



Supporting families and children transitioning in and out of primary school

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/enewsletter/supporting-families-and-children-transitioning-and-out-primary>

Transitioning in and out of primary school are major events in children's lives and it is a [change for the whole family](#). While the majority of children cope well with the changes of school transition, many children have difficulty adjusting and coping. It can also be a challenging time for parents and carers who can have concerns around their child's adjustment, emotional or behavioural difficulties, academic skills, social relationships, additional or complex needs or may have had bad experiences with school themselves. Active and positive involvement with families is crucial for successful school transition. Health and community professionals are well placed to offer support for parents and carers and children in [school transition](#).

Supporting families with children transitioning in and out of primary school

In [preparing for starting school](#), health and community professionals can help support and encourage families to attend information nights and transition sessions held by their school, set up meetings or phone calls and share information about their child and their previous environment, get to know school processes, expectations and communication procedures; and speak with school staff regarding concerns and possible support strategies. Health and community professionals can also work with education staff before, during and after transition periods to ensure coordinated support strategies are in place.

Helping parents and carers manage their child's [separation](#) distress can be particularly important for transition to primary school. Employing strategies such as communicating with new teachers, developing a positive goodbye routine, reassurance of when collecting them, avoiding lengthy goodbyes, talking positively about school day experiences and self-care strategies can assist families.

Noticing an [increase in behaviours](#) during school transition that may indicate a difficulty can help families and professionals intervene early. Behaviours to observe transitioning to primary school include: clinging behaviour, restlessness, withdrawing, anxiousness, refusing to comply, avoidance, planning and organisation difficulties, increase in crying and tantrums, changes in eating habits, sleep difficulties, regression to younger behaviours and aggressive behaviours. Behaviours in high school transition may also include: refusal to talk about school, low confidence/self-esteem, drop in grades, [school refusal](#) or lack of involvement, little or no talk about friends, little or no interest in doing homework. Discussing with families that these behaviours can be typical for children, but if they persist or are interfering with the child's daily life it may indicate mental health difficulties, it is important for accurate early intervention.

Other things to help parents and carers assist children managing change during transition

- Learning from other transitions (e.g. holidays, moving house, welcoming a new sibling, etc.) and what has helped them to cope

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- Utilising early childhood educators or primary teachers to help provide information and support the process
- Using children's strengths and skills
- Developing and practising independence skills like self-help skills, responsibility, care for belongings, [decision-making](#), and understanding social rules
- Developing and practising [social and emotional skills](#) such as [relationship and friendship building skills](#), [refusal skills](#) in engaging in unsafe behaviours, sharing and taking turns, conversation skills, [managing emotions](#) and getting to know other families and children
- Developing and practising learning skills such as literacy and numeracy skills, ability to focus on an activity, listening skills, following instructions, hands-on approach to learning and hand-eye coordination
- Parents practising self-care skills, and understanding their own experiences with school and being aware of their language/messages regarding school when talking to their children
- For transition to high school specifically, parents and carers may also need support in understanding the use, impact and how to manage their child's using social media (e.g. Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, etc.).

[School transition programs](#) are also available for both transition in and out of primary school that help children understand what school will be like, help build positive relationships with peers and staff and practical skills to make the transition easier (e.g. independency, behavioural expectations, interactions with others, adjustment to rules, size of class, etc.).

Helping children cope with transition in and out of primary school

Helping children recognise, express and talk about their feelings as well as [managing strong emotions](#) is important in managing adjustment issues with transition. Assisting parents and carers in developing strategies to [help children calm themselves](#), such as counting to ten, taking five deep breaths, doing star jumps, going to a quiet place, etc., can help calm children's strong emotions.

Assisting parents in helping their children cope with strategies that help parents [actively listen](#) and talk to their child, provide appropriate comfort, model behaviours, encourage [help-seeking behaviours](#) and [problem-solving skills](#) and talking positively about attempts to cope.

Utilising helpful thinking strategies can also assist children facing difficulties adjusting. This can involve working with parents to acknowledge and validate children's feelings, reminding children of a time where they coped with something similar in the past, help encourage [helpful thinking](#) such as "I can be brave or "I can try my best" and modelling helpful thinking strategies themselves (e.g. thinking out loud). This can help promote coping behaviours and help the child feel more confident.

Helping develop a coping plan can be important for both families and children. The [coping plan](#) needs to be achievable, ensures the child is comfortable with the first step, allows for flexibility (e.g. extra time and practise at a step) and utilises parent's encouragement and recognition of a child's hard work in facing their fears. This plan might also involve arranging school visits and supporting children to initiate contact with school, developing and practising [routines](#), and helping children familiarise themselves with school environment.

Other resources/links:

[Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit](#)

[Promoting positive education and care transitions for children](#)

[Transition to primary school](#)

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[Transition to secondary school](#)

[Enrolling in secondary school](#)

[Promoting positive education transitions for children](#)

[Preparing children to start primary school](#)

[Preparing children to start secondary school](#)

[Helping children when they are changing schools](#)

