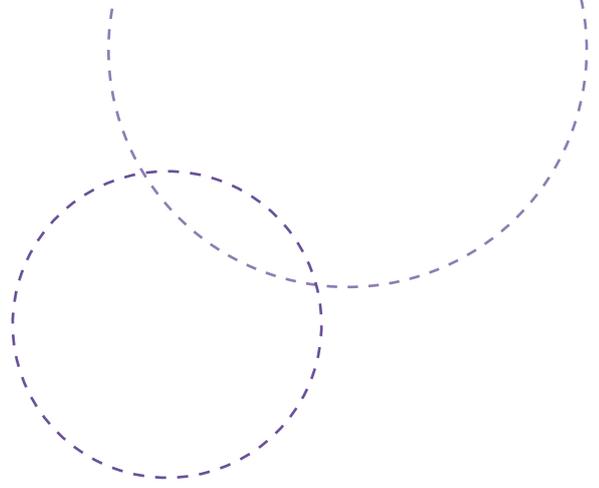




Starting School

Tips for facilitating sessions



This KidsMatter resource was written and produced by the Australian Psychological Society on behalf of KidsMatter.

Acknowledgement

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Overview

Starting school is an important time for children and their families. The research suggests that a positive start to school has long-term benefits for children's future learning as well as their social and emotional development¹. Together with families, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and schools can help children to have a positive transition to school. In order to support children and their families during this time, KidsMatter offers a range of resources for families, ECEC services, schools and health professionals.

You can download the following resources online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/startingschool

- **Starting School videos**

A series of six short films covering a range of topics and useful strategies to help children and families make a positive start to school.

- **Leaders Guides**

Short guides to accompany each video that provide specific suggestions and ideas on how ECEC services and schools can present the videos and associated resources to families. The Leaders Guides also include discussion points and activities with handouts, along with instructions for how to run activities with families.

- **Starting School information sheets**

A series of resources written specifically for families that contain useful tips, strategies and information about starting school.

- **Transition matters: A resource about starting school for early childhood educators and school staff**

A summary of recent research and evidence-based information about starting school that supports ECEC services and schools to develop or review their existing transition program.

- **Communication resources**

Resources to support children, families, ECEC services and schools to communicate with each other. The communication resources include activity books that can help children prepare for school, as well as share information about themselves to their new teacher (eg *A picture book about me*).

- *Starting School: Tips for facilitating sessions* has been developed to provide your ECEC service or school with practical suggestions on how to use and get the most out of the KidsMatter Starting School resources. It provides suggestions and strategies for using the resources as part of a structured presentation or as an addition to an existing starting school program. It also 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, and also assists parents and carers to find a point of connection with each other. Creating opportunities for families to meet during transition to school not only allows families to access social support, it also provides opportunities for ECEC services, schools and families to strengthen and develop relationships. The four warm-up activities (*Meet and greet*, *Your child's highlights*, *Carousel introductions* and *Discovering what we have in common*) can be found on pages 14-17 and can be used at the start of any Starting School session.

Preparing for Starting School sessions

This document and the Leaders Guides are designed to be read before running a Starting School session with families and contain background information to assist Session Leaders in delivery. Becoming familiar with the Starting School resources (videos, Leaders Guides, information sheets and *Transition matters*) will help Session Leaders to feel confident in delivering sessions and answering questions from families.

- All materials for the sessions are available to download and print online. If you have downloaded the videos from the website it can still be helpful to have access to an internet connection during the information sessions, particularly for signposting the KidsMatter website and resources. Your ECEC service or school may find it helpful to have other KidsMatter resources available for families to read before and after the sessions and you may like to identify the contact details of local services for families that may like further assistance. See page 11 for support and information that can be used to create a flyer for families to take home. It will also be helpful to have printed copies of the Starting School information sheets at each session.



Starting School resources

The six videos cover a range of topics about starting school to assist families to support their child during transition to school and are based on a review of the literature². A summary of this review can be found in *Transition matters*.

The videos have been designed to be viewed by parents and carers before their child commences school as this is when families are most likely to attend and engage in starting school activities.

Video	Length	Title	Topic
Video 1	5.46 min	Thinking about transition to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes children might experience as they start school.• Skills that support children during transition.
Video 2	6.30 min	Getting ready for school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategies to help families prepare, plan and practise new routines before the start of school.
Video 3	7.31 min	Understanding behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Common behavioural and emotional reactions to starting school.• Strategies to help families identify their child's behaviour and how to support them.
Video 4	5.56 min	Problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching and encouraging children's use of problem solving skills.
Video 5	5.26 min	Coping skills for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategies to help children cope in difficult or challenging situations.
Video 6	5.20 min	A change for the whole family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How starting school might affect the whole family.

The Starting School resources have been designed to include a range of mediums and activities such as videos, open and small group discussions, activities, reflections and handouts. KidsMatter also has a suite of resources for school staff and ECEC educators, families and community members. Specifically, the KidsMatter Primary and KidsMatter Early Childhood resources provide evidence-based information and strategies for families, ECEC educators and school staff. If they are not already available in your ECEC service or school, these resources can be downloaded online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au

The Starting School information sheets complement the videos, allowing families to review the information contained in the videos at a later time. As well as summarising the information in the videos, the Starting School information sheets

provide additional information and strategies for families. Within each of the Leaders Guides, a range of activities and some suggested group discussions have been developed to assist families to think about how the information in the videos relates to their own family and experiences. Your ECEC service or school may also wish to consider building in some informal chat time to enable parents and carers to talk with each other. The literature suggests that fostering relationships between families is particularly important during the transition period². This can be done by talking with other parents and carers who are going through transition or who have been through it before, as they can be a valuable source of support. The aim is to allow parents and carers to share their knowledge and experiences and link this to the new information in the videos.

Identifying Session Leaders

Session Leaders run Starting School information sessions for parents and carers. It may be helpful to identify Session Leaders as early as possible to enable them to have enough time to review the materials and plan how they will be used. For ECEC services, it can be useful to choose someone with an existing relationship with families to be a Session Leader or be involved in the sessions. For schools, involving staff who work with this age group will help to start building relationships with families. In both settings, having someone who is involved in the starting school process become a Session Leader helps to maintain continuity and enhance the confidence and comfort of families. It is therefore beneficial if the same Session Leader runs all of the sessions.

Having two Session Leaders may be useful, particularly if more than 20 to 25 people are expected to attend the sessions. The benefits of having two Session Leaders include:

- having more opportunity to answer questions and assist parents and carers during activities
- having capacity to talk privately with a parent or carer if they require additional support
- more continuity for families if one of the Session Leaders is unable to run a session
- greater capacity to follow up any issues identified during the session.

Local ECEC services and schools may also like to consider collaborating with each other to co-facilitate the sessions. *Transition matters* highlights the reasons why ECEC services and schools working together during transition is important.

Meeting with the Leadership Team or Action Team

If your ECEC service or school is already involved in KidsMatter, planning the sessions with the KidsMatter Early Childhood Leadership Team or KidsMatter Primary Action Team may be helpful. The Leadership Team or Action Team can work collaboratively with the Session Leaders to discuss and work through suggestions to support families most effectively during transition. They may also be able to help by liaising with other key people such as the early years coordinator, the principal or director, other educators, families, wellbeing or support staff, and leaders of community cultural groups.



Planning the sessions

Many factors will influence the type of information and activities you decide to include in each Starting School session.

When structuring the sessions, Session Leaders may like to consider:

- the amount of time allocated to additional information you would like to include (eg about the school or how your service works with families during transition)
- the number of people expected to attend
- the time of day that would best suit attendees
- if community members or health professionals will attend and how they can be involved
- whether an interpreter will be helpful
- whether there is a space for an activities area for children who accompany parents
- the amount of discussion potentially generated by families
- if a question and answer time will be incorporated
- the environment in which the sessions will be held. Consider whether the space is comfortable, if there is enough space to form groups for activities, if there is sufficient lighting and enough adult chairs and whether people can see the videos
- whether the ECEC service or school will brainstorm creative ways to help families feel welcome. For example, having coffee and tea available, greeting families as they arrive and providing name tags.

Customising the sessions

ECEC services and schools will have their own information and knowledge about the starting school process to communicate to families during transition. Your ECEC service or school may also have structures in place to provide school-specific orientation information to families (eg information evenings, welcome packs). This information is important because it helps parents and carers to understand the school context and what to expect, which can help to reduce anxiety and stress.

ECEC services and schools are encouraged to incorporate specific school and community information into their sessions. For example, schools will usually provide information about their school and their starting school program while ECEC services may provide information about local schools and/or invite a guest from a local school to their sessions to talk about what families can expect when their child starts school. If your ECEC service or school is intending to provide information that is specific to their setting at the end of the session, they may like to summarise what will be covered to help to avoid questions about school-specific information being asked throughout the KidsMatter content. Question and answer time is an opportunity for Session Leaders to clarify information, share their knowledge about starting school and help families to apply the information to their own situation. Suggestions and strategies for management of question and answer time can be found on page 10.

The format of the sessions can be adapted to suit your ECEC service or school. For example, some ECEC services or schools may like to present each of the videos at separate sessions along with suggested activities. Others may prefer to select those that are most relevant to their setting and community and direct families to view the other videos online in their own time. Some ECEC services or schools may only have capacity for one or two sessions and will choose to show a number of videos at each session. When considering the number of sessions it is important to weigh up the pros and cons. For example, multiple sessions enable more opportunities for parents and carers to meet and more time for discussions in each session; however, this requires a larger time commitment. If multiple sessions are not possible, consider which videos and resources will be most relevant to your audience to help ensure the duration of the session is manageable.

Group size and session duration

It is recommended that each session lasts no longer than 120 minutes and that a break in the middle is included to avoid overwhelming families with information in one sitting. Depending on parent availability you might find a 60 to 90 minute session without a break is sufficient depending on the activities you have planned. The size of groups will vary; however, maintaining a group size of 20 to 25 participants will ensure that the activities and discussions run efficiently. Smaller groups create an environment that is more comfortable for families to contribute and ask questions. When there are large numbers of families, and if resources permit, your ECEC service or school may decide to run multiple sessions or have a number of co-presenters to support running activities with such a large group. For schools, the Starting School sessions may be the first opportunity for families to meet other families whose children will be attending the same school. Schools who choose and are able to run multiple sessions may decide to provide families with additional opportunities to meet (eg an informal get-together) to enable families to start to build networks.



Family attendance

Research suggests that the transition to school is a good time to work with parents, particularly in the lead up to and following the commencement of school³. The level of parental involvement generally decreases as children move into higher year levels at school^{4,5,6}. This pattern highlights the importance of relationship-building and the introduction of strategies promoting parental involvement during the transition period, as engaging parents and carers early on in a child's education is key to future parental involvement in a child's general schooling.

Family attendance at the Starting School sessions can be impacted by a number of factors. Consider the potential barriers in your context that can help to ensure as many families as possible are able to attend sessions (for more information about promoting inclusion and participation, see *Transition matters* p.31). Here are some suggestions to ensure that the sessions are open to, and inclusive of, all families:

- Communicate with parents and carers to find out what promotes and prevents their participation.
- Consider each family individually. What are their needs and how might your school or ECEC service be able to adapt?
- Consider whether the capacity and resources of your ECEC service or school allow for concurrent activities for children.
- Collecting information from parents and carers may assist when considering whether language barriers are an obstacle to communication. Your ECEC service or school may have access to resources for overcoming language barriers (eg libraries with books in multiple languages, members of the community, community services such as interpreters and translation).

It might be helpful to think about past events and attendance:

- Who usually attends?
- Which times have the most attendance?
- Why might some families not attend?
- What can the school or ECEC service do to reduce these barriers to attendance?

Leading the sessions

When planning the delivery of Starting School sessions it may be helpful for the Session Leaders to reflect on past presentations or workshops they have attended.

What stood out? Which key elements featured at the best presentation or workshop? What are could be avoided? Many Session Leaders will already have considerable knowledge of and experience with starting school. Personal experiences and examples can make the presentation more engaging for families; however, it may be best to avoid using the names of students or families or give information that would easily identify them. For example, it may be best to avoid singling children out (even if they can't be identified or the experience was many years ago) by saying, "there was one child who...", as no parent or carer wants to think that their child will be used in an example next year. It is better to say "children sometimes..." or "for example, children might..." (see page 11 for more information about personal disclosure).

Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledgement of Country helps the wider community demonstrate respect for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and can be performed by any individual, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, participating in any type of occasion. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the traditional custodians of the land where a gathering is conducted. This can be done at the beginning of each session using the standard phrasing developed by KidsMatter:

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to Elders past, present and future, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Personalising or making changes to the acknowledgment based on each setting's experiences or preferences can help to make the acknowledgement more personal. Alternate wording might include:

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of country (insert name of traditional owners if known) and their continuing connection to land and community. I pay my respects to them and their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

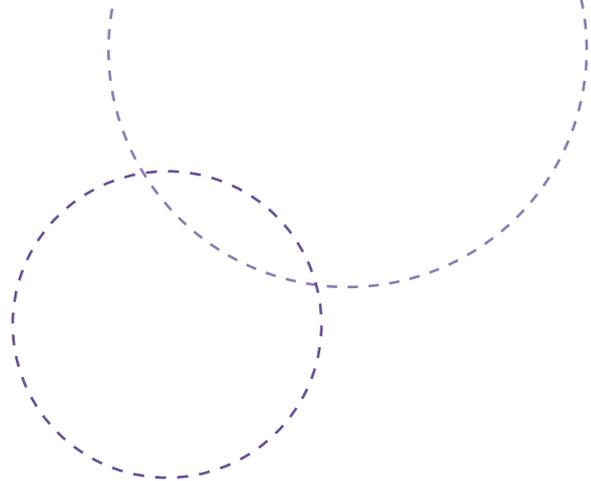
Beginning each session

At the beginning of each session it is helpful to:

- provide a brief overview of the session to inform parents and carers about what to expect
- provide an outline highlighting what will be included and how long the session will take
- advise parents and carers that there will be opportunities to participate in discussion and activities at the level at which they are comfortable
- remind parents and carers that everyone's views and opinions will be respected and everyone will be given a chance to contribute
- remind parents and carers about privacy, and request that they do not share others' personal information outside the sessions
- provide contact details for health professionals to families who may need additional support or wish to discuss any concerns that may arise in the following days or weeks.

Warm-up activities

A set of four warm-up activities have been developed for use at the beginning of one or more of the Starting School sessions. The warm-up activities (*Meet and greet*, *Your child's highlights*, *Carousel introductions* and *Discovering what we have in common*) can be found on pages 14-17 of this guide and are designed to be short, enjoyable exercises that provide parents and carers with the opportunity to get to know each other, and may also be helpful to introduce parents and carers to group discussions. The warm-up activities require minimal



preparation and Session Leaders can decide which of the four warm-up activities they would like to use at the start of a session as they can be delivered in any order. Delivering the warm-up activities at the beginning of a Starting School session is also a great way for Session Leaders to learn more about parents and carers who are attending sessions and may highlight some themes in parents' and carers' experiences when starting school.

Tips for managing activities

Many of the activities are best undertaken in small groups (usually three or four people). The Session Leaders may like to think about how they manage the process of forming groups. In some situations asking parents and carers to form their own groups may mean that those who already know each other will sit with each other, leaving parents and carers who don't know others to potentially feel isolated. The Session Leader can help to structure the formation of groups so that all parents and carers are included. Some options for doing this don't require preparation, such as asking parents and carers to line up, form a circle or stay where they are and number them off to form groups. The essential element is that groups are formed in a random way. Remember to be mindful of the mobility of all parents and carers.

Other options that require slightly more preparation include:

- having numbered or coloured cards under or on chairs which each person then has to match with others
- cutting up pictures into four pieces, giving each person a piece and asking them to find the people who have the other pieces to complete the picture
- putting different coloured dots on name tags and asking people to group themselves by dot colour.

While it is ideal to mix up groups so that parents and carers have an opportunity to meet new participants, and to prevent parents and carers who do not know others feeling excluded, it may be necessary to be flexible in some circumstances. For example, if there is some initial reluctance to move around for the first activity, you may find there is more willingness as the session progresses or during future sessions as people feel more relaxed. Walking around the group and providing support will help to ensure no one is isolated or left out.

Other things to consider when conducting activities include:

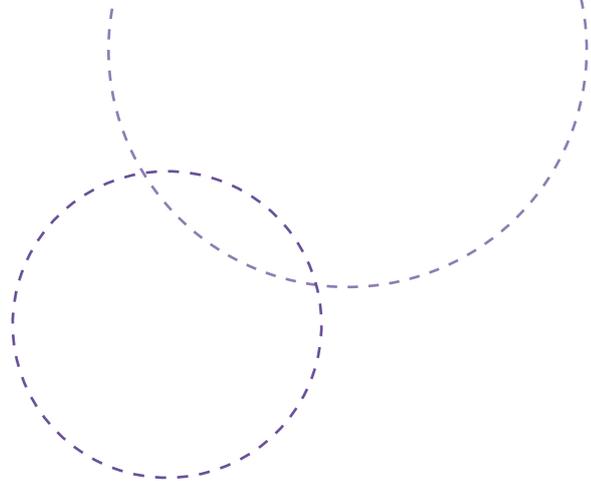
- If a parent or carer attends with their partner, family member or a friend and indicates that they do not want to be separated during activities it is important to allow them to remain together. It might be helpful to make the groups slightly larger so they are still able to talk to the same number of new parents and carers.
- Some parents and carers may be reluctant to participate in the activities and discussions. It is important to let parents and carers know that they need only participate when they feel comfortable.

Literacy

Some of the suggested activities include handouts that are designed to be completed by parents and carers. Reading the instructions and information written on the sheets aloud can support families who may have literacy difficulties.

Session Leaders may also like to consider these strategies to aid literacy:

- Explain to parents and carers that the handout is just for their own use and will not be collected.
- Let parents and carers know that they can think about the questions rather than record answers if they prefer.
- Invite parents and carers to complete the handouts in their preferred written language.
- Invite a member of the local community who is able to translate or support families from different cultural backgrounds.



Working with groups

Leading sessions with a diverse group of people can sometimes be a challenge. Some people may be keen to participate and interact during the presentation whereas others may not. Respecting that some parents and carers do not wish to participate in discussions will also promote a sense of belonging and inclusion within the group. There are many different ways to work with groups and some tips for facilitating sessions are listed below. Session Leaders may have already used some of these strategies or have others they have found useful in the past. Getting together with other Session Leaders or staff members before a session to talk about what has worked in the past can be a helpful way to share ideas and experiences.

You may find these tips helpful for working with groups:

- Encourage and acknowledge participation from less confident or reluctant parents and carers by providing positive feedback (eg “Great point” or “Thanks for sharing your thoughts”).⁷
- Show interest in what parents and carers are saying^{7,8}.
- To give everyone a chance to participate, invite different sections or groups to comment throughout the sessions. For example, you could say, “Would anyone from the left side of the room like to comment?” Try to avoid asking particular parents or carers to respond as this may be confronting for less confident parents and carers.
- Remind parents and carers that everyone’s opinion is welcome and valued.
- Acknowledge different opinions and perspectives even if you don’t agree (eg “I haven’t thought about it that way – it’s good to hear other perspectives”).
- Avoiding negative judgments or direct challenging, such as “Why would you think that?” or “What evidence do you have for that?” If the information is incorrect and there is established evidence to the contrary, gently provide correct information (eg “Many people share that view; however, recently there has been evidence to show that...”).
- With respect to small group versus large group discussions, be mindful that parents and carers may not wish to share information discussed in their smaller groups with the large group.

Protective interrupting

It may be necessary to politely interrupt parents or carers who try to dominate discussions. It can be helpful to interrupt by summarising what they are saying, then immediately saying, “Would anyone else like to comment?”⁷ The above strategy may also be useful in situations where parents or carers may be sharing personal or sensitive information which may make others in the room feel uncomfortable. However, it is important that this is done in a respectful way and followed up after the session to ensure parents and carers don’t feel dismissed or that their input is not valued. For example, you might say, “Thank you, it sounds as though this is something that’s important for you to talk about. Perhaps we could talk about it after the session?”

Responding to questions

Question and answer time can sometimes be daunting for Session Leaders and participants. However, it can be a valuable time to clarify and share information that is particularly relevant to the group. Here are some tips for managing question and answer time:

- Some parents and carers may feel uncomfortable asking a question in front of the whole group. Some suggestions for giving these parents and carers an opportunity to ask questions are to use a question box, being available to answer questions one-on-one after the session, or providing an email address.
- If the room is large, it may be helpful to repeat a question so that it can be heard by everyone. Repeating the question also gives the Session Leader a moment to think about their response and ensures that they have heard the question correctly⁸.
- Thanking the parents and carers for asking questions is a helpful technique for encouraging further questions as it conveys that you value questions⁸.
- If a question is unclear ask the participant for more information or clarify your understanding of the question⁸. For example, you might say, “I’m not sure if I have understood your question. Could you explain it further or could you provide an example?”

It is impossible to pre-empt every question that parents and carers may ask, and in some cases the Session Leader may not know the answer to the question. It is okay to explain that you are not sure of the answer. In this situation you might like to:

- offer to find out the answer and let them know later (but only if you will actually do so)
- direct the person to the appropriate resource (eg the KidsMatter website, support staff at school).

Try to avoid:

- directing the question to another member of staff without prior warning. If there will be multiple staff members at the session, before you begin it may be a good idea to discuss if they are willing to help answer questions at the end of the session
- guessing or feeling pressured to provide a response that may be inaccurate.

Self-care and personal disclosure

When delivering material on topics that relate to early childhood and school experiences, remember that discussions can sometimes trigger unpleasant memories for Session Leaders as well as parents and carers. An example of this might be discussions around difficult times of change. It is important that Session Leaders are mindful of their own self-disclosure. While personal experiences can make presentations more meaningful and interesting it is important to be aware that this setting is not guaranteed as a confidential or safe space to disclose personal information. Listed below are contact details for support and information services for adults.

Service	Phone	Website	Services provided
Lifeline	13 11 14	www.lifeline.org.au	24-hour telephone counselling
beyondblue	1300 224 636	www.beyondblue.org.au	Information line
SANE Australia	1800 187 263	www.sane.org	Directory of medical and allied health practitioners in mental health Information line: 9am-5pm weekdays Online helpline, factsheets, resources
Australian Psychological Society (APS)	03 8662 3300 1800 333 497	www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist	Find a Psychologist service

It is a good idea to have these contacts available during Starting School sessions as a resource for families. Your ECEC service or school may also like to consider adding a list of local contacts available for families (ECEC services, schools or community based agencies) in the event that there is something they would like to address further. If parents or carers identify that they are concerned about their child, a starting point could be to encourage them to contact their general practitioner or connect with the support person at the school their child will be attending.

Feedback

Your ECEC service or school may like families to complete a feedback form or put any comments or suggestions into a box.

This can help Session Leaders plan sessions for the following year to better suit the local community. Some areas where feedback may be helpful include:

- timing and length of the sessions
- any barriers to attending (in particular from those who could not attend)
- sections of the session parents and carers found particularly helpful or relevant
- topics that parents and carers would like to know more about.

Families, ECEC services and schools can provide feedback to KidsMatter on the Starting School resources and materials online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources-feedback. Providing feedback will help us to continue to develop and improve services and resources to meet the needs of the community.



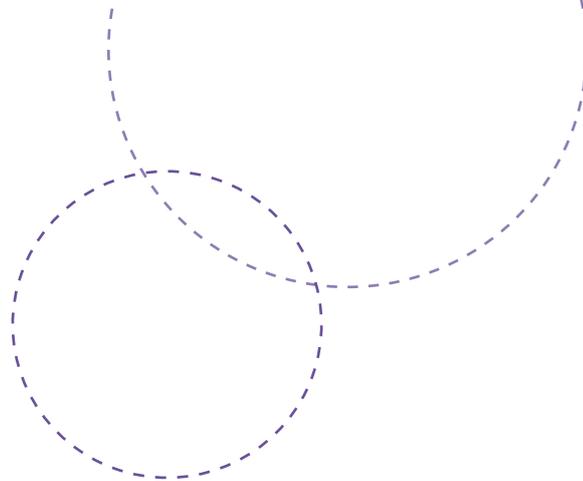
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Appendix 1

Warm-up activity: Meet and greet



Aims

- To provide parents and carers with the opportunity to meet without placing too much pressure on them to introduce themselves to a larger group.
- To provide parents and carers with an opportunity to find a point of connection with each other.

Preparation

- Depending on how you choose to break parents and carers into smaller groups, you may need to do some preparation (see page 9 for advice about forming groups).

Tips and hints

- Prompting groups half way through the activity to ensure that each parent and carer has had a turn to share information about their child can assist groups who may have a dominant participant. Session Leaders may prefer to walk around to each group to make sure the discussions are progressing well and to ensure that each participant has had an opportunity to speak.

Instructions

Estimated time: 10 minutes

- 1 Introduce the activity to families. For example:

Before we look more closely at what transition involves for your child, this is an opportunity for you to talk to other families whose children will be starting school soon. An important aim of these sessions is to provide the opportunity for you to get together with other parents and carers as you can be a significant support to each other now and as your children progress through school. Children will have had a variety of different experiences and be developing a range of interests before starting school. Share some of the experiences your child has had and the things they are interested in with each other.

- 2 Explain to parents and carers that you are going to ask them to discuss several questions in smaller groups. Form smaller groups of approximately three parents and carers. When parents and carers are in their groups, ask each person to introduce themselves and discuss the following questions, which may be handwritten on a whiteboard or provided on paper to each group.

- *What is your child's name and interests? (ie favourite game, place, activity)*
- *Do you have other children? Have they started school, and if so what was the experience like for the other children and the family?*
- *For school settings: Where is your child coming from prior to starting school? (eg preschool, home)*
- *For ECEC settings: Where will your child be starting school?*
- *What are you hoping to gain from these sessions?*

- 3 Allow approximately 10 minutes for discussion. Move around the room and help groups move through the questions, making sure everyone is involved in the discussion. Provide a one to two minute prompt for the end of the discussion.
- 4 Invite groups to feedback to the larger group on their discussion if they would like to. It is okay if parents and carers decide that they would prefer not to share. If parents decide to share, allow about five minutes for discussion.

Appendix 2

Warm-up activity: Your child's highlights

Aims

- To provide parents and carers with the opportunity to interact by sharing a positive experience and a point of connection with each other.

Preparation

- Depending on how you choose to break participants into smaller groups, you may need to do some preparation (see page 9 for advice about forming groups).

Tips and hints

- Prompting groups half way through the activity to ensure that each participant has had a turn to share information about their child can assist groups who may have a dominant participant. Session Leaders may prefer to walk around to each group to confirm that the discussions are progressing well and to ensure that each participant has had an opportunity to speak.

Instructions

Estimated time: 15 minutes

- 1 Introduce the activity to families. For example:

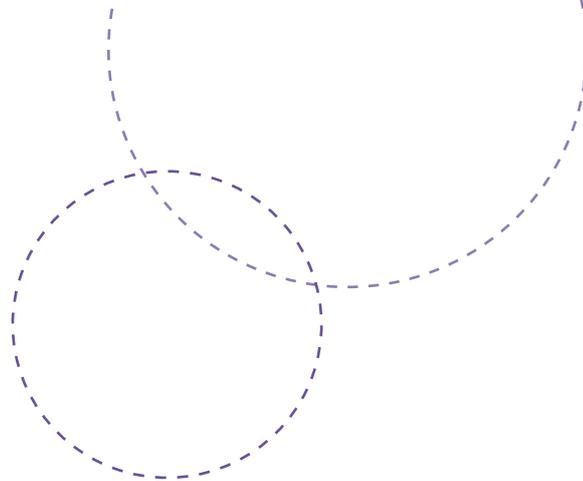
Before we start our transition session we will take some time to meet some of the other parents and carers who are here today. As you may be aware, meeting and sharing experiences with other parents and carers of children who are starting school is a valuable experience as you can be an important source of support to each other.

- 2 Form smaller groups of approximately three parents. When parents and carers are in their groups, explain to parents and carers that the first part of the activity is a reflection activity and the second part of the activity involves sharing with their group.

- 3 Begin by asking participants to close their eyes (if they are comfortable to do so) or look down for one minute and consider some of their favourite moments of their child's life. This can include milestones reached, events with family and friends or even daily occurrences.
- 4 After parents and carers have had a moment to reflect on their child's highlights, ask them to think about one specific highlight that they would like to share.
- 5 Ask parents and carers to open their eyes and share their child's highlight and why they chose that highlight to share. Allow approximately 10 minutes for discussion. Move around the room making sure everyone is involved in the discussion. Provide a one to two minute prompt for the end of the discussion.
- 6 Invite groups to feedback to the larger group on their discussion if they would like to. It is okay if parents decide that they would prefer not to share. If parents decide to share, allow about five minutes for discussion.

Appendix 3

Warm-up activity: Carousel introductions



Aims

- To begin to establish a safe environment for parents and carers to meet each other and share experiences.
- To introduce parents and carers to the type of group discussions that will occur.

Preparation

- Not required.

Tips and hints

- Session Leaders may like to walk around the circle to confirm that the discussions are progressing well and to ensure that each participant has had an opportunity to share.

Instructions

Estimated time: 15 minutes

- 1 Introduce the activity to families. For example:

Before we start today's session we will take 15 minutes to do a warm-up activity called 'Carousel introductions' which will give you the opportunity to meet some of the other parents and carers who are here today. You may find that you have much in common with some of the parents and carers here today as you are all about to begin the starting school journey together and will have similar thoughts, feelings and expectations about what the first few days, week and months will involve.

- 2 Ask parents and carers to stand up then number each person as either a 'one' or 'two'. Once each participant has a number ask participants to form two circles so they are facing a partner ('ones' on the inside, 'twos' on the outside).

- 3 When parents and carers have formed the two circles, ask each person to introduce themselves to the person opposite and discuss one of the following questions (which may be handwritten on a whiteboard):

- *What is your child most looking forward to about starting school?*
- *What are you excited about or looking forward to as a parent or carer?*
- *What have you found helpful for you and your child during the transition period? (eg strategies they have tried or support they have found useful from the ECEC service or school).*

- 4 After each question, ask the outside circle to move two people to their right so that they are discussing their answer with a different person each time.

- 5 Allow approximately 10 minutes for discussion. Provide a one to two minute prompt for the end of the discussion.

- 6 Invite parents and carers to feedback to the larger group on their discussion if they would like to. You may find that there are some consistent themes that parents and carers raise when providing feedback. Session Leaders may find it helpful to talk about these themes in the group discussion.

Appendix 4

Warm-up activity:

Discovering what we have in common

Aims

- To discover similarities between the parents and carers, and to foster connections and social networks.
- To create a good atmosphere for learning and participation.

Preparation

- Depending on how you choose to break participants into smaller groups, you may need to do some preparation (see page 9 for advice about forming groups).

Tips and hints

- It is recommended that Session Leaders randomly allocate participants to groups for this activity to promote the development of relationships, new connections and wider support networks between parents and carers, as people will often position themselves next to those who they already know.
- If parents and carers have difficulty knowing where to start, the Session Leader can offer some suggestions or categories to think about (eg sporting activities, hobbies, favourite films, favourite food).

Instructions

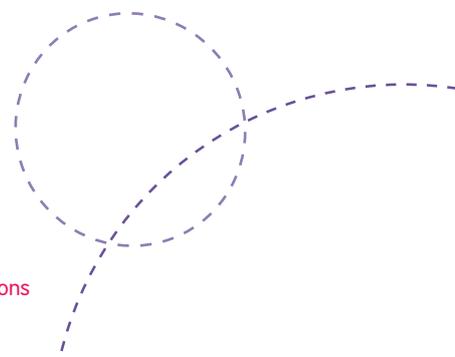
Estimated time: 10 minutes

- 1 Introduce the activity to families. For example:

Before we begin today's session we will spend a short amount of time getting to know each other.

- 2 Divide the group into smaller groups of three to four people.

- 3 Ask parents and carers to move into these groups and find a space to sit together.
- 4 Ask each group to see if they can find three things they have in common as a group that are not related to their child who is starting school. Encourage participants to look beyond personal characteristics (eg eye or hair colour) and clothing, so that shared interests are explored more broadly.
- 5 Allow approximately 10 minutes for discussion. Move around the room and help groups if they get stuck. Provide a one to two minute prompt for the end of the discussion.
- 6 Invite groups to feedback to the larger group on their discussion if they would like to. The lists are often a great source of laughter and can act as an ice-breaker. Sharing the lists can also cue others into similarities they may share with the members of other groups.



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