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Transitions between outside school hours care and school

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Transitioning to school and between educational settings is a significant milestone for children and families. Successful transitions lead to better outcomes for children and enhance continuity of learning and development. A successful transition occurs when a child and their family feel a sense of belonging in their new environment.

Educators, teachers and school and service leaders are uniquely placed to support children and families in establishing and maintaining a sense of belonging at critical transition points.

The evidence-based practices presented in this guide can be used to support children's transitions:

- from before-school care to school
- from school to after-school care.

It is designed to help services and schools work together to achieve more successful transitions. We recommend school and OSHC leaders set up a meeting once each term to discuss the strategies presented in this guide and make a plan for the following term.

The guide is organised into two distinct categories:

- Collaborative partnerships

- Child-centred approaches

Many ECEC services and schools already plan for transitions with a child-centred approach and draw on collaborative partnerships to enhance the process. However, many educators and teachers would also like to gain a better understanding of how these practices look in action. Some of the examples offered here may not apply in all contexts or be appropriate for all children. Reasonable adjustments should be made where necessary to ensure appropriate support is provided for children with disability or developmental delay and to accommodate families across different contexts and cultures.

To support the content covered in this guide, we spoke to Principal Corrie Connors and OSHC Managing Coordinator Pam Kildey, both of Kuluin State School in Queensland. You can view videos of Corrie and Pam discussing how they navigate child-centred approaches and collaborative partnerships, in their particular context.

To find out more about the research and evidence behind this practice guide, see our evidence summary.

Collaborative partnerships

Links to national standards and frameworks

My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care

- Principle: Partnerships

- Practice: Continuity and transitions

- Practice: Learning through play and leisure

National Quality Standard

- 4.2.1 Professional collaboration

- 6.1 Supportive relationships with families (all elements)

- 6.2 Collaborative partnerships (all elements)

- 7.1.3 Roles and responsibilities

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

- 1.6 Strategies to support full participation of learners with disability

- 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

- 7.4 Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities

- 4.1 Support student participation

- 7.3 Engage with parents/carers

Australian Professional Standard for Principals

- Professional Practice: Engaging and working with the community

These practice guides are also designed to align with professional standards used by major OSHC providers.

Why collaborative partnerships are important

Collaboration between outside school hours care (OSHC) services and schools enhances continuity of learning and effective transitions for children as they move between OSHC and the school learning environment. Collaboration is essential for facilitating safe, effective processes for supporting children's movement to and from school and OSHC services. It also helps to foster children's learning and development, and sense of belonging at school and OSHC, by enabling everyone involved in the transition to work together to support the child.

What collaborative partnerships look like in practice

The following practices contribute to collaborative partnerships in transitions between OSHC and school.

Positive professional relationships

Collaborative partnerships are built on mutual respect for the distinctive, complementary role that OSHC services and schools play in the lives of children and families. This includes respect for the shared wisdom and expertise of teachers and educators in both settings. Positive relationships embrace diversity, recognising that everyone has something valuable to contribute and nobody has all the answers in determining how best to support a child.

Teachers and educators in OSHC services and schools can:

- use informal contact during daily transitions to check in and share information
- plan reciprocal visits if the OSHC service is not located on the school site (though this may require a more formal arrangement)

- build understanding of the practices and priorities of each other's professional context, and the distinctive expertise that OSHC and schools bring to their work
- model warm, respectful relationships between adults in school and OSHC in ways that are visible to children, to create a climate of trust, connection and belonging
- take opportunities to express appreciation for each other's contribution, including by encouraging children to appreciate the support they receive (for example, encouraging children to say thank you to the educator who walked them to class and supported them with their preparation for the school day).

Leaders in OSHC services and schools can:

- promote a culture where collaboration between OSHC, school, children and families is seen as a partnership in which all voices are respected and heard
- create formal and informal opportunities for teachers and educators in school and OSHC to get to know one another, such as events or professional learning
- talk about each other's programs and services in positive ways to all community stakeholders including colleagues and families
- model collaboration and mutual respect at the leadership level of OSHC and school, creating connections appropriate to the governance models of both organisations.

Shared responsibility for children

Collaborative partnerships are most successful when there are clear roles and responsibilities for all aspects of transitions. This includes supporting children's safety and wellbeing, working with families, and fostering children's independence and skills. Children and their friends and families also have important roles to play as members of a collaborative team.

Teachers and educators in OSHC services and schools can:

- create space for shared thinking about roles and responsibilities, either through a dedicated meeting or brainstorming in parallel and exchanging ideas

- brainstorm the work that occurs during transitions and who contributes, including specific teachers, educators, family members or the child. This might include:

  – designing the daily transition process in collaboration with families and establishing check-in processes to monitor progress

  – accompanying the child from one environment to another

  – confirming that children are where they need to be

  – ensuring they have their belongings with them

  – ensuring key resources (such as accessibility supports) are available

  – providing emotional support during arrivals/departures

  – fostering the child's skills to manage their own transitions using intentional teaching practices

  – sharing information about the child's interests, strengths and needs

  – monitoring the child's progress in transitions over time, making note of and acting on any identified challenges or needs

- work collaboratively to negotiate or share roles and responsibilities, where they may be unclear, and prioritise what will work best for the child (within relevant legislative requirements, policies and resourcing arrangements)

- maintain ongoing communication (including with families) about roles and responsibilities, especially during changes to staffing arrangements or routines

- address misunderstandings proactively and respectfully and consult with OSHC and school leaders if gaps are evident in resources or processes for transitions support.

Leaders in OSHC services and schools can:

- ensure sufficient resources are available to support effective transitions, including sufficient budget and time allocations

- establish and regularly review agreements about shared facilities and operational arrangements

- develop and review policies and procedures that encourage collaboration between teachers and educators in OSHC and school, built around shared responsibility for children

- create joint initiatives where OSHC educators and teachers work together to problem-solve issues of shared interest, such as enhancing facilities or transition processes

- model a mindset of shared responsibility if issues in transitions are raised with leadership.

Reflection questions

1. Which practices do you currently use to build collaborative relationships between schools, OSHC, children and families? How do these practices support successful transitions?

2. Which challenges do you experience in building collaborative partnerships?

   a. Which beliefs or assumptions might get in the way of collaboration?

   b. Which practical barriers exist and how might these be overcome?

3. How can you check in with teachers, educators, children and families about the effectiveness of the collaboration? Does everyone feel the same way about how transitions are going?

Child-centred transitions

Why child-centred transitions are important

Child-centred approaches in OSHC place the learner at the core of teachers' and educators' decisions and actions. During transitions, educators and teachers can come together to make decisions about what will work best for each child, based on their needs, and with consideration of their interests and perspectives. A child-centred approach can help individual teachers, educators and school and service leaders orient their practice to the strengths and needs of each child. It can also help teams of teachers and educators across OSHC and schools commit to a shared vision for children's wellbeing, learning and development and articulate how their values, goals and practices support this.

Using a child-centred approach to transitions

The following practices contribute to a child-centred approach in transitions between OSHC services and schools.

Treat transitions as opportunities for learning and development

Children's ability to manage transitions between OSHC and school involves a range of skills that they develop and apply every day. A guiding principle of the National Quality Framework is that children are capable and competent learners. When this principle is applied in practice, children's agency during transitions increases and so does their sense of belonging in both OSHC and school environments.

Teachers and educators in OSHC services and schools can:

- Brainstorm learning and development that occurs during transitions and seek opportunities to highlight and capitalise on these. Include relevant curriculum documents for the OSHC or school context as part of the brainstorm. Successful transitions involve:

  – all 5 outcomes from the My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia. For example, children with a strong sense of identity (Outcome 1) see both OSHC and school as 'their place' and settle easily in both environments. Children who are confident and involved learners (Outcome 4) can transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another

  – general capabilities from the Australian Curriculum, especially the Personal and Social Capability (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management).

- Intentionally support children to develop personal and social skills during the transition.

  – OSHC educators can incorporate developing personal and social skills into children's daily routines, and develop a play-based learning environment in collaboration with children by seeking and valuing their input.

- Teachers in schools can also incorporate learning personal and social skills into daily routines, including using explicit instruction to guide children's understanding, decision making and behaviour during transitions.

- Monitor children's progress in managing their transition.

  – OSHC educators should observe how children are managing transitions as part of their ongoing monitoring of children's learning and development.

  – Teachers can make informal observations of how children feel and behave when arriving at or leaving school.

  – Teachers and educators can share information about children's progress with families, other teachers and educators involved in the transition, and with children themselves.

  – Teachers and educators should take note of any difficulties children experience as part of their transition over time and help them to develop skills to manage these challenges. They can do this by talking with the child about how they feel and what might help, making a plan together and monitoring progress.

- Balance children's independence against risks.

  – Assess children's needs, capabilities and strengths and provide them with supported opportunities to develop agency and independence in transitions. For example, older children may be able to select and set up equipment, walk between school and OSHC unaccompanied, or have leadership opportunities.

Leaders in OSHC services and schools can:

- develop a shared vision for children's wellbeing, learning and development that includes the goals and priorities of the school (or schools) and OSHC service

- create routines for the beginning and end of the school day that include opportunities for OSHC educators and teachers to informally exchange information about children (within the constraints of confidentiality)

- include the achievements and activities of children in OSHC in communications from the school, such as the newsletter

Connect practices across OSHC and school, while celebrating differences

Transitions are easier for children when there is some continuity across environments, either in the people, practices or programs. At the same time, the key differences between OSHC and school environments need to be recognised to ensure there is a healthy balance between formal learning, rest, relaxation, play and leisure.

Teachers and educators in OSHC services and schools can:

- discuss and visit each other's environments, building an understanding of the rules, practices, and social dynamics that children experience in each space

- identify opportunities to connect learning across OSHC and school, such as:

  - providing play and leisure experiences in OSHC that complement the more formal learning occurring at the school, including development of general capabilities such as positive behaviour for learning programs and reading

  - connecting rules and expectations for behaviour, while maintaining OSHC's distinctiveness as an informal play and leisure environment

  - sharing information about how children are grouped in OSHC and school (such as classes or friendship groups), so that social connections can be supported, where possible

  - planning learning experiences together through shared opportunities arising from sports carnivals, community celebrations or special occasions, such as NAIDOC week or Harmony Day

- talk with children about the differences between the OSHC and school environment and help them to find their own strategies to 'shift gears' at the point of transition.

Leaders in OSHC services and schools can:

- create opportunities for teachers and educators to participate in reciprocal visits between school and OSHC settings, to better understand each environment

- facilitate shared professional development opportunities for school and OSHC teachers and educators

- exchange information between settings about rules, expectations and practices, and how they can align and complement each other

- create an environment in which feedback can be regularly shared between children and families, and educators and teachers about any challenges with children's transitions.

Listen to children's perspectives

Children themselves may have valuable ideas about how to make transitions successful. Listening to children begins with establishing warm, responsive relationships, so they feel confident sharing their perspectives. When children see change happen because of their input, it builds their sense of engagement, wellbeing and agency.

Teachers and educators in OSHC services and schools can:

- encourage children to think about what helps them settle at OSHC and school, including routines, experiences, support from adults and other children, or resources. Revisit this conversation at key points throughout the year, such as at the commencement of term 2, or after a long absence

- informally check in on how children's daily transitions are going through a conversation or observations

- keep an open mind, actioning children's suggestions about transitions wherever possible and when in the best interests of their wellbeing, learning, and development. This involves recognising that children's priorities are meaningful to them (even if surprising to adults)

- follow through on commitments to children, either taking action as the result of feedback or 'closing the loop' with the child if the suggestion cannot be actioned and check in again later whether the child feels that the issue has been addressed

- respect confidentiality (within the constraints of mandatory reporting), especially if children disclose issues that involve other adults or children.

Leaders in OSHC services and schools can:

- create a culture in the OSHC service or school where children are listened to and their requests and feedback are acted-on, where appropriate

- notice and acknowledge when children's ideas have led to positive change

- equip teachers and educators with skills to listen to children respectfully and ethically.

Create child-centred physical environments

The physical environment plays an important role in OSHC engagement and participation, including the experience of transitions. Where possible, indoor and outdoor learning environments for OSHC should provide opportunities for small and large groups to gather and engage in a variety of play-based learning experiences and activities. The set-up of these spaces is critical for effective transitions, and for ensuring that both schools and OSHC have appropriate learning spaces.

Teachers and educators in OSHC services and schools can:

- discuss arrival and sign-in procedures, ensuring there are clear policies and procedures about how, when and where children are accounted for as per the National Law and Regulations

- discuss the transition routine and how the learning environments support effective transitions for children, considering aspects such as self-care tasks including storage of belongings, handwashing and sunscreen application

- support the consistent application of expectations about how environments are used such as where children should walk or where they can run

- monitor the effectiveness of the physical environments in supporting transitions for children, and modify where possible.
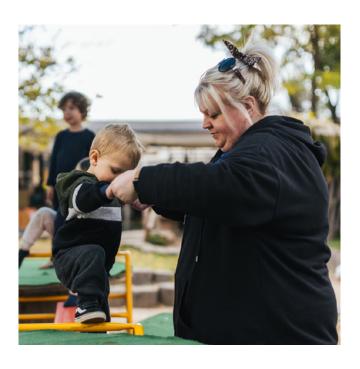
Leaders in OSHC services and schools can:

- ensure there is adequate and appropriate access to space for indoor and outdoor play-based learning

- plan routines together to visualise how the physical space supports effective transitions

- implement processes for the management of shared space such as maintenance and cleaning (see also facilities and operational agreements)

- check in to ensure the negotiated use and sharing of space is working effectively.

Reflection questions

1. What learning and development occurs during children's transitions between school and OSHC, from when they leave one setting, to when they settle in the other?

    a. How can you support this learning and development?

    b. How does this learning and development relate to the outcomes you aim to achieve for all children?

2. What do you know (or assume) about the priorities and practices in school and OSHC?

    a. How are the 2 environments similar? Which rules or practices do they share?

    b. How are the environments different? Why are these differences important for children?

3. How do you find out what children think about their transitions and continuity of learning between OSHC and school? How can you communicate to children that their views and ideas are important?

4. How does the physical environment at OSHC and school set children up for successful transitions? How could physical spaces be designed around children's interests and needs?

More information

For background on the research evidence behind this practice guide, see AERO's Transition between school and outside school hours care evidence summary.

Acknowledgment

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