Video 3: Understanding behaviour
Leaders Guide
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 beyondblue.

Disclaimer

While every care has been taken in preparing this work, Beyond Blue Ltd, The Australian Psychological Society Limited, Principals Australia Institute Inc, Early Childhood Australia Inc. and the Commonwealth of Australia do not, to the extent permitted by law, accept any liability for any injury, loss or damage suffered by any person arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the content of this work.

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’.

Copyright

© Commonwealth of Australia 2013

This work is copyright. Provided acknowledgment is made to the sources, schools and early childhood education and care services are permitted to copy material freely for communication with teachers, staff, students, parents, carers or community members. You may reproduce the whole or part of this work in unaltered form for your own personal use or, if you are part of an organisation, for internal use within your organisation, but only if you or your organisation do not use the reproduction for any commercial purpose and retain this copyright notice and all disclaimer notices as part of that reproduction. Apart from rights to use as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968 or allowed by this copyright notice, all other rights are reserved and you are not allowed to reproduce the whole or any part of this work in any way (electronic or otherwise) without first being given the specific written permission from the Commonwealth to do so. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights are to be sent to :

Communications Branch
Department of Health
GPO Box 9848, Canberra ACT 2601

or via e-mail to:
copyright@health.gov.au

Last updated in November 2013
Video 3: Understanding behaviour

This document aims to provide Session Leaders with information to assist in the presentation of Video 3: Understanding behaviour to parents and carers as part of the KidsMatter Starting School information sessions.

Video 3: Learning objectives

• To increase understanding of the range of emotions that can occur with change and how children may express these emotions.

• To increase understanding of how parents and carers can support children during the transition to school.

Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions contains more detailed tips and hints for planning and facilitating information sessions. Session Leaders may find it helpful to read this document before delivering the sessions as it offers valuable information that may assist in efficient facilitation. It contains four warm-up activities designed to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to meet without placing too much pressure on them to introduce themselves to a larger group. The four warm-up activities (Meet and greet, Your child’s highlights, Carousel introductions and Discovering what we have in common) can be found at the end of Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions and can be used at the start of any Starting School session.

For more background information and ideas for how your setting can support children to make a positive transition, see Transition matters: A resource about starting school for early childhood educators and school staff.
Outline

The following table provides an outline of Leaders Guide for Video 3: Understanding behaviour. Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions contains warm-up activities that Session Leaders can use at the beginning of any session to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to meet each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Review Video 2: Getting ready for school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Introduce Video 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show Video 3: Understanding behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summarise Video 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Questions, comments and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Activity: Feelings during transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Discussion: Behaviours and emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Checklist

- Feelings during transition activity sheet
- Starting School Understanding behaviour information sheet
- Blank paper, pens
- Additional KidsMatter information sheets

Further resources

You might like to have additional KidsMatter information sheets available for families. See the Starting School Understanding behaviour information sheet that lists other KidsMatter resources you might find helpful.

Review Video 2

Provide a brief overview of what was covered in Video 2 in order to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to ask questions before presenting Video 3. For example:

Previously we identified some of the ways you can plan ahead and prepare for the changes that school brings. We had a look at some ideas from other parents that could be helpful for your child when they are getting ready to start school. We also thought about some practical strategies that you can implement at home that may work for your family. Does anyone have any questions or comments before we move on to Video 3?

Introduce Video 3

Start with a brief introduction before presenting the video. For example:

We are now going to show a video that looks at some of the feelings children may experience when starting school. Sometimes children can have difficulty telling us in words how they are feeling so they might show us through their behaviour. In this video you will see some helpful ideas and strategies that can help you find out more about how your child might be feeling.
Summarise Video 3

After the video you may like to summarise the key points. For example:

As you have just seen, finding the time and space to talk with your child can help you to gauge how they are feeling about starting school and assists your child to develop language to describe their feelings. Perhaps we can now start to think about some of the ideas and strategies that were shown in the video designed to help your child feel supported, encouraged and reassured about starting school.

Questions, comments and discussion

After the video you might like to invite parents and carers to break into groups to discuss the content of the video. Some example prompts for the discussion include:

What did you find helpful in the video? Which ideas for talking with your child do you use already? Which communication tips shown in the video would you like to try?

Activity: Feelings during transition

Go to page 6 for instructions to facilitate this activity.

Group discussion: Behaviours and emotions

Estimated time: 5 minutes

1 Introduce the discussion with the following key points:

As we saw in the video, children at this age may find it difficult to tell us with words how they feel so it is common for children to express themselves through a range of behaviours. It is often up to us to play detective to try to work out what is causing the behaviour. For example, what is your child feeling and why?

2 Ask parents and carers to work through each of these emotions: happy, worried/nervous, sad and excited.

3 Within the large group, invite parents and carers to brainstorm some of the behaviours they are likely to see during transition when children experience each of these emotions.

4 Ask parents and carers to think about the emotions they discussed in the activity and consider how a child might behave when they feel this way. For example:

How might a child who is feeling anxious, excited or sad behave? Don’t forget that sometimes a child who is looking forward to going to school may display new or different behaviours, such as an excited child who is restless and has difficulty sleeping.

Summary

Conclude the discussion. For example:

Children will often display behaviours that communicate their underlying feelings and emotions. Together we have identified some of the ways children might behave when they experience a range of emotions during transition. Once we know what is behind the behaviour we’re able to best support children. As we heard in the video, if you are worried about your child there is support available and it is important to seek help if necessary.

If parents and carers are concerned about their child, Session Leaders can suggest they read the Starting School Getting help when starting school information sheet for further information about support services.

If you plan to show Video 4 after Video 3, link to the next video and accompanying activities. For example:

Now that we have looked at the strategies parents and carers can use to start having conversations about feelings during transition, we will have a closer look at some of the steps involved in helping your child learn how to problem solve.
Understanding behaviour

What are common behaviours and emotional reactions during the transition to school?

As children prepare for and adjust to the new expectations and responsibilities associated with school, parents and carers often observe related changes in the behaviour of their children. Children may experience stress during the transition period and respond by regressing to behaviours that are more typical of younger children, such as fussiness, bed wetting and thumb sucking, and subsequently may need more support1,2,3.

What sorts of feelings contribute to the way children behave when starting school?

Children may display a range of different emotions during the transition to school. While some children may be excited at the prospect of starting school, others may be anxious or worried and withdraw (displaying ‘internalising’ difficulties such as not participating in previously enjoyed activities and appearing anxious, irritable, fearful or sad) or act out and display aggressive or oppositional behaviour (displaying ‘externalising’ difficulties that manifest as verbal or physical aggression, tantrums and refusal to comply with rules and routines)2,4,5.

Where can parents and carers get assistance if they have difficulties?

Parents and carers may raise concerns about their child’s behaviour or emotions in the lead up to starting school. As an educator you may feel comfortable discussing strategies that you have found useful in responding to other children’s needs. However, in some circumstances you may feel parents and carers need a different level of support from someone in the wider community. This can include less formal support such as talking with family and friends, or more formally seeking support from GPs, paediatricians, psychologists and counsellors. Parents and carers may find that seeing their GP or maternal and child health nurse is a good place to start to help with decisions about the need for specialist support and provide referrals to appropriate children’s mental health specialists if required.
References


Activity: Feelings during transition

Aims
- For parents and carers to recognise that there are many emotions associated with the transition to school.
- To help parents and carers think about some of the reasons why children may experience certain emotions during transition.

Preparation
- Photocopy the required number of activity sheets and information sheets.

Materials
- Activity sheet: Feelings during transition
- Information sheet: Understanding behaviour
- Pens

Instructions
Estimated time: 10 minutes

1. Introduce the activity. For example:
   *As discussed in the video, there are a range of feelings that children will experience during the transition to school. This activity asks you to reflect on how your child might be feeling and why they may feel this way.*

2. Explain to parents and carers that in a moment you will ask them to work in small groups and that everyone will be given an activity sheet. Read through the activity sheet and explain to parents and carers that they will be asked to think of some reasons children might experience the emotions highlighted in the video. Point out that you are asking them to think about children in general rather than their child in particular. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that there could be lots of reasons that explain why children experience these emotions.

3. Allocate parents and carers into groups of three or four (see Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions p.8 for ideas on how to form groups) and give everyone an activity sheet. Each group will need to complete one activity sheet; however, parents and carers are welcome to complete one activity sheet each. Ask each group to choose someone to record their ideas. After five minutes, invite each group to read some of their ideas aloud.

Conclusion
Conclude the activity. For example:

*In this activity we thought about some of the feelings children may experience during the transition to school and some of the reasons for these feelings. Remember, all children are different and so too are their feelings about starting school. For example, some children may feel excited about starting school as they will be eager to make new friends, while other children may feel worried about starting school as there will be new rules and routines with which they are not yet familiar. How children feel about starting school may change over time.*
Activity
Feelings during transition

Children experience lots of changes during transition. How might children be feeling and why might they feel this way?

**Children might feel excited or happy about...**

- Joining the big kids

Children’s feelings about a particular experience may change as the first day of school comes closer.

For example, feeling excited and nervous about meeting new children.

Some children may feel excited about something that other children might feel worried about.

For example, meeting their teacher.
Children might feel worried or nervous about...

- Meeting their new teacher

Children might feel sad about...

- Leaving adults who have been their main carers