication and collaboration between families and educators/staff for the whole year.

For an example template, see the Victoria Department of Education and Childhood Development:

Involving all levels of the school community

- How are all members of the school community involved?
- How is information on transition communicated more widely to the rest of the staff?
- How do support staff become informed of transition practices?

School staff

Developing a whole-school approach

Children and families commencing primary school are making a transition into the school community. By taking a whole-school approach, schools signal to children and their families that they are part of a community that will work together to ensure a smooth transition.

Some ideas for taking a whole-school approach:

- Designate time in a staff meeting to address transition issues. Ask all school staff to think about how their practices relate to new children and families starting school. Consider what part each of the various staff play in making children and families welcome in the school.
- Look at the connections within the school between different teachers and teaching staff (specialist teachers, learning support teachers and aides), office staff, and before and after school care staff. What role can they play to support transition?
- Include visual information in the transition information packs for parents and carers (e.g., photos) to show key staff such as the principal, deputy principal, office staff and before and after school staff. This could be supplemented in the first weeks of school with photographs of all staff members in the school (many schools do this through their newsletter). There is a staff contacts template you may find useful at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool.
- Have teachers introduce themselves and share the role they play in the school at the first assembly of the year.
- Create opportunities for all staff to meet with the children who are starting. This will help familiarising teachers and children with new faces. Some schools take the children to other classrooms during the transition activities.
- Invite early childhood educators to accompany families on school visits or events during the orientation period.
Ideas to foster reciprocal communication between ECEC services and schools

- Stay in periodic telephone contact.
- Arrange for school staff to visit and observe children at the ECEC service.
- Form a network that meets once a term to discuss topics related to the curriculum, development, learning, and transition. Meetings could be arranged in both settings.
- Share professional development activities on topics relevant to both settings.
- Arrange for educators/staff to meet face-to-face in both settings.
- Arrange family meetings and discussions to share and gather information about the child (e.g., routines, strengths, interests) and any concerns about starting school (in a setting where the family feels most comfortable whenever possible).
- Provide feedback to the ECEC service or school and acknowledge the usefulness of the information sent and how it has been incorporated.
- Plan together for supporting children and families during transition.
- Attend important milestones of the children in each setting, for example, a birthday celebration, their first assembly presentation and so on.
- Share information e.g., ECEC services providing information about children’s early development, learning styles, and strengths. Schools giving information back on children’s progress.
- Acknowledge the commitment of educators/staff from both settings to maintain reciprocal communication (e.g., mention it in the school’s newsletter).

Useful information for schools includes:

- individual children’s strengths, interests, and how they learn best
- services and support that the child has received prior to their entry in the school
- techniques and strategies that assist the child to settle in
- the child’s views of starting school and what they may be looking forward to or are worried about.

Diversity in prior to school experiences

- Not all children will have attended an early childhood service.
- How might information gathered about their prior to school experiences? How will you get to know the family?
Community

ECEC services and primary schools exist within wider communities.

Working to develop reciprocal communication with the broader community and developing an understanding of services and supports available to families will assist the transition to school. ECEC services and schools will be able to utilise the strong connections the other has made with different organisations in the local community. This collaboration helps to benefit families.

Ideas for engaging with the broader community

- Designate an early childhood educator/staff member to research community locations/services that enable different children and families to engage with one another (e.g., local libraries, swimming pools, parks, playgrounds, and sporting clubs).
- Compile a list of support services available in the community for families that may require extra support.
- Link to and work with local agencies (e.g., have story time with a transition theme at a local library, organise community centre staff [i.e., a school nurse] to visit the school).
- Establish local parenting groups for new families, either in the ECEC/school grounds or in the local community.
- Explore the resources within the community that could be utilised to support transition practices (e.g., engage guest speakers, identify suitable places to meet, identify specialised education libraries, identify specialised support groups [autism, learning difficulties etc]).
- Meet and communicate with representatives from relevant cultural groups to learn about the potential needs of your multicultural families, and to gain a cultural perspective for any issues that may arise.

Some things to think about

- How are the specific aspects of local communities reflected in the transition programs?
- How are community agencies informed about what is occurring in the school and how they can contribute?
- Does the ECEC service or school have a list of local resources and organisations that families can access?
- Are there clear communication processes and are they flexible and responsive to the ECEC/school’s needs?

Local community groups could work with ECEC services/schools to help develop information sheets and brochures for families in different languages. The brochures could then be launched as a community event by the local mayor or community representative.
Promoting inclusion and participation

The flowchart (page 15) and questions throughout this booklet will have assisted you to think about how your ECEC service or school’s philosophy and values may affect families and children’s ability to participate within your setting. Thinking about this and the nature of the families starting school will enable you to consider what barriers might exist in engaging with all children and their families.

Factors such as speaking English as a second language, family and work commitments, being a single parent, and having younger children make it harder for families to access information and participate in transition activities.23,42,43

The following information covers key barriers and ideas for helping to overcome them. Your ECEC service or school may have some that are not listed here. The key to overcoming barriers relating to reciprocal communication and involvement is to find ways to engage with families. This will often require modifying the traditional ways in which communication takes place and listening to what families are seeking rather than directing how communication will be undertaken.

Some strategies for promoting inclusion

- Communicate with families to find out what promotes and what prevents their participation.
- Consider each family individually. What are their needs and what might the school be able to do to adapt to these?

Obtaining an understanding of each family’s situation will assist the ECEC service or school to be responsive to their needs and adapt their practices to promote inclusion.

Some strategies for overcoming language barriers

- Use specific materials for those who speak languages other than English.
- Involve respected members of cultural communities in delivering transition activities. Be mindful not to assume that because people are from the same background that they will work to support each other. Ask if there is someone within the community who would be willing and able to assist in communication.
- Have bilingual educators/teachers, teacher aides, office staff or interpreters available to support families from linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Have children’s books in a range of languages for members of the community to borrow.
- Have a resource list of places within the community that can supply books in a range of languages relevant to your community.
- Set up connections and support networks for parent and carers from the same cultural backgrounds.

Overcoming barriers to communication and involvement

Language and cultural diversity

All communities bring with them a range of languages and cultures. Indeed, within seemingly singular cultural groups there will be a lot of diversity. Collecting information from all families on their cultural opportunities and differences, and identifying their strengths and what they can bring to the ECEC or school community, can assist your ECEC service and school to be inclusive of the diverse range of cultures. Your community may be able to provide the means and resources for overcoming many of these language barriers (e.g., libraries with books in multiple languages, members of the community, or community services such as interpreters and translation).
Past experiences of the education system

There will be some families for whom involvement in the education system has not been a positive experience. They may feel apprehensive about coming into the ECEC service/school and talking to educators and school staff. The manner in which these families are supported and welcomed will be vital in helping to change this perception.

Different understandings of families roles within the learning/education of children

Families can see the role of the ECEC service or school in the care or education of their child differently. Some may come from a tradition where the service/school is seen as having absolute control and authority over the child’s learning and education. Some may believe because of their lack of formal education or language barriers that they are not able to contribute to their child’s education. In contrast, some families will have strong views on care/education and see themselves as having an active and directive role.

Time and care constraints

The demands of work and caring for younger children may prevent many families from attending events. Ensure that all families have the opportunity to be involved and informed so it is clear that your setting respects family diversity and desires to work collaboratively.

Some strategies for increasing positive experiences

- Meet families in a setting that they are familiar with, such as ECEC service, school, and in the presence of other people they are familiar with.
- Invite families into the service/school regularly to see their children playing or working.
- Enable families to tour the service/school on request, visit the playground and rooms, and allow extended families to be involved.
- Make a point of engaging in conversation with all families.

Some strategies for encouraging families to see themselves as joint educators

- Talk to families about the benefits of involvement in their children’s learning/schooling.
- Provide ideas for how they can support their children’s learning.
- Consult with families around how they would like to be involved and what activities/excursions they value.
- Acknowledge any level of involvement.
- Be respectful of the manner in which families choose to engage.

Some strategies for overcoming time and care constraints

- Have information sessions at various times, and alternate times and days to cater for working parents.
- Provide childcare for younger children during the day or evening, so that families can attend events with their child.
- Survey families about times that will suit them.
- Provide alternatives to attending physically (e.g., written summaries, video tape information sessions, online forums).
Evaluating and reviewing your transition policies and practices

Now that you have taken the time to think through all the various aspects that contribute to a successful transition, the next important step is evaluating your transition policies and practices. Similarly to the development of the policies and practices, the evaluation should include input and feedback from all stakeholders. Effective evaluations use multiple methods of obtaining feedback and use a range of different respondents. These may include informal conversations between different stakeholders (including families) about what is working, or more formal methods such as surveys or forums. Having regular reviews ensures that the policies and practices continue to remain relevant over time. Evaluations are not only a chance to make any necessary adjustments, they are also an opportunity to share and celebrate your successes.

When reviewing your transition practices:

- document your achievements
- reflect on what you have learned and any new skills gained
- consider what worked well
- consider what didn’t work well, or as well as you hoped
- decide what could be done differently next time.

The Planning Tool (page 40) will help you to get started on the evaluation of your current practices and help you to create an action plan for the future.

Your ECEC service or school will have laid the foundation for effective ongoing partnerships, having reflected upon, planned and implemented transition policies and practices that have, as their central philosophy, the desire to develop respectful reciprocal communication with children, families and the community.
Children’s voices in evaluation and review

There are a range of different ways children might be prompted to give feedback about your ECEC service or school’s transition practices.

For example, you might consider:

- story-telling
- drawings
- playing with figures or puppets
- role playing
- online forums
- voice recordings.

Other transitions

In looking ahead, consider how these policies and practices can support other transitions:

- Children transferring from another ECEC service/ school
- The primary to secondary transition
- Transition for families that move services/ states frequently (e.g., military families)

These transition policies and practices link closely to the KidsMatter Components.

**Creating a positive ECEC and school community:**

Encouraging reciprocal communication and respectful relationships within your community that will promote a positive community.

**Developing children’s social and emotional skills:**

Providing families with information and strategies for supporting children’s social and emotional learning.

**Working with parents and carers:**

Supporting parenting and facilitating the development of positive relationships with and between parents and carers.

**Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties:**

Creating an environment where families feel comfortable to seek assistance from your ECEC service or school.

**Looking forward**

The early relationships that develop as children leave their ECEC service and start school can grow into collaborative partnerships. Working together and developing positive relationships between and among children, families, early childhood educators and school staff not only provides a strong foundation for transition, but also develops partnerships for learning that continue throughout primary school.

ECEC services and schools are already doing much work towards assisting children and their families to adjust to school and transition positively. It is hoped that by reading Transition matters, your ECEC service and school will have some new ideas and strategies to enhance your current practices and help families make a positive start to school.
References


27 Dockett S, Perry B. Starting school in Australia is ‘a bit safer, a lot easier and more relaxing’: issues for families and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Early Years. 2005; 25:271-281.


# Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjustment to school</strong></td>
<td>Refers to both academic and social and emotional outcomes. It includes feeling a sense of belonging, liking school and learning, and feeling comfortable and secure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services</strong></td>
<td>Describes any organisation or structure providing early childhood education and child care. It includes childcare centres, preschools, family day care schemes, kindergartens and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Years Learning Framework</strong></td>
<td>Australia’s first national learning framework for early childhood professionals developed by the Council of Australian Governments (2009). It is a guide which provides goals for children’s learning to assist ECEC services to develop their programs for children aged birth to five.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>A broad term that includes individuals who take on an involved role in the child’s life. It does not only include those who are biologically related to the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First year of school</strong></td>
<td>The first year of formal schooling known by a variety of names across Australia: preparatory, kindergarten, transition, reception, and pre-primary. The compulsory age for when children must start school also differs across states and territories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Encompasses a broad range of activities and interactions both in and out of the school. It ranges from formal and direct to less formal and indirect participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental health</strong></td>
<td>The capacity to enjoy and benefit from satisfying family life and relationships and educational opportunities, and to contribute to society in a number of age-appropriate ways. It also includes freedom from problems with emotions, behaviours or social relationships that are sufficiently marked or prolonged that can lead to suffering or risk to optimal development in the child, or to distress or disturbance in the family (Raphael, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental health in early childhood</strong></td>
<td>Involves being able to experience, manage, and express emotions; form close, satisfying relationships; and explore and discover the environment (Zero to Three, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental health difficulties</strong></td>
<td>Describes a broad range of emotional and behavioural difficulties that cause concern or distress and frequently affect children’s learning as well as their behaviour in different settings. A term used interchangeably with ‘mental health problems’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents and carers</strong></td>
<td>Those who have a responsibility to raise and care for a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnership</strong></td>
<td>Refers to a collaborative relationship based on the understanding of shared aims and goals between members of the ECEC and school community. It includes a shared responsibility for the education and wellbeing of children at ECEC services and school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protective factors</strong></td>
<td>Can be thought of as strengths that enable children to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing even though risk factors for mental health problems are present. May include aspects of the child’s individual abilities, their family circumstances and relationships or their early childhood service’s practices and environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk factors</strong></td>
<td>Increase the likelihood that mental health problems will develop. Are commonly categorised in relation to individual factors, family factors, specific life events or circumstances, and social factors. The presence of a particular risk factor does not necessarily mean a difficulty will develop. The presence of multiple risk factors usually increases the likelihood of difficulties developing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School community</strong></td>
<td>Encompasses school staff and children, and also includes families and other people and organisations in the wider community that have relationships with a school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>Refers to any person or organisation who are involved in the transition process including the child, families, school staff, early childhood staff and other members of the school and wider community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition period</strong></td>
<td>A process that happens over time. Refers to the time from when children are beginning to get ready to start school until the time when they have adjusted to school, as opposed to a single point in time such as the day or week they commence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wellbeing</strong></td>
<td>Refers to the condition or state of being well, contented and satisfied with life. Has several components, including physical, mental, social and spiritual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional resources on transition to school

**Australian resources available online**

- **Canberra Preschool Society** has an article on transition to school:
  
  *Transition to School: Looking forward*
  
  by Kay Margetts (1999)

  This paper looks at the challenges and discontinuities during transition, factors influencing adjustment to school and effective transition programs.
  

- **Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children’s Hospital** has two policy briefs on transition to school:
  
  - *Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services – Policy Brief No 11*

    This brief focuses on what the research tells us about the nature of and pathways to school readiness. It emphasises the importance of schools, services and communities supporting children and families and providing the conditions and experiences needed to ensure that all children reach school able to take advantage of the educational and social learning experiences that schools provide.


  - *Rethinking School readiness – Policy Brief No 10*

    This Policy Brief summarises the research evidence regarding transition to school, including strategies that aim to make it a smooth and successful process for children and their families.


**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations** has a framework for family school partnerships:

- *Family – School Partnerships Framework. A guide for schools and families*

  This document focuses on partnerships between Australian families and schools and includes principles and strategies to guide the development of these partnerships.


**Early Childhood Research & Practice** has an article on effective transition to school programs:

- *Starting School: effective transitions* by Sue Dockett and Bob Perry (2001)

  This paper focuses on effective transition-to-school programs. Using a framework of 10 guidelines developed through the Starting School Research Project, it provides examples of effective strategies and transition programs.


**Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** has specific information about starting school and transition to school in Victoria, including the Transition Learning and Development Statement and information.


There is also an article on children’s perspectives of starting school:

- ‘They need to know’: children’s perspectives of starting school by Kay Margetts (2009)

International resources

Early Childhood Research & Policy Briefs has a brief on transition to school in the USA:

Transition to Kindergarten

This Policy Brief looks at what US schools do to support transition and discusses required policy changes and areas for further study.


Books on transition to school


A joint initiative by Early Childhood Australia and the Australian Primary Principals Association.

It is a resource for staff to use to support parents and carers in the first year of school and contains information about starting school, learning and development, learning at school, the parent school partnership and working together to solve problems.


This book contains articles on current research, policy and practice in early childhood transitions from a variety of international perspectives. It is written for educators, practitioners, policy makers and researchers. The articles cover models of transition, research regarding children’s experience of transition and the experiences of parents and professional supporting transitions.


This book is based upon the ongoing findings of the Australian Starting School Research Project.

It discusses readiness for school, children’s, families’ and educators’ perspectives on starting school and community aspects of starting school.

It has been written for early childhood education researchers, practitioners and students.


This book is written for early childhood educators and contains information on planning transition programs.

It discusses starting school, the importance of a positive start to school, the ecological model of transition, school readiness, building relationships, planning transition – people and processes, and establishing collaborative teams.

Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families and schools, by R.C. Pianta & M. Kraft-Sayre (2004). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. This book is written for educators, administrators, and family support specialists. Successful kindergarten transition introduces a model that has been adopted in diverse schools and communities in the USA. It contains information on a developmental approach to transition, planning transition, transition practices and the assessment, evaluation and revision of transition plans.
3 Planning Tool

What is the Planning Tool?

The Planning Tool helps you look at your current transition practices. Of course, how these look may vary greatly depending on whether you work in a school, a preschool or some other ECEC service. Once you have an understanding of what you already do, the tool can help develop your process further. Focusing on the key elements discussed throughout Transition matters, the Planning Tool will help you to think about your practices with regard to the usual stakeholders in your community. Typically, this will include children, families, early childhood educators, school staff and community services.

The Planning Tool consists of four parts:

- **Part 1:** Identifying strengths and gaps
- **Part 2:** Focusing and prioritising
- **Part 3:** Planning for action
- **Part 4:** Evaluation and reflection

How to use this tool

This tool is one way for you to get together with other educators/staff members from your service/school and review your current transition processes. Record your responses in the tool provided, you may also have other methods to help you along the way. Once you have recorded your responses, we recommend you meet with the alternate ECEC or school setting and share how you responded. This will help you to collaboratively identify current planning needs to build upon your current transition program.
PART 1: Identifying strengths and gaps

Use this part of the tool to identify your strengths and any areas that could be improved. This can be achieved by looking at your current transition practices in relation to each stakeholder. Completion of this section can be flexible. You might decide to discuss each item as a team or instead have each team member complete the form individually to be discussed and collated together.

Suggestion: Make the planning process more manageable by identifying just one stakeholder to focus on at a time (ie families, children, early childhood educators, school staff, or the community services).

PART 2: Focusing and prioritising

Use this tool to look at your transition practices in greater detail with your identified stakeholders. You will find references to relevant sections throughout Transition matters to help you answer many of the questions. Identifying the strengths (and any gaps) your stakeholders, will help your team decide what areas to improve on or develop.

Suggestion: This tool is structured so that teams can choose to focus on one stakeholder at a time. If you decide to do this, you need only complete the section of Part 2 that relates to the stakeholder identified. Revisit the planning tool and focus on a different stakeholder once your first plan is in place.

PART 3: Planning for action

This simple four-step action planning process will help your team to:

- establish aims and set goals
- brainstorm strategies allocate resources and roles evaluate progress.

Suggestion: Feel free to incorporate other templates you are used to using to enhance your planning process.

PART 4: Evaluation and reflection

Celebrate your successes and think about some of the challenges in implementing your action plan in this section. Use Part 4 to determine where you would like to go next.

Feel free to incorporate other templates you are used to using to enhance your planning process.
## PART 1: Identifying strengths and gaps

**What do you already do in your setting to support children and their families during transition?**

Think about your current practices during transition (remember transition refers to a broad period of time). How does your setting work with the various stakeholders to support children and their families in making a positive transition? List these practices under the relevant section below. The aim is to identify and acknowledge your existing strengths, and to start thinking about areas for further development. It is possible that there will be some overlap (ie a tour of the new school would be relevant in both the **children** and **families** boxes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you work directly with families of children starting school (include strategies to foster relationships between families)?</th>
<th>How do you work directly with children starting school (include strategies to foster relationships between children)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you work with educators and staff from the places children are coming from or going to? How do these practices support children and their families?</th>
<th>How do you work with the community services to support children and their families (this might include afterschool care services, community centres, ESL services and other professionals)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please give an overall rating of the transition practices you have listed for each of these groups (if any).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good but some improvement could be made</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Poor, many aspects could be improved</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families of children starting school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children starting school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood educators or school staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This will help to give a visual representation of where your service or school is currently at with each of the stakeholders.

Considering the above list and ratings, what are your strengths?

Where can you make improvements? Which stakeholder could you start with?

Focusing on one stakeholder at a time, complete the PART 2 survey for your chosen stakeholder. You and your team can then identify specific goals and strategies for that stakeholder.
### Children starting school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Relevant pages in Transition Matters*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal communication</td>
<td>We encourage ongoing communication between children and all educators/staff during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pages 10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We encourage children to share their experiences of starting school and their views of what is important during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We use the voices of children to evaluate and inform the development of transition policies and practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>We make an active effort promote inclusion for all children and make all families feel welcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s strengths, interests and abilities are valued and integrated into transition planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All educators/staff are aware of the cultural and family backgrounds of children who will be starting school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness and flexibility</td>
<td>We aim to promote continuity between transition settings by sharing experiences, learning and development of children who are starting school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition policies and practices are flexible and respond to the individual needs of children as they arise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>We foster a sense of belonging and connectedness to our local community by building positive relationships with children during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We provide opportunities for children to develop positive relationships with their peers and the other members of the community during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Considering your team’s responses to the above questions, what are your strengths?**

**What areas could be improved?**

---

*See pages 21-23 for strategies relating to children*
### Families of children starting school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Relevant pages in Transition Matters*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal communication</td>
<td>We encourage ongoing reciprocal communication between all staff and families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pages 10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We encourage families to share their views about the transition policies and practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We use the voices of families to evaluate and inform the development of their transition policies and practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Transition activities and information are accessible to all families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The program takes into account the contexts of the families within the local community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness and flexibility</td>
<td>There are a range of different opportunities for new families to be involved in and engage with our ECEC or school community during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition policies and practices are flexible and respond to the individual needs of families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>We promote sustained engagement and involvement with all families across the transition period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Families are provided with opportunities to establish ongoing networks and supportive connections with educators, teachers, and other families and the wider community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Considering your team’s responses to the above questions, what are your strengths?**

**What areas could be improved?**

*See pages 21-26 and 34 for strategies relating to families*
### Early childhood educators/school staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant page/s in Transition Matters*</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing communication occurs between early childhood educators and school staff (e.g., by acknowledging any information received, looking for opportunities to send information back to the alternate setting)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pages 10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All educators and staff are encouraged to share their views and contribute to the development and evaluation of the transition program at the setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transfer of information between transition settings aims to provide continuity for families during the transition to school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The contributions of all educators/staff are valued and incorporated during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use information provided by early childhood educators or school staff to help plan transition and classroom activities (e.g., information about children’s previous learning and experiences, information about children’s early experiences of starting school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All educators/staff actively seek opportunities to build positive relationships with educators/staff from other transition settings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Considering your team’s responses to the above questions, what are your strengths?**

**What areas could be improved?**

*See pages 27-28 for strategies relating to early childhood educators/school staff*
### The community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reciprocal communication</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Relevant page/s in Transition Matters*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have established links with the local community to assist families to receive support and information during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pages 10-12 and 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We share information about our practices during transition with the local community, including community agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>We encourage members of the community to be involved and contribute during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All educators/staff are aware of the resources and connections in the community that can assist families during transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness and flexibility</td>
<td>Transition practices have been developed with consideration of the context of the local community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition practices are flexible and responsive to changing needs in the community (e.g., changes in demographics or culture, government policies, significant events, availability of resources)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>We actively seek opportunities to build positive relationships with the local community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What are your strengths (considering your team’s responses to the above questions)?**

**What areas could be improved?**

*See page 29 for strategies relating to the community*
PART 3: Planning for action

Use the responses from the stakeholder profiles in Part 2 to select goals and strategies for improving your transition practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are your aims?</th>
<th>Tips for the action plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based upon your responses in PARTS 1 and 2</td>
<td>Your team may have multiple aims. Prioritise these so that you are able to focus on one at a time. Select your first priority and decide the actions required to achieve it. As you work through, keep in mind that aims could require further refining. As you complete your plan, you may need to revisit and revise your goals in order to have an action plan that is realistic and achievable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Break your aim into smaller more manageable goals | |
| Select a specific goal that you would like to work towards | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder:</th>
<th>Aim:</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Tips for the action plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm strategies for achieving this goal</td>
<td>Select one or more strategies for your action plan</td>
<td>How will this goal be measured (i.e., how will you know when you have achieved your goal?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Barriers or concerns | What concerns or barriers are there to achieving this goal or implementing these strategies? | Brainstorm strategies for overcoming these concerns or barriers | Select the one or more strategies for overcoming these concerns/barriers |
### ACTION PLAN
Which strategies (one or more) you will use to achieve your goal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips for the action plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make sure that your goal is specific enough to allow you to evaluate whether your goal has been achieved. Breaking down the strategies you plan to use into steps will help towards achieving your goal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Allocation of staff and resources
Who will be involved? | What roles will each person play? | What resources do you plan to use to support the achievement of your goal (e.g., time, funding, materials)? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allocation of resources and educators/staff as part of your action plan is an important step towards realising your goal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Evaluation
How will you evaluate whether you have achieved your goal? | Who will be involved in the evaluation? | When do you plan to conduct your evaluation? How do you plan to feed back to the stakeholders? How will the results be used? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure that your new practices remain relevant by evaluating and reviewing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Celebrate your successes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What worked well?</th>
<th>What do you think made them successful?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Collect the feedback of all the stakeholders involved when assessing what worked well. It is also important to consider whether you are now closer to reaching your overall aim.

## Allocation of staff and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you come across any barriers?</th>
<th>How were these resolved?</th>
<th>How might these be resolved?</th>
<th>What could have worked better?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This information could be used in later planning and implementation or a broad range of programs.

## Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What has your team gained from the experience (e.g., knowledge, new skills)</th>
<th>What could be done next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Think about what stage in the planning process would be helpful to revisit in order to plan your next step.
Communication resources

How do you connect?
Making families feel welcome takes regular contact. Communication can take many forms and may include face-to-face discussions, letters sent home, or email contact.

The KidsMatter website (www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool) contains handy communication ideas and templates to help your ECEC service/school connect with families and children about starting school. These tools are free for you to download and use, or as a starting point for creating similar tools that work better for you.

Keep in mind that any information you provide should be accessible to all families. Catering to the needs of everyone often takes a lot of perseverance in order to reach everyone in the community.

What you’ll find:
Some of the resources you will find on the KidsMatter website:

• Picture books for children
• Ideas for talking to children about starting school
• Classroom contact lists
• Communication trackers
• Example templates for regular communication
This KidsMatter resource was written and produced by the Australian Psychological Society on behalf of KidsMatter

Acknowledgement
The KidsMatter Initiatives have been developed in collaboration with beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society, the Principals Australia Institute, Early Childhood Australia and, with funding from, the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and beyondblue.

Disclaimer
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Important Notice
KidsMatter Australian Primary Schools Mental Health Initiative, KidsMatter Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative, and any other KidsMatter mental health initiatives are not to be confused with other businesses, programs or services which may also use the name ‘Kidsmatter’.

Important Recommendation
The information contained in this work is best used after receiving appropriate training and support, that is available through the relevant KidsMatter Initiatives.

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