

# TRANSITIONS - Preparing for what is to come

## Information for Parents

As we come to the end of another year we need to start preparing our children for what lies ahead. Whether next year brings the introduction to formal school, the move from primary school to secondary school or even if they are just moving grades from one class to the next, it is time to start preparing.

We know that our children can take a little longer to grasp and understand new things. Therefore, it is important that we provide them with a longer transition program. When we don't properly prepare our children for new environments and different people we can often see a spike in behavioural issues, anxiety disorders and/or non-compliant outbursts. Therefore the information held within this document is important to help transition your child smoothly and problem free through changes.

This information sheet gives strategies and ideas that have been proven to aid in reducing the above and preparing our children for the changes that will occur next year. Remember that not all children are the same and your child may need longer on some strategies than others or you simply might not need to address some of the areas outlined. As a parent you know your child best and have the greatest understanding of their wants, needs, desires and stressors so go with your instinct and listen to your child to ensure that they feel heard, catered for and nurtured.

### Is It the Right School?

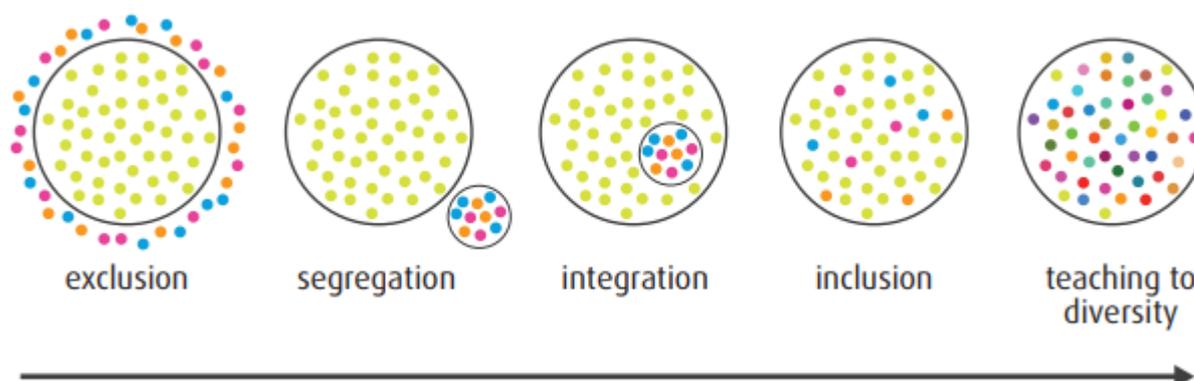
As a parent/guardian the first question you are undoubtedly asking yourself is "What school do I send my child to?", or if they are already in a school, "Is this the right school for them?"

These questions are both imperative and challenging. When picking a school for any child you want to consider certain things. Instinctually you will think about the academic process of the school, the community impression, resources, teaching staff and programs available. While these are all important to consider,

for a parent of a child with diverse needs there are some additional questions worth contemplating, asking and investigating.



1. Is this school a feasible option for our current set up? Distance from house, work schedules, cost etc.
2. What is the school set up for children with a disability? Do they use a withdrawal model, integration or inclusion model? Information available here: <http://allmeansall.org.au/research/>



<http://www.inclusionbc.org/inclusive-education/whats-new/back-school-2018>

3. Have they currently got many students with a disability? If so, can you have a talk to any of those parents to try to gauge the viewpoint of staff and school approach?
4. When you do approach the school about including your child what is their response? Are they excited and happy to welcome them? Are they willing to upskill themselves where necessary?
5. Is this school the right choice for myself and my family? Does it fit in with where we see our child going?
6. What are the current curriculum expectations and aspirations for children with diverse needs? Do they think that all children can succeed?

## **Recommendations Prior to Formal Education**

Before your child begins any form of formal education there are a few things that we would recommend working on with your child to master. Although your child may not master all of these areas, giving your child a good starting point will help them integrate into school.

- Dress and undress themselves – although fiddly buttons will potentially still be a challenge (which is to be expected) ensure they can put their own pants, shirts and socks on to make swimming lessons etc easier.
- Communication method – this is an integral part to any transition as it is not uncommon for schools to notice significant behavioural concerns in children who lack the ability to communicate their wants, needs and desires. So no matter what means a child uses to communicate, be it a PODD, iPad, lanyard, communication board or Key Word Sign, ensure that there is consistency between the school and home in their use of these.
- Toilet trained or training – although your child may not be fully toilet trained it is preferable to start the process and get them as close to it as possible.

- Social interactions with other children – as much as possible help your child to have been immersed with other children and teach basic social skills ie sharing, saying hello, helping etc.
- Independence/time away from parents – any separation can be challenging for our children. The best way to do this is to help them to separate from you before the need arises. Where possible have them visit a friend for an hour while you leave or ask a friend to take them to the shops without you.

## Tips for Any Transition

- Start 5 to 10 weeks out
- Start slowly
- Increase exposure
- Reinforce at home – pictures, reminders, visual schedules, timetables
- Start the conversation with child and teacher
- Information on student to teacher – student profile or book (see example 1)
- Pictures of teachers and surrounds – revisit daily
- Have a consistent communication method ie PODD, iPad, Sign etc.

## PRIMARY SCHOOL – First introduction to formal education

- Go to any transition activities that the school offers.
- Make sure the school is aware of your child’s health concerns and/or other issues.
- Encourage the school to seek further education and advice from DSQ (especially if they haven’t had a child with Down syndrome at their school before).
- Have child eat at set times and from their lunchbox – follow the school schedule at home, i.e. eat lunch at the same time as the school, have some set playtime at the same time as the school etc.
- Gradually increase time spent in classroom during transition stage. Start by paying a visit to the school, then stay 10mins, 30 mins...build up to 2 hrs. If the school is open to it, you might get to the point where your child could stay for a morning session.
- Remove yourself slowly – even in the transition stage it is important to remove yourself for amounts of time. This may begin with you walking away but still being visible, then going and sitting for 10mins on a bench outside. Slowly build up to where you can leave your child for a couple of hours without needing to be seen.
- Ensure all their possessions are labelled– if your child can’t read or recognise their name you could use a pic they recognise as theirs.
- Build independence – teach them to pack and unpack their bag, open containers in their lunch box, open



poppers and if they can't do up their own shoelaces consider buying Velcro shoes.

## Transitioning Between Grades

- In Term 4, start the conversation with the school about who the potential teacher will be for the following year. Many schools will still be in the process of working out next year's teachers and classes so don't expect any answers. However, by initiating the conversation you are encouraging them to think about it and showing the importance of making transition a priority.
- Half way through term 4 try to gauge which class they are considering for your child and ask that they begin the transition process as outlined previously (Tips for any Transition).
- Once the transition process has begun encourage conversations at home. Discuss factors that will be different, the same, exciting, challenging etc. Always keep the conversation positive and express how they are getting older and learning more.

## SECONDARY SCHOOL

Moving from primary to secondary school can be a challenging and stressful period and opens the door to significant changes in physical development, intellectual challenges and psychosocial growth. For this reason it is often a time that families can find the most challenging and where children start to realise they are different. We need to ensure we are enabling them to be as independent as they can handle and to look towards the future ie job, further education, trade etc. This will help guide them towards becoming contributing members of society operating to the best of their ability. For this reason, when transitioning to high school consider some of the below points.



- Think about the methods of transport they will be taking to get to and from school. If they are taking the bus or train you will need to repeatedly teach this. Go on the first journey with them and then slowly reduce your presence. (This can be very challenging for you as a parent as your need to be their support is strong but if this is the way they will need to travel to and from school in the future you have to teach them how to do this).
- Problem solve the what if's....what if I miss my stop on the bus? What if someone says something mean to me at school? What if I forget to take my lunch with me? These are important answers that our children need to know in order to help them problem solve when issues arise and we are not around. Practising them helps to be prepared for things that can arise.
- Visit the new school in term 4 the year before. Most high schools will already have a transition program where they invite potential new students to visit and participate in a program. This may be enough for your child but they may also require more than just this couple of visits.

- If possible, find out early who the teachers are going to be and the people they will encounter on a regular basis. Once you know this take photos with each of them and make up a visual to remind your child who they are going to be seeing and listening to next year. These are also the people whom they will go to should they need help while at school.
- Display and discuss what a timetable is and how to follow it daily. This may mean replicating the school timetable format to use at home on the holidays and encourage them to follow it independently.
- Teach them independence skills like looking after their possession, how to follow a timetable, undressing and dressing themselves, remembering to go to the toilet, using deodorant, keeping themselves neat and tidy etc.
- As your child does not stay in the same classroom or with the same teacher all day, it is important to ensure you keep open communication with all applicable teachers. This is best done through the use of emails as teachers generally check their email in the morning so will be able to access the information before classes begin.



# Student Profile

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age/DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Place recent picture here

What I DON'T Like....

What I Like....

My Friends

What do I want to be?

Who do I live with?

Important Information - Medical issues, food allergies, other diagnoses