

Transition to School

Parents can empower their children and successfully prepare them for their first day in a new learning environment. Reframing Disability reached out to our parent community to seek strategies that helped them transition their child to school, building confidence and independence.

"Talk positively with your child about starting school. It might be a scary time, but starting big school is also a very exciting time for children."



What are your expectations?

How do you envision your child's education experience will look. Things you may want to consider:

- Is it important that your child is always included in the same activities as their peers?
- How do you feel about your child being pulled from their class for therapy?
- How will support be implemented in the classroom?
- Do you want teachers to have high expectations of your child, and that they are seen as capable and competent?

Get familiar with the school

Familiarise your child with school:

- Drive past school often and at different times so you see children arriving at school, or during break times when you can see kids in the playground.
- Take photos of your child outside the school gate and use the picture as a reference point when talking about going to school.
- Parents can practise walking, wheeling or driving their child to school, showing them the front gate and the school sign.



Social Stories

A social story helps paint a picture of what to expect. Ask the school if they already have a social story for new children.

You can get photos from the school website and FB page, and if there are photos you can't find, ask the school to provide them. Speak to your school about routines to get an idea about what to include.



Include photos of things like:

- the school gate,
- the school uniform,
- where school bags are hung,
- where the water fountains are,
- where kids eat their lunch,
- photos of their teacher,
- their classroom,
- the library and the sick bay.

[Click here](#) to access a free template

"If you think getting ready in the mornings could be challenging, then a visual schedule of the morning routine may be handy, so your child knows exactly what to expect and what needs to be done each morning. Definitely practice before the school year starts!"

Practising a morning routine

In the last few months before school starts, structure the morning routine similar to what you will implement on school days

For example:

- wake up,
- toilet and wash hands,
- eat breakfast, then watch tv,
- brush teeth and get dressed,
- packing the backpack they will be using for school.

Uniforms

- Practice wearing their school uniform.
- Think about upsizing clothing for children with self care challenges.
- Wash a few times and remove tags for children with sensory sensitivities.
- Label all clothing.
- School shoes – get them early so your child can wear them in. Shoes with velcro will be easier to get on and off than those with laces.
- Practice taking on and off their school shoes and sports shoes.



Recognising their name

Your child will be in a class with many other students; encourage them to recognise their name. Recognising their name will help them identify their belongings.

If your child needs further support, you can purchase a recognisable key ring to hang off their bag and their favourite themed lunch box to help them identify belongings.

Make learning fun

Some children show an interest in learning academic content, like literacy, numeracy, science and geography. If this sounds like your child, follow their lead and interests when engaging them with early learning.

[Click here](#) for ideas on making learning fun

"We had a lunch box week prior to our son starting school. We packed his lunch and recess and ate at the same time as the school schedule."



Personal care

Before your child starts school, work with your allied health team to get strategies that promote independence for your child.

Practice:

- Getting dressed and ready for school.
- Practice using the lock on a toilet door to prevent them from getting trapped inside. It also helps to explain that at school, there are separate toilets for girls and boys.
- Washing and drying hands.

The lunch box

Purchase a lunch box and water bottle that they can identify as their own to help promote independence for your child.

Before school starts, teach your child to open the lunch box and water bottle and provide opportunities for them to practice using it at a picnic at the park.



Reading to your child

Reading with a child promotes brain development, imagination, develops language and emotions and builds and strengthens social relationships and interaction.

Reading to your child frequently can promote a love of literacy and spark your child's imagination. The year before school, read books about starting school to familiarise your child with these experiences

[Click here](#) for some reading with children tips

"My son and I love to read books and tell stories at bedtimes. Sometimes i will read the story to him, other times he will create a story based on the pictures."

Familiar faces

Organising some play dates with other children may help your child feel less nervous about school if they know some of their future classmates.

- Try and arrange a class get-together.
- Ask your child's preschool if any of the other children will be attending the same school.
- You may know children in your street or neighbourhood.



Movement skills

Make movement at home fun and provide opportunities for your child to develop or practice the fundamental movement skills they will be using at school:

- Include running, jumping, catching, throwing, kicking and striking.
- Find out the type of play equipment and activities/games your child will have access to at school. Use the holidays to practice similar activities and play on similar equipment.
- Your child may need games or equipment adapted to suit their individual needs, like a racerunner or soft play equipment to engage in physical activity.

If you familiarise yourself with this equipment, you will be able to share these adjustments with your school, so your child is supported when they start school.

Working collaboratively as a team

Take a support person to the enrolment, transition and learning support meetings to support you in advocating for your child. The support person could be one of your child's therapists, key worker, a friend, family member or early childhood team. The role of the support person may vary but may include taking minutes or just having on hand for a debrief afterwards, etc.



“If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway.”

Strong, secure, respectful relationships

It is important that parents can build a positive relationship with their child's school. This can begin by having open, transparent conversations about your child.

- Focus on your child's strengths and highlight what they can do.
- Share strategies and problem-solving ideas.
- Create an 'All About Me' page.

Sharing information with the school

Parents may be asked for copies of their child's assessments and reports. In some cases, parents may not feel comfortable sharing this information.

The information you choose to share is up to you. If necessary, you can black out some of the content and share information that you feel is relevant to your child's school support needs.

Useful resources for families

[Click here](#) for downloadable information sheets from the NSW Department of Education



Early introductions

Your child's relationship with their teacher is so important during this process. Encourage your child's prospective teacher to get to know your child.

- They could write a letter to your child, welcoming them to their class.
- Ask for a photo of your child's teacher and refer to it frequently so your child can learn their teacher's name and face.
- Have your child write a Christmas card to their teacher and include a festive photo if possible.

"My daughter and I made a card for the teacher. It was a great opportunity to chat with her about school and her teacher and get her excited for her new schooling adventure."



Transition to School Days

Parents can support their child by attending with them and getting to know their child's teacher, other Kindergarten families and building on the partnership with the school.

Your child may require additional support for these visits. Schools may also have a Learning Support Officer present to support your child.

Extra transition

Parents can also request extra visits to the school or the classroom if they feel this would benefit their child.

This may include:

- Joining a kindy class for a session.
- Going to school in the lunch break.
- Having an extra meet and greet with their teacher.

During these visits, parents should take photos at the school to create a social story.



Positively educating the school community about your child

The best way to get the school community to embrace your child positively is to share information about your child and build positive relationships within the school community. Opening communication channels with others will allow the teaching staff and parent community to seek knowledge and understanding about your child and their disability.

For an example of how one family positively introduced their son and educated their school community [click here](#).

"It's important that you and your child are involved in the school community in some way that you are both comfortable with."



Reasonable adjustments

Many children start school with varying degrees of ability, and children with disability are no exception. As a parent, you will be working collaboratively with the school to plan and prepare your child for school. This will involve discussing appropriate supports and adjustments for your child, including whether the school will apply for support funding for your child.

These adjustments may not happen before your child is at school. In some cases, your child's teacher will get to know your child first before discussing supports and adjustments. It's great to start having conversations about potential adjustments.

For more information on what's reasonable, [click here](#)

For more information on adjustments to teaching and learning, [click here](#)