

FACT SHEET 8

Kindergarten and Pre-School Years

Starting kindergarten and pre-school is an important social and learning milestone in the life of your child. Your child's commencement in kindergarten and pre-school can lead to a mix of emotions for you and your child; emotions that can range from uncertainty to excitement. This period can also be a time when you have many questions and concerns regarding how your child will adapt to this new environment and whether any additional support or adaptations will need to be made to positively accommodate your child's limb difference.

Transitioning your child into kindergarten and pre-school may also be a period of significant change for parents as, for some, this is the first time that their child has entered into coordinated care outside of the home environment. It is also a period of change for your child who will enter a world that is focused on story time, art and imagination, talking and listening, play time, exploration, socialisation and making new friends.

This Fact Sheet contains information to assist you when your child is entering the kindergarten and pre-school years, including: selecting a kindergarten or pre-school; enrolling your child; preparing your child for kindergarten and pre-school; and accessing support.

Selecting a kindergarten or pre-school

In Australia kindergarten is not compulsory, whereas pre-school is compulsory preparation before your child commences primary school in some states and territories. Parents can select from government, Catholic and independent providers; the choice of which will determine funding arrangements and costs.

Before enrolling visit the kindergarten or pre-school, assess its grounds and facilities, and identify any assistance or accessibility needs your child might require there. In addition, ensure that information about the school's procedures, policies and service license is displayed and/or available to you.

Enrolling your child in kindergarten or pre-school

When selecting and enrolling your child in kindergarten or pre-school arrange to meet with relevant staff to discuss your child's limb difference and any specific needs or support requirements your child may have.

Ensure that the kindergarten or pre-school is aware of your child's abilities and limitations, is inclusive and respectful with regards your child's needs, is able to provide your child with the appropriate level of support, and that the facilities are accessible (if required). Meeting with staff early will provide them with time to organise the best plan of action for your child, investigate funding opportunities and make any relevant modifications your child might need.

While every state and territory, and education sectors, have different arrangements, your child's kindergarten and pre-school may establish an individualised plan that is family-focused and incorporate the involvement of specialist teachers and support agencies designed to ensure that your child's education, development and participation is maximised. Speak to staff at your child's kindergarten or pre-school about their arrangements and/or discuss your child's situation with the relevant Government Education Department, Catholic School Association or Independent School Association in your state or territory.

When enrolling you generally need to provide information, including: your child's name and address; details about yourself and any other parents, carers or guardians in your child's life; details of people who can collect your child; and, any relevant medical health and immunisation status details.

We understand that discussing your child's limb difference can be emotional, however early childhood 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 kindergarten or pre-school ask to have all relevant staff present at the meeting. You may 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.

Preparing your child for kindergarten and pre-school

Starting kindergarten and pre-school is often a significant adjustment period for children. In light of this you might want to consider preparing your son or daughter for this milestone prior to their commencement. Some preparatory ideas include:

- > talking to your child about what to expect and why kindergarten or pre-school is important

- > talking to your child about any concerns they have regarding their limb difference and how it will be accommodated in this new environment (you may want to visit in advance so that any physical or emotional concerns are minimised)
- > supporting your child to manage dressing him or herself, which for some children with limb difference may require additional support or advice from their Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist
- > reading to your child every day
- > encouraging your child to become independent by giving him or her 'alone time'
- > packing a change of clothes for your child and labelling all belongings
- > building independence by establishing a 'goodbye ritual' which might see you stay for a short period initially and reducing that to a brief goodbye once your child feels secure and settled
- > keeping staff informed of any changes in your child's life that might affect their experiences at kindergarten or pre-school.

Accessing support

The kindergarten and pre-school years can be a time of great excitement for your family. However, it may also be a time that leads to some concerns or questions along the way.

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.