

FACT SHEET 9

Primary and Secondary School Years

The primary and secondary school education years are a significant period in the life of children, young people and their parents. During this time parents select the school/s their child will attend, learn about additional support available to their child, build connections with educators, build relationships with other parents, watch their child develop independence and become part of their child's learning. During this time children and young people develop independence, undertake educational development and learning, build friendships, enter into adolescence, and participate in a range of social and sporting activities.

During the education years your child may experience some difficulties and concerns that may or may not be directly related to their limb difference and your child may seek your support to overcome any challenges along the way. Equally, your child will be keen to share his or her achievements and successes with you during this important period of their life.

If your child is returning to school after an acquired amputation your child, their educators and peers may need your support and guidance so that they can all successfully adjust to this change. A separate Fact Sheet addresses that specific issue.

This Fact Sheet contains information to assist you during your child's primary and secondary education years, including: selecting a school, enrolling your child, coordinating a school meeting; and, preparing for a school meeting.

Selecting a primary or secondary school

The selection of a primary school and secondary school for your child is one of the most important education decisions your family will make. Selecting a school often involves school visits, meeting with educators and attending orientation sessions prior to school commencement. In addition factors such as travel, finances, and before / after school care may need consideration before a school is chosen.

In some cases, children with a limb difference may be eligible for additional funding and support whilst attending primary and/or secondary school. Approved eligibility may lead to additional funding, provision of accessible resources and assistance in the classroom. Eligibility for support differs between states and territories (as well as the education sector) and it is best to discuss your child's specific needs with your preferred school. You may also want to discuss your child's situation with the relevant Government Education Department, Catholic School Association or Independent School Association in your state or territory.

Enrolling your child in primary or secondary school

When meeting with potential schools, or enrolling your child in a school, it is important to discuss your child's specific needs with the staff. Discussing your child's individual needs is important so that their schooling can be stress-free and positive for all parties. You may find that your child's school has never educated a child with a limb difference so you may need to explain this in detail with school management, teachers and other key staff.

We understand that discussing your child's limb difference 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. Coordinating and preparing for a school meeting to discuss your child is one way of ensuring that all staff understand your child's needs.

Coordinating a school meeting

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 the school will ensure that all relevant staff understand your child's limb difference and support needs. 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 one-on-one support from a specific staff member in the school.

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).

Over the course of your child's education years you and/or your child may be asked to provide information related to your child's limb difference with new teachers or at the beginning of each school year. This may, at times, feel intrusive or frustrating. But, it is important to remember that the school is asking these questions and requesting information to ensure that your son or daughter is best supported in the school environment and that all opportunities for additional resources and equipment are explored.

Preparing for a school meeting

Prior to meeting with school staff it is a good idea to make a list of key issues you want to discuss, including:

- > **Rests and breaks.** Will your child require 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 needs and equipment? Are classrooms and toilets accessible? Are there steps in the school that may affect your child's ability to access school grounds? Will the computers accommodate a single-handed keyboard or specific programs if your child has an upper limb difference?
- > **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 be administered on school grounds?
- > **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 are the procedures around the various types of assistance your child may have?
- > **Transport.** If your child has limited mobility, are there special arrangements available for school drop-off and pick-up zones?
- > **Absences and curriculum.** How will any absence from school (eg. to attend medical appointments) affect your child's learning, marks and completion of certain subjects? What can the school suggest in this area both now and into the future?
- > **Communicating with peers.** How would you like your child to discuss their limb difference with school peers? How can students best understand your child's limb difference?

Accessing support

The primary and secondary 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.

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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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