

FACT SHEET

Returning to school after a limb amputation

When your child returns to kindergarten, pre-school or school after an amputation it can be a stressful and emotional time for you all. It can also be a worrying time for your child's school community, teachers and peers. But there are approaches you may want to take to ensure that the return to school is as smooth as possible.

This Fact Sheet explores issues related to your child's return to school after an amputation, including 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 child.

Preparing to return to school

- **Find out how your child feels.** It's important that you maintain 'open lines of communication' with your child as they may be worried, concerned or excited about returning to school. Your child might be concerned about perceived limitations and expectations their peers and teachers may have. Your child may be worried about what others think about their physical body, their prosthesis (if applicable), or any aids and equipment being used. Your child may also be worried about any learning missed during the surgery and recovery period.
- **Speak to your occupational therapist (OT).** Your child may already be working with an OT during the recovery period and preparation to return to everyday activities. An OT assessment and feedback can assist school staff to understand your child's needs and contribute to development of an Individual Plan at school.

- **Social Worker.** Your social worker can arrange confidential counselling and provide funding information. Your social worker may also be able to speak to your child's school and assist during the return to school transition period.
- **Prosthetist.** If your child is being fitted for a prosthesis, their prosthetist will already be working to determine which device will best suit them. Depending on your child's recovery period, they may not be ready for their prosthesis prior to returning to school. You will need to consider what physical and/or emotional impact (if any) that returning to school prior to receiving a prosthesis may have.
- **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 you time to discuss your child's upcoming 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 you can.

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. 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. When speaking with your child's school ask to have all relevant school staff present at the meeting.

You may want to bring your own support person to that meeting for emotional or practical assistance. 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 they return. The school will likely want to put into place an Individual Plan for your child. These plans generally cover: funding eligibility; required accessibility modifications; classroom assistance; curriculum; and, any other needs.

All schools must comply with the Disability Standards for Education, 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia) which clarifies education providers responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth of Australia).

Preparing for a school meeting

Prior to meeting with school staff, it is a good idea to prepare a list of key topics you want to discuss 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 family?
- **School attendance.** Will it be full or part-time? If it is part-time when do you expect your child will move into full-time schooling?
- **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 use (e.g. wheelchair, crutches, prosthetic limb)? Are the classrooms and toilets accessible? Are there any steps/stairs that may affect your child's ability to access parts of the school? 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 managed at school? How do you give consent to the school to administer medication?

- **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?
- **Transport.** If your child has limited mobility, are there special school drop-off and pick-up zones?
- **Absences and curriculum.** How will any absence from school (e.g. to attend medical appointments) affect your child's learning? How can your child 'catch-up' when away from the classroom?
- **Communicating with peers.** How would you like your child to discuss their limb difference/s with other students? How can students be assisted to positively understand your child's limb difference?
- **Individual Plan.** Does the school need to develop an Individual Plan for your child, reflecting that they live with a limb difference?

Assisting peers to understand limb difference

It is important to remember that your child's limb amputation may be distressing for, or difficult to understand, by some of their peers.

Try to ensure that the school is working with you to support students to learn about your child's limb difference in a way that is acceptable for your child and family. Speaking about this matter early will help to ensure that your child's limb difference is positively accepted and understood by the school community. This is discussed in more detail in a separate Fact Sheet.

Accessing support

Assisting your child's school and peers to understand their limb amputation may lead to some questions or concerns. You may want to speak to a Limbs 4 Life 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 Life can connect you to a trained Peer Support Volunteer who you can speak to. Visit our website or call us for more information and links to our online support.

www.limbs4kids.org.au | T: 1300 782 231 | E: kids@limbs4life.org.au

The Limbs 4 Kids program is an initiative of Limbs 4 Life, Australia's peak organisation for amputees and those 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.