

## FACT SHEET 10

# Returning to School after a Limb Amputation

When your child returns to kindergarten, pre-school or school after a limb amputation it can be a stressful and emotional time for you, your child and the rest of your family. It can also be a worrying time for your child's school, teachers and peers. To reduce stress during this transition there are approaches you can use to ensure the return to school period is as smooth as possible.

This Fact Sheet explores issues related to your child's return to kindergarten, pre-school or school after an amputation, including: how to begin the transition process; what you need to discuss with your child's school; preparing for a school meeting; and, ways to assist other students to positively understand the physical change in your son or daughter.

## Beginning the transition process

The transition of returning to school after a limb amputation can be a difficult period for your child and family. It is important to speak to your child about this transition and draw upon support from education, health and psychological services when you need to.

- > **Speak to your child.** It is important that you maintain 'open lines of communication' with your child as he or she may be worried, concerned or excited about returning to school. Your child may be worried about what his or her peers and teachers will think about their new physical body, their prosthesis (if applicable), any aids and equipment being used. As your child may have missed time at school, he or she may be worried about any learning that has been missed.
- > **Speak to your Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist.** These health professionals will already be working closely with you and your child during the recovery period; assessing and enhancing mobility, independence and confidence. The assessments and feedback from your Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist can assist school staff to understand your child's needs and contribute to the development of an Individual Plan at school.

- > **Speak to your Social Worker.** Your Social Worker can provide you with access to support and confidential counselling if you require it. In addition, your Social Worker can liaise with your child's school and assist during the return to school transition period.
- > **Speak to your Prosthetist.** Your Prosthetist will already be working with you and your child to determine which prosthesis (if any) will best suit your child. Depending on your child's recovery period, he or she may not be ready for their prosthesis prior to returning to school. You will need to consider what (if any) impacts returning to school prior to receiving a prosthesis may have at a physical and emotional level. Discuss these matters with your Prosthetist and other health professionals supporting your child.

## Speak to your child's school

Speak to your child's kindergarten, pre-school or school as soon as possible regarding your child's amputation. In some cases it will be a scheduled amputation which will allow time to discuss your child's surgery in advance. If the amputation occurs unexpectedly then it is best to discuss what has occurred with your child's school as soon as possible.

We understand that discussing your child's amputation with his or her school can be emotional, however educators are professionals who care for their student and parent community and will want to support you as best as they can.

When speaking with your child's school ask to have all relevant school staff present at the meeting. You may also want to bring your own support to that meeting; whether that is your Social Worker, a family member or friend. Having another person present can provide you with emotional support and assist you in taking down notes.

Meeting with your school will ensure that all relevant staff understand what has happened, how your child is recovering and what steps need to be put in place when your son or daughter returns to school. Your child's school will likely want to put into place an Individual Plan for your child. These plans have different names in different states and territories and in different educational sectors (eg. Individual Education Plan, Negotiated Education Plan) but largely cover: funding eligibility; required accessibility modifications; classroom assistance; curriculum; and, any other specific needs your child may have. Depending on your child's needs, school location or education sector your child may also be allocated with support at a school or regional level.

It is important to note that all jurisdictions must comply with the Disability Standards for Education, 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia) that clarify to education providers their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth of Australia).

## Preparing for a school meeting

Prior to meeting with school staff regarding your child's amputation and new limb difference/s, it is a good idea to prepare a list of key issues you want to discuss or draw their attention to, including:

- > **Amputation information.** How did the amputation occur? How is your child coping since the amputation? What medical and health professionals are working with your child and your family?
- > **School attendance.** Will it be full or part-time? If it is part-time when do you expect schooling will become full-time?
- > **Rests and breaks.** Will your child require any additional rest periods during school hours? How will the school monitor and manage rest periods?
- > **School modifications.** Does the school need to make any modifications to accommodate your child's accessibility and equipment needs? Are the classrooms and toilets accessible? Are there steps, stairs or distances in parts of the school that may affect your child's ability to access school grounds?
- > **Pain management.** Does your child take any pain medication and, if so, what dosage? How often do medications need to be administered and how will this occur during school hours?

- > **Assistance.** Will your child require assistance moving from one classroom to another? Does your child need assistance carrying bags, books or technology? Does your child require assistance with eating? Does your child require assistance with toileting? What procedures are in place?
- > **Transport.** If your child has limited mobility, are there special school drop-off and pick-up arrangements available?
- > **Curriculum.** How will your child's absence from school (or other matters related to their limb difference) affect their learning, marks and completion of certain subjects? If necessary, what curriculum modifications can the school offer both now and into the future?
- > **Communicating with peers.** How would you like your child to discuss their limb difference with other students or teachers? How can you and the school assist students to positively understand your child's amputation and limb difference?

## Assisting peers to understand limb difference

Your child's limb amputation may be distressing or difficult to understand by some student peers (particularly young ones). Try to ensure that the kindergarten, pre-school or school is working with you to support all the students to learn about your child's amputation and limb difference in a positive way. Addressing this matter early will positively influence acceptance of your child's physical difference. This is discussed in more detail in a separate Fact Sheet.

## Accessing support

Assisting your child's school and peers to understand your son or daughter's limb amputation may lead to some questions or concerns. You may want to speak to a Limbs 4 Kids team member who can assist you. You may also want to speak to another parent who has experienced what you are going through. If so, Limbs 4 Kids can connect you to a trained Peer Support Volunteer who you can speak to you. Visit our website or call us for more information and links to our online support.

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[www.limbs4kids.org.au](http://www.limbs4kids.org.au)

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The Limbs 4 Kids program is an initiative of Limbs 4 Life, Australia's peak organisation for amputees and persons living with limb difference. Limbs 4 Kids ensures that all Australian children and young people with limb difference, as well as all of those who care for them, receive access to information and support.

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