

Kindergarten research insights

Professional reading resource



Starting school: Essential transition practices

Despite the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, or perhaps because of them, some transition practices have emerged as essential for supporting children and families starting school. Although there were significant challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions, these also provided an opportunity to consider new practices, reinvent existing ones and innovate to support a positive transition to school for all children and families.

Relationships, connectedness and sense of belonging are key elements of transitions for children, families and educators (ETC Research Group 2011). Relationships are worth investing as much time and resources in as are dedicated to teaching and learning programs, orientation and enrolment processes. Relationships are an important support for children and families who have experienced disruption and uncertainty, such as during a pandemic.

This article identifies some essential transition practices for kindergartens, informed by transition-to-school research and framed by the QKLG. Both kindergartens and schools have a shared responsibility in relation to initiating transition activities. Some practices suggested here are dependent upon reciprocal actions within schools and it is intended that this article will provide some information for reflection, whatever the circumstances are of children starting school.



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QKLG: Identity — Building a sense of security and trust

Children's ability to accept comfort and support from a range of people is a key focus in the QKLG and is an important factor in the transition process. Feeling physically and emotionally safe is fundamental for children and families starting school. Children are entitled to know, prior to their first day at school, who will be looking after them and keeping them safe. This information is also important for families.

Opportunities to connect with classroom teachers and other key staff are essential for building trust and a sense of belonging at school. A sense of safety and trust are prerequisites for open communication, secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships (Hopps 2019).

To support a sense of security and trust:

- contact schools to find out what opportunities are available for children and families to connect with their classroom teacher

- ask for a photo of Prep teachers and other key school staff. These could be made into an *All about school* book together with children's drawings, thoughts and questions about school (see Dockett & Perry 2014, p.14)
- source school maps and explore these with children — maps could even be drawn by school students
- ask schools for a copy of a book or video about their school, or about what a day in Prep is like
- find out from children and families what they think is important for their Prep teacher to know about them, and, with consent, include this in their transition statements
- encourage families to visit the school together with their child, e.g. practising crossing the road with the school crossing guard, or walking, riding or driving past the school if going onto school grounds isn't possible
- if on-site visits are possible, consider a kindergarten excursion to school.

QKLG: Connectedness — Building positive relationships

Developing a sense of connection to people and place is identified in the *QKLG* key focus of building positive relationships. The development of trust happens within the context of positive relationships between and among children, families and educators. Relationships also contribute strongly to a sense of security and a sense of belonging. Therefore they are *the* most essential support for children and families starting school. Underlying positive relationships is respectful and reciprocal communication, so valuing communication for its role in relationships as well as the exchange of information is important (Hopps 2014).

To support positive relationships:

- introduce families whose children are going to the same school to each other
- connect with Prep teachers, such as through individual meetings on-site, or via video-conference, email or phone
- extend an invitation to Prep teachers to connect with children at kindergarten. This could be on-site, via video conference, email, phone, card or letter
- connect with children's school-age care settings, e.g. with consent, passing on transition statements
- find out if school playgrounds are open to the public over the summer holidays and encourage families to organise playdates there (see Dockett & Perry 2014, p.16)
- make enquiries about school buddy programs. If buddies have already been assigned, kindergarten children can write to them
- support children's social skills, such as making friends and joining in the play of others.

QKLG: Wellbeing — Building a sense of autonomy

Managing and responding to change are aspects of developing autonomy in the *QKLG* and play an important role in transitions. Children are active participants in their transition-to-school experiences and their developing autonomy and agency can be fostered by transition activities.

Listening to children's perspectives on their starting school experiences, thoughts, questions and feelings is important. When these are sought, acknowledged and responded to, children can experience a sense of empowerment, which is important for their wellbeing as they start school.

To support a sense of autonomy:

- build children's resilience and confidence, and share information with families about how these can be supported at home, e.g. asking for help, positive mindset and self-regulation of emotions, behaviour and learning
- seek children's views about starting school. What do they think school will be like? How are they feeling about starting school? What would they like to know about school? What would help them to feel safe at school?
- ask children's older siblings, or children already at school, to share their advice about starting school
- include information in transition statements about how a child's emerging autonomy can be supported at school.

Read more information about [supporting children's transition to school](#) on the QCAA website.



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