

How can you help your child settle into an early childhood care service?

Starting an early childhood education and care service can be an emotional experience for both you and your child. Children especially can often experience some difficulty settling into a new environment, particularly if they find it hard to separate from family or familiar caregivers.

This information sheet offers some suggestions that can help you support your child during the settling in period. You will of course need to be patient because they may cry, be grumpy or throw tantrums for an initial time as they get used to the new environment.

Plan an orientation visit

- An orientation visit before your child starts will give them a chance to explore their new environment.
- They can begin to develop a relationship with the educators and meet other children at the service with the security that you are close by. Familiarising your child with their alternate carers and care setting will be a huge help to them.
- Discuss your child's interests, routines and rituals with the educators.
- The service may also be able to provide you with a family handbook at this time. This should include information about the service's operations and key policies and procedures which may help you to plan to settle your child into the service.



Prepare them for the separation

- Leave your child with their grandparents or your friends for a few hours every day so they get used to your absence.
- Talk about the early childhood care service with your child and let them know that you are happy and confident that they will have a good time and will be cared for.
- If possible, start with shorter or fewer days then gradually increase their time spent at the service. Once they develop a settling routine, they should be more comfortable.
- Don't let your emotions or anxieties affect your child. Try and hold back your tears when you drop them off.
- Say 'goodbye' confidently and reassure them when you leave that you (or someone else) will be back later to collect them.
- Give your child sufficient time to say their goodbyes in the morning. Reach the service early so you have time to prepare your child for a good day.





Comfort them

- Ask your child if they would like to take their favourite toy or colour book to the centre.
- Find a preferred educator that your child can be left with when you drop them off for the day.
- Spend some time settling your child into a favourite activity before you leave.
- Inform the service about what comforts your child and discuss how you manage activities or times of the day they find unsettling. For example, does your child have a toy or blanket that helps them to settle?
- Show empathy – in the morning when you see your child upset on your way to child care, talk to them. It is advised not to share your own worries, but tell your child that they'll be okay. Ask them to share their feelings with you. Listen to them and tell them what they are feeling is normal and it's a big step for them as they are growing up.
- Where possible, organise play dates outside of service. This will help your child be more comfortable with the other children at the service.

Encourage them

- Every time you go to pick up your child from the service, tell them they did great that day.
- Encourage your little one pack their bag with essentials they will need for the day. If they are too young to pack their bag themselves, ask them if they would like to take a toy/book with them. Pack a comforter – a toy or blanket that is something familiar from home for them.
- Take the time to have a nice conversation at the breakfast table. Tell them the time at what you'll be picking them up, and perhaps offer them a reward if they behave well at their early childhood service.
- Talking with children and encouraging them to voice any concerns or anxieties they may have is a helpful strategy.

For your peace of mind it can be helpful to call the service later to see how your child settled. Children who become very upset when they are left often settle very quickly and happily once the actual separation is over. The service should enable you to contact them throughout the day.

You may also want to speak to the educators at child care about how you can better support your child's transition.



How can the service assist your child to settle?

The educators at the service should also demonstrate openness and sensitivity in assisting your child and family to settle. Some important ways for them to do this include:

- Providing you with verbal and/or written information about what can be expected when your child is settling and giving you settling tips during this process.
- Keeping you informed about your child's settling, and actively seeking ongoing information from you about your child's needs and interests.
- Inviting you to call or visit the service
- Giving you information about anything that may be happening at the service that may affect your child's settling. For example, the absence of key people who work with your child.
- Reviewing the settling process for your child with you to identify how this is going.

Reconnecting with your child after a day in early childhood care

It's not only a new experience for your child, it's also important for you to know how they feel about going to their early childhood education and care service. This will help you connect and build a strong relationship with your child.

After you pick them up from their service, give them your undivided attention. They might be grumpy because they haven't seen you the whole day, so shower them with all the love you can.

Create a meaningful conversation with them after their day at a service.

Here are some suggestions:

- Ask them about their favourite activities of the day.
- Talk to them about the friends they have made. Ask them to name a few children who you know your child is friendly with or spends time playing with.
- If the service provided food, ask your child how it was and who did they have it with.
- Talk to them about their favourite educator at the service and what they like about them.
- Ask them if their educator read them any story, which one was it, and what they liked about it.
- Mention some items that your child would see or play with at the service, as this helps them recall situations. For instance, ask them what they and their friends made with the blocks.
- Ask them if they learned anything new.
- Use images or notes from the educators at the centre for conversation. For example, "Look at this lovely photo of you at the sandpit. What did sand feel like in your toes?"

