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NEW PARENT RESOURCE 3rd Edition

SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

A GUIDE BY PARENTS FOR PARENTS
3RD EDITION



LEADERSHIP | ADVOCACY | SUPPORT

ARE YOU A PARENT WHO HAS A SCHOOL-AGED CHILD WITH DISABILITY OR ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS?

Supporting Diverse Learners with Disability in Catholic Schools is a practical, parent-to-parent guide designed to help you confidently navigate the school journey

- Written by experienced parents, for parents
- Practical, easy-to-use advice for both primary and secondary school
- Helps you prepare your child for school and each stage of learning
- Guidance on working effectively with teachers and school staff
- Tips to support positive learning and wellbeing outcomes

The third edition has been updated with information on government supports, how schools support students with disability, reasonable adjustments, curriculum modifications, and post-school pathways including TAFE and university.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AT PRIMARY SCHOOL: KINDERGARTEN TO YEAR 6

As the parent or carer, your attitude about school and the responses of an education 'set the tone' for your child. You can do this by speaking positively about the new school and the experience.

Here is a chance to build some resilience and show your confidence in your child and their ability to work through this change. It may require acknowledgment that some days will go smoothly but others will be tough. However, you have confidence they will settle.

THE FIRST DAY

The first day at any new school, for children or young people of any age, can be an exciting time. It can also be a time of fear and anxiety that can be heightened by the unfamiliarity of the school setting. This can be particularly challenging for children and young people who are living with diverse learning needs.

Families also can be fearful and anxious for their child, seeking a smooth transition, to settle in quickly, adapt to the new environment and routines, and make friends and develop connections within the school community.

What can families do to support their child's transition into a new school?

- Talk to your child about what to expect on the first day and when you will pick them up.
- Follow the school's instructions about what to bring (e.g. sun hat, spare clothes).
- Prepare the night before, lay out clothing and help them to pack their bag.

- Encourage your child to follow your morning routine and remind them of next steps.
- Discuss with the teacher the best approach to settle your child on the first day.
- If you are having trouble separating from your child, ask the teacher or educators to help you.
- Make sure you say goodbye – disappearing quietly can cause greater distress and mislead.
- Ensure you or their carer is on time at the end of the school day to pick up your child.
- Be enthusiastic and positive.
- At the end of the day talk to your child about what happened during the day. Ask general questions such as 'what did you enjoy doing?' or 'what made you smile?' Try not to 'drill' them too much – they are likely to be tired and drained.

TOP TIPS FROM PARENTS FOR A SMOOTH START TO SCHOOL

- Read over the family information the school provided to ensure everything is prepared.
- Try to avoid non-essential disruptions in the morning as you are getting ready for the day. Changes to your routine may unsettle your child.
- Plan and organise the night before. Make sure uniforms are ready, shoes and socks neatly folded, packed, any notes signed and prepared, bag packed with a reminder.
- Make sure ALL belongings, even each sock, both shoes and lunchboxes and drink bottles are labelled.
- Use countdown and time checks during the morning – using a kitchen timer can help.
- Have recess and lunch at the same time as the school in the holidays to prepare before school starts.
- Prepare your child's recess and lunch and offer it to them in their lunchbox so they can practice opening, closing and unempting their food for each break.
- Package recess separately to lunch to avoid them eating it all at the first break.
- If possible, make sure your child can go to and use the toilet themselves and wash their hands. Speak to your child's teacher if they need assistance.
- Practice taking shoes and socks off and putting them on. Purchase shoes that can manage such as those with Velcro fastenings – check with the school uniform policy or staff to ensure appropriate footwear is purchased.
- Speak to the principal if your child needs to have a variation to the uniform such as a cotton jumper rather than a school jumper because of sensory issues.
- Create a social story for your child prior to starting school and try to find out roughly what will happen during the school day. The school may be able to help you with this.
- Make sure that all your health professionals are on board regarding the start of the school year. Talk to them about their role in preparing your child and talking about going to school.
- Consider using a visual board (see below) with your child to create a visual timetable to help your child know what they need to do to prepare for school or any other activity.
- Practice putting uniform items on and taking them off and modify (within school allowances) any items which create sensory or motor issues. Use Velcro fastenings and larger buttons, and consider fabric type such as wool and check if there is a acceptable alternative etc. Make sure you leave enough time to modify school uniforms if necessary.
- Practice morning and afternoon routines.
- Be positive – talk to your child about the exciting and fun experiences they will have at their new school.
- Reassure them it's OK if they feel a little unsure or overwhelmed and remind them there are lots of people who want to care for and look after them at school.
- For children commencing Kindergarten, look for books about Kindergarten and school to read together. Your local library may be able to help you out here.
- Encourage your child to dress themselves so they can practice tasks like taking their jumper on and off.
- Visit the Kindergarten classroom or travel past it on your route home. Talk about the experience and how to be at school when you know what interests them such as art, sports, music, nature work etc.
- Talk to your child and establish a positive routine together.
- Organise holiday play dates (if possible) with friends who have children at the school and who may have a child starting Kindergarten.
- Create a routine around sleep – at this age, children need 10 to 12 hours sleep each night. Practice sticking to bedtime and wake up times.

'In the guide, you will find all manner of suggestions that will help your child get the most out of their school experience... The more you know, the better you will be able to engage collaboratively with others to pursue the most rounded education and development for your child.'

– Bishop Danny Meagher

