

The Child in your Care is Starting Kindergarten

After experiencing learning through play and discovery in preschool, settling into Kindergarten can be a real challenge for some children:

- Feelings of being completely overwhelmed in a larger and busier environment
- Struggle to process and retain instructions
- Huge volume of information over a short period of time
- Fast paced curriculum with a strong academic focus
- Requirement to be seated for long periods
- Much larger and busier play spaces
- Taking instructions from numerous new people

Ways to Ease transition and Support the Child in you Care

Arrange a meeting with the school Principal and invite your child's C/W and a member of their preschool staff before the child starts school. If you can include whoever will be your child's Kindergarten teacher, or the school's Head of the Learning Support team even better. This will ensure staff involved with your child have been given opportunity to:

- **Discuss and understand challenges the child may face in school**

e.g.

Social skills may affect ability to form positive peer relationships and build trust and feelings of safety with newly introduced adults

Complex behaviours, triggers, sensory issues and needs, anxiety

Slower processing speed and/or poor working memory

Issues with hearing, sight, other disability, or any issue requiring regular appointments which may affect the child's attendance

Issues around food especially if the child takes a long time to eat their food

Issues around toileting

- **Discuss strategies that work well for the child when overwhelmed or anxious**

Use statements from recent assessments and reports from therapists who have been/are supporting the child, and even the valuable resources you have been given on training courses to support what you say

- **Discuss and fully understand the importance of confidentiality for both child and their birth family**

This is especially important as there is a strong emphasis on topics around family and family history during Kindergarten year

- **Discuss the child's cultural heritage and how that will be supported and reflected in their learning at school**

Very important step in ensuring the child feels valued among their peers as an equally important member of the school community

- **Discuss the support that will be available to the child if English as a second language support is required**

Very important in ensuring the child has an equal opportunity to access the curriculum

- **Discuss funding which is available from NSW Education**

There is funding available to every OOHC child in NSW, to help them settle into school.

And thereafter funding is available to support the child through any number of changes that may arise and affect their learning

e.g.

Change of placement, change brought on by permanency planning, change of C/W, etc.

OOHC Funding Model (<https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/child-protection/out-of-home-care/oohc-change-funding-model>) clarifies circumstances in which funding can be raised, and by whom.

Funding can be transferred into the school's 'Global Financial Fund' so it is important that carers are proactive in ensuring it is actually directed towards the child it has been applied for.

OOHC Wellbeing For Schools document (<https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/whole-school-approach/wellbeing-framework-for-schools>) explains the school Principal's responsibility and duty of care.

An **Individual Education Plan** to which you and the child's teacher and the child's C/W contribute will specify particular goals to work towards and this will be reviewed and updated regularly.

OOHC Teacher for this this region - Kerry Keogh (Supports school staff and OOHC students in NSW public schools)

She is based at Tyalla Public School, Coffs Harbour

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As carers, we have regular opportunities to learn a great deal about the effects of trauma on a child's brain and how that can affect their responses and decision making. It is very important to share this information with the school Learning Support Team and the child's teacher **before** the child starts school....especially information on therapeutic responses to an overwhelmed child in 'fight or flight' mode, and what works for the child in your care.

The child's experience in school will be much more positive if similar strategies are used by carer, teacher and learning support staff because it helps the child feel safe, know their feelings are acknowledged and that they are valued by the school community, giving them that vital sense of belonging and connection.

It is a mistake to expect all teachers to be trained in therapeutic practices to support children who are surviving trauma but schools do have a teacher responsible for Student Wellbeing who can check in and support any child who needs it.

Useful resources to share:

www.complexcare.com.au (**Trent Savill**) provides a good range of resources relating to working with and managing complex behaviours

Dan Hughes, Dan Siegel, John Gottman and Brene Brown are just a few references for learning what constitutes trauma and why trauma affects a child's ability to:

- Take in instructions
 - Retain information
 - Organise belongings
 - Cope with unexpected and/or sudden change
 - Cope with being called out for attention, be it positive or negative
 - React or respond in expected ways....
- and so much more....

www.makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au provides valuable information on the impact of diet, sleep, physical activity, and screen time on children's health and social skills, and provides practical tips and advice.

Helen Montgomery

Northern CRG (Nov.2019)