

## **WHEN IS MY CHILD READY FOR SCHOOL?**

What skills do your children really need to have to make a smooth transition to school and become a successful long term learner? The transition to school has been recognised as one of the major challenges children have to face in their early childhood years

### **WHEN ARE CHILDREN ABLE TO ATTEND SCHOOL?**

The age in which children can enter the schooling system varies from State to State. In Victoria children who turn five by the first of May are able to begin Prep. In recent years however, many parents have opted to hold children who would go to school at four back a year, potentially widening the gap by children in the same class by up to two years.

### **HOW DO WE TELL IF CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL?**

In order to assess whether a child is ready for school it is important that we take a holistic approach when looking at their development. In order for a child to successfully negotiate the education system we need to look at their development in the following areas. During the kindergarten year the early childhood teacher will assess your child and plan for their move to school.

There are guidelines that the early childhood teacher will follow to assess your child. These guidelines help the teacher identify your child's needs and goals.

The areas assessed by the early childhood teacher include:

- **LEARNING** (cognitive- intellectual development, persistence, problem-solving, resilience)
- **CONNECTION & CONTRIBUTION** (Social development – how your child interacts with adults and other children, contributing to play, friendship skills and emotional development, managing emotions and problem solving.
- **IDENTITY** ( emotional competence/psychological regulation, confidence )
- **WELLBEING** (physical/emotional - self-care (your child's ability to look after themselves sufficiently), fine and gross motor skills
- **COMMUNICATION** (Social/emotional - ability to speak and/or understand language)
- Other individual factors may also be considered.

The following information outlines what skills are needed in each area, and some ways that we can assist children in acquiring them.

### LEARNING SKILLS

Upon entering prep, it is not important that children have significant literacy or numeracy skills, what is important is that they have the capacity to learn what is required of them according to the school curriculum. In order to help a child become successful learner, we can do the following activities that encourage learning skills.

WHAT	WHY	HOW
Develop concentration span/listening skills	Children will need to be able to sit relatively still in a room with other students and absorb what they are being told. This will include being able to follow directions and complete a task with increasing independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read books &amp; ask questions</li> <li>• Games that require children to follow directions ( snakes &amp; ladders, SNAP, board and dice games)</li> <li>• Encourage children to choose and complete activities/tasks</li> <li>• Get children to repeat things back to you</li> <li>• Play eye spy in the car and “Who Am I?”Guessing games.</li> </ul>
Assist Memory Recall	Children will need sufficient cognitive skills to be able to recall what they are learning, or being asked to do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Games &amp; Books (get children to recall stories)</li> <li>• Teaching songs and poems</li> <li>• Ask children questions about daily routines</li> <li>• Getting children to remember where they put their things</li> <li>• Lots of rhyming stories/songs</li> </ul>
Develop an Interest in learning	Children’s interest in mastering literacy and numeracy concepts may vary; it may be possible that children of very similar ages have very differing interests in this area. Finding opportunities for a child to problem solve successfully may assist them in becoming enthusiastic learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get children to participate in finding answers to the questions they ask you.</li> <li>• Provide activities that are achievable yet challenging</li> <li>• Use specific positive re enforcement when children have learnt an new skill or persisted at a task</li> <li>• Use “I wonder……?” to encourage children to seek solutions and answers.</li> </ul>
Make Choices	School will require children to respond to questions, and give opinions on situation. A child’s ability to answer a question in a group setting will have an impact on how they can operate in a group setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give opportunities your child simple choices. (red/blue socks)</li> <li>• Ask children for their opinions</li> <li>• Get your child to give alternative endings and solutions to stories/situations.</li> </ul>

### COMMUNICATION/CONNECTION& CONTRIBUTION

This is one of the most significant areas in determining whether a child is ready for school. A school playground will vary dramatically from that of a childcare centre/Kindergarten. There are less staff, more children, and a wider variety of age groups. It is possible to suggest that children who are happy at school do better academically. Some of the social skills that children will benefit from learning prior to school are:

WHAT	WHY	HOW
Initiate verbal contact with peers	Children are able to engage or enter into an activity with one or more child without assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role model appropriate strategies to children and use appropriate language and gestures</li> <li>• Provide social opportunities</li> <li>• Assist your child in joining in but do not take over</li> <li>• Getting children to complete jobs (e.g. table setting) in pairs (if possible)</li> </ul>
Cooperative skills	Children are able to understand the basic concepts, and engage in sharing and turn taking with minimal or no adult intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing activities where sharing and turn taking are necessary.</li> <li>• Role modeling appropriate behaviour</li> <li>• Assisting children to share independently rather than doing it for them</li> <li>• Provide children with language that enables them to share</li> </ul>
Participate as part of a group	Children are not overwhelmed and able to participate in group situations such as the classroom or playground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage children to discuss stories/rules etc as a group</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for children to complete tasks in small and large groups</li> <li>• Be aware of children who have difficulty and assist them in joining in, this may entail 'partnering children'</li> </ul>
Independent Conflict resolution skills	Child is able to negotiate and offer suggestions to solve conflict verbally and with minimal assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bibliotherapy; the use of literature to address children's problems.</li> <li>• Encouraging children to perspective take</li> <li>• Encouraging children to speak directly to one another</li> <li>• Encouraging children to make eye contact with one another</li> <li>• Encouraging children to find a solution</li> </ul>

**Words to teach children to use:** My turn, your turn, wait, stop, share, don't speak to me like that, a friend is someone who makes you feel good about yourself, I'm cross/cranky/happy/ excited, can I join in. Please help, can I help you, can I play?

## IDENTITY

*“Children’s images of themselves as learners are influenced greatly by their school experiences (Hadley, Wilcox & Rice, 1994). Their experiences of success, (or otherwise), have a direct impact on their future success at school and on their own sense of self and self-esteem.”*

Emotional development (identity) refers to the development of a healthy self-perception. For children to develop this prior to going to school and throughout their lives they need:

WHAT	WHY	HOW
Opportunities to experience success	Children who are able to master tasks develop the believe or ‘self-efficacy’ that they will generally experience success when attempting new tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide tasks that are challenging yet achievable</li> <li>• Give specific praise</li> <li>• Discuss with children what they need to do to achieve their task, rather than doing it for them</li> </ul>
Experiences that make us feel valued and liked	Children who experience positive interactions with peers and caregivers may develop a positive image of themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that you interactions are warm and respectful</li> <li>• Tell children what you admire like about them</li> <li>• Celebrate their achievements /milestones</li> </ul>
Competent self-help skills	Children who are able to carry out tasks independently may be more confident in their own abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist children with tasks rather than doing them</li> <li>• Make children take responsibility for their actions</li> </ul>
Help-seeking behaviours	Children may make the transition to school more easily if they understand how to seek help effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bibliotherapy, use literature to help with problem solving, emotions and feelings and social interactions</li> <li>• Encourage children to make eye contact and state their needs specifically</li> <li>• Talk to children about how to seek help, and who may be appropriate</li> </ul>

**WELLBEING:**

Physical Development: it may be appropriate in some cases to take into account the size of the child. Although this could not be the only factor used to decide when a child went to school, if a child was small or large for their age to the point where expectations on them would be influenced by their appearance, it may be helpful to consider this. Additionally a child's stamina should also be considered, is the child able to stay awake all day, five days a week!

**NOTE!!** In order for children to gain the physical skills they need to concentrate on, and participate in a full day of school, they will all need the following:

- Sufficient sleep
- Breakfast
- Foods that will encourage stamina and concentration

Physical development will also include fine motor skills, although these will be skills learnt in prep, activities that will help develop the following skills may help:

WHAT	WHY	HOW
Emerging fine motor skills	Increasing pencil & scissor control, hand eye coordination, the ability to tie shoes laces, do up buttons and zips, pack school bag and if necessary unwrap lunch, open lunch boxes and containers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of writing/drawing materials</li> <li>• Activities that promote FMD such as threading, collage and sewing</li> <li>• LEGO</li> <li>• Sticky tape dispensers scissors</li> </ul>

**ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR HOME**

The Importance of Play

Rightly or wrongly the world seems to be becoming a busier place, and because of this children's days are being taken over by routines and scheduled activities. Time to just 'be' and experience periods of uninterrupted play seems to have become a thing of the past.

Considering this, the provision of experiences that encourage children to play in a relaxed, unhurried environment will encourage increased emotional wellness and may decrease potential challenging behavioural issues. Positive social interactions with peers, sensory, imaginative play in solitary and social situations when adequate time and space is provided can enhance social and emotional competence and wellbeing in young children. Encouraging children to relax and play with materials and explore their environment with curiosity and a sense of inquiry will increase the development of new skills, promote confidence to experiment with ideas and equipment and make independent choices. The more a child is able to repeat and practice positive experiences, the higher the likelihood of utilising thinking skills and increasing their capacity for memory and recall.



## MANNINGHAM

Kathy Walker ("What's The Hurry" 2005) suggests that "Early Stimulation" should consist of activities that will encourage children to 'have a go', take risks, and use thinking skills. She suggests that activities such as cubby building, trying to think about possibilities from different perspectives, imaginative play, collage, sand play and other unstructured experiences that encourage children to practice problem solving will stimulate learning.

### **ENCOURAGING SOCIAL SKILLS:**

Arranging plays with other children, particularly children that that may be attending the kindergarten or the same school can help with making friends.

Participating in board games, ball games and other formal and informal social interactions with peers and family members can assist children to understand rules, turn taking, following directions and winning and losing.

Playing in school playgrounds, bike riding and exploring the playground equipment can assist children to feel familiar with the school environment.

Practicing being up, dressed, fed and out the house by a set time for a month prior to school! The state in which children arrive at school and the nature of the morning routine can have a significant impact on how children learn.

Make sure your child can negotiate their lunchbox, and has opportunities to participate in the routine of getting ready for school.

### **ENCOURAGING LITERACY**

Schools are increasingly reporting low levels of oral literacy in children entering prep (Language Impoverished). The following is an outline of what prep teachers believe assists a child's learning:

- Negotiate and enter conversations with peers
- Reciprocal conversations, talking and listening.
- Ask hypothetical questions
- Use descriptive language
- Recount events
- Comprehension

The following Strategies for achieving this:

- Increased child/parent, child/staff conversations
- Lots of "I wonder what would happen if.....?" question to children
- Reading to children and encouraging them to change the endings of stories, dramatise stories, make up and illustrate stories.
- Role modeling of descriptive language
- Opportunities for play
- Rhyming songs

Additional Strengths Identified for Readiness:

- Ability to ask questions
- Approach adults and ask for help
- Confidence
- Self-help skills
- Competent fine and gross motor activity