Supporting Social Skills Development
Parent Support Pack #5

Supporting transitions in the early years

It is at this time of the year that we begin thinking about the upcoming changes to routine and transitions that our children are about to undertake. In a few short weeks, our children will be transitioning from the school routines that they have become accustomed to during the year to spending most of their time in the home, family or caregiver environment. Following this, our children will experience further changes, returning to school to meet a new teacher, work in a new classroom, and play in a new playground with some new peers! Some of our students will even be moving to a new school in a different suburb, experiencing a different drive to school, and changes in the home routine to accommodate this. Starting the school year can be an exciting and fulfilling experience. However, some children find these changes difficult to manage and may become anxious in the face of the new and unknown. This is perfectly natural! Even the most confident and self-assured of children can find the move to a different school environment a daunting and sometimes overwhelming task... We can support our children in these transitions to ease this anxiety and promote positive feelings about school and changes.

Skills that support school transitions

A child’s social knowledge and experiences are the primary factors influencing their ability to manage change and transitions. The following skills have been identified as key social skills for positive school experiences, as well as composed transitions within this context:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skill</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Children are likely to manage transitions better if they feel confident in their abilities in the classroom and playground. This is also likely to bolster confidence in separating from parents as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Directions</td>
<td>Awareness of classroom directions can be a big learning curve for some kids! A child’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ability to attend to and follow directions will greatly support their participation in the classroom.

Expressing Emotions

Children are likely to transition well to novel situations if they have some strategies for managing emotions such as fear, sadness, anger and worry. Our children will definitely require support and prompting to apply these strategies, however some basic concepts of emotional regulation will be a great comfort!

Coping Strategies

There will likely be situations, activities, routine changes and transitions that cause anxious feelings for children in a new environment. Ensuring that children are aware of some coping strategies and can be easily prompted to apply them will have a significant impact on a child’s positive experiences in a new school context.

Joining Play

Knowledge and confidence in joining in with a group in play will greatly support your child in developing positive peer relationships. Being comfortable with others in the class helps children to feel safe and well at school.

Friendship Skills

Skills such as sharing, turn-taking and being caring and kind to others will support children in developing positive peer relationships.

It’s important to be aware of these skills and how they support children transitioning into a new environment, so that we can in turn support children in developing and practicing skills that might need a little attention.

What can we do?

As parents, there are many opportunities we can give our children to allow them to learn about and practice some of the skills above. These will be outlined in this support pack and in the subsequent support pack this term.

1. Prepare your child for change

Preparing your child for change early can help to minimise overwhelming feelings and worry relating to the new environment. You might like to make a couple of visits to the new place before the child’s first day in the new environment.
Point out landmarks or features of the new environment that the child can use as points of reference to talk and think about the new place. It's a great idea to take some photos of your child in this new environment! You could use these photos to make a flip book with your child, with pictures and descriptions of your child’s new environment. Take out the flip book often, show family and friends, and talk about the new place as a fun adventure that your child will undertake.

2. Practice joining in play!

Making new friends or joining play with a group of children can be daunting for a child with language difficulties. You can help your child to become more confident in approaching a new group by practicing the following steps to access play:

**Joining Play**

1. Move close and smile (don’t say, “Can I play?”)
2. Stand close, watch, listen and WAIT for a space
3. Say something nice about the game
4. Join in... don’t wait to be asked!
5. Go with the flow and have fun

Talk about these steps and terms at home, and then support your child in applying them. A birthday party is a great opportunity to practice! In the car on the way there, talk about the steps to access play. Then, when you arrive at the party, choose a group to join with together, and step with your child into play, then fade out. You could do the same at a park near the child’s new school (or close to the LDC if your child is moving to the next year level), and support your child in approaching a safe group of children in a play-environment. This may culminate in your child developing friendships with other children attending the same or nearby school.

Please feel free to contact me at the LDC if you would like to discuss social skills and transitions further.

Warm regards,

**Tina Kilpatrick**

Certified Speech Pathologist
Working Days: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre
18 View Street Dianella, WA, 6059
P (08) 9275 5511 F (08) 9275 5319
E Tina.Kilpatrick@education.wa.edu.au