An effective transitioning period for a child and their family is fundamental in setting a solid foundation for future education and social outcomes.
Northern Territory

Early Childhood

Transitioning Overview

Starting school is one of the major transition points for children. While the transition to school can be a time of excitement and eagerness, it can also be a time of anxiety and concern for parents and children. Many children revel in the changes and challenges brought about by their move to school; others find the different demands and expectations overwhelming. Different demands are not only evident for children and families, educators also experience changes as each new child, or group of children, starts school. Positive and ongoing connections between families, children, schools and the wider community provide advantages and ongoing support that are beneficial for all.\(^1\)

What is transitioning in Early Childhood?

The process of a child’s movement from a ‘prior to school’ setting, such as home, Families as First Teachers (FaFT), family day care or long day care, to a preschool or school setting is often referred to as their *transition to school*.\(^2\)

It is important to note that in the Northern Territory (NT) this terminology can cause some confusion with the name of the year level prior to Year 1 called Transition. Therefore the term transitioning will be used where possible to differentiate the process from the year level.

Effective transitioning processes go beyond the steps taken to orientate children and their families. Transitioning to school is a process that begins in the years prior to children commencing in preschool and/or Transition, and continues after they have started compulsory schooling.\(^2\)

The Northern Territory’s *Education Act* states that a child who turns six years of age on or before 30 June of the school year is of compulsory school age.

The process of transitioning takes place over a prolonged period of time. This period not only entails a geographical move, but also the transfer of information, and a period after the move during which children and their families adjust to their new settings, new relationships, and new educators.\(^3\)
Effective transitioning in Early Childhood

Any successful transitioning process follows the same basic four stages:

1. **Preparation**
   Preparing the child to move. Making sure they have the relevant social, emotional and developmental skills needed to progress to the next stage of their education. Providing guidance and advice on the transitioning experience and making effective transitions to their new educational environment.

2. **Transfer**
   Transferring the child from one setting to another. Making sure that children, their families and the receiving preschool or school have all of the information they need to ensure an effective transfer.

3. **Induction**
   Settling the child into their new learning environment, and identifying and providing any additional support needed.

4. **Consolidation**
   Continuing to monitor the child's learning and developmental outcomes and engagement, and providing any additional support needed.

An effective early childhood transitioning process:

- enables children to feel comfortable, connected and engaged with their preschool/school and community
- provides ongoing, unique support for every child and their family
- supports parents/carers in understanding the developmental stages of their children
- provides opportunities for families to engage with their children's education through processes and procedures at their school, and
- involves communities and services as contributing and informed partners

Develops respectful, trusting and supportive relationships with children and their families.
Why is the transitioning period so significant in Early Childhood?

Research has found that successful transitioning from prior to school settings to preschool and formal schooling can have life-long educational and social benefits for children. Supporting children to learn effective skills during this time will assist them in navigating life-long transitions and relationships.

Transitioning to school also represents a significant period for building relationships with families and the community in supporting a positive start to school. It can promote children’s mental health and wellbeing, and academic success.

Transitioning to school can be particularly challenging for vulnerable children and school-based transitions have been found to result in more encouraging academic outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

An effective transitioning period for children and their families is fundamental in setting a solid foundation for future education and social outcomes. For children and families of Indigenous or other cultural backgrounds, the transitioning period can present unique opportunities and obstacles. It is important to apply a culturally competent lens to all aspects of any transitioning process.

Establishment of mutual and sustainable relationships with children, families, services and communities is essential.

Such relationships provide a range of positive academic, developmental, physical and socio-emotional outcomes by supporting and encouraging families’ engagement with their children’s education. They foster a sense of inclusion among children and families within the school environment.
What makes transitioning successful?

Schools with effective transitioning strategies recognise that school readiness is about all aspects of a child’s life that impact on their ability to learn.

Collaborative, mutual, and sustainable relationships are what make the transitioning period successful. Schools have a responsibility to actively develop and foster these relationships.
Readiness is not merely the ability of the child to be ready for school. Effective school readiness reflects the families, early childhood settings, schools, communities and services that a child is involved in. Children’s readiness for school involves many components and factors. Improving school readiness for children must not only address development of skills and behaviours of children but also address the readiness of all the environments in which they spend time.

School readiness combines four essential and connected components:

- children’s readiness for school
- schools’ readiness for children
- the capacity of families to provide developmental opportunities
- the capacity of communities to provide developmental opportunities

Redefining School Readiness

Traditionally school readiness was thought of as a child’s maturation or ability to meet particular outcomes or capacities. Research shows this individual child view to be too limited.

What does this look like?

The following page shows some of the various components and attributes of school readiness. Input from a range of partners, particularly families, is an important ingredient in successful transitioning initiatives. Successful transitioning relies on children, families and educators developing positive, supportive and sustainable relationships. Most importantly, children and their families need to be valued and recognised as a central part of school life.
READY SCHOOLS
Preparedness of schools to assist children’s readiness

Ready schools:
• establish respectful and trusting relationships
• provide required supports for all children
• have quality teaching and learning
• are welcoming and inclusive places

+ READY FAMILIES
+ READY COMMUNITIES AND SERVICES
Contribute to the supports and services enabling children’s readiness

Ready families, communities and services support and promote:
• access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate early childhood education and care programs
• recognition of the importance of families as teachers and support for families to fulfil this role
• provision of safe environments, adequate nutrition, physical activity and access to health care
• commit and value enrolment and attendance at early childhood education and care services

= READY CHILDREN
Enabling children to participate in classroom and learning experiences

Ready children have a wide range of skills and abilities across the dimensions of:
• physical wellbeing
• social and emotional development
• approaches to learning
• language development
• cognition and general knowledge

Adapted from The Ready Child Equation
The four components of the NT Early Childhood Transitioning

**Ready Schools**
*Welcoming and inclusive places*

To positively influence child development and school success *Ready Schools* establish:

- links with each child’s early years service
- transitioning support programs for children commencing preschool and school
- a range of programs and supports available to cater for children with diverse needs during the early years of schooling
- educators with an understanding of early childhood development.

**Ready Communities and Services**
*Contributing and informed teams*

Children whose families have access to informal and formal resources and supports have better developmental outcomes. The availability, quality and affordability of programs and services that positively support child development contribute to school readiness.

*Ready Communities and Services* provide resources and supports that could include:

- social networking opportunities in family friendly environments for families and children to meet and socialise
- health services
- playgroups
- libraries
- care and education environments provided through Families as First Teachers programs, preschools, playgroups and other childcare settings

Linking services and establishing integrated service networks provides additional gains, including continuity and consistency.

**Ready Families**
*Engaged and informed partners*

Children’s family context and home environments differ in many ways including family resources, parenting skills and attitudes.

*Ready Families* recognises the ability or support needed to help families provide responsive care and appropriate learning experiences for their children and to develop family wellbeing during the early years period.

**Ready Children**
*Confident and capable learners*

*Ready Children* have optimal social, emotional and learning experiences and environments during the early years, both at home and in community settings and services.

*Ready Children* need engaged, responsive care with organised and purposeful experiences and activities such as:

- exposure to print, music, the natural environment, languages and the arts
- having stories read to them
- exposure to early literacy and numeracy
- regular access to stimulating, play-based learning materials and experiences.
Successful transitioning for children is made possible by overlying layers of support from families, early childhood services, schools and the wider community.

Four key aspects encompassing this support that enable these fundamental people to work together effectively and promote positive transitioning are:

1. **Positive Relationships**
   Transitioning provides an optimal time to promote children's and families' sense of belonging and connectedness to the preschool and school community as it is likely that families will participate in some of the transitioning activities. This fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness.

   Building positive relationships is assisted when activities and communication about transitioning are inclusive, family-friendly and sensitive to the diverse range of cultures, abilities and family circumstances in your school community.

2. **Reciprocal Communication**
   Communication is a two-way, shared process. Reciprocal communication is enhanced by positive relationships and develops where there is a sense of mutual respect and empathy between those involved.

   Within early childhood services and schools, this is driven foremost by the interests and welfare of the child.

   For transitioning to be successful, it is crucial that all stakeholders are involved in the communication process.

3. **Inclusion**
   Inclusive practices foster reciprocal communication by acknowledging and respecting the diversity of each early childhood service and school community.

   Diversity presents itself in many different forms including diversity in practices, beliefs and cultures, family structure, additional needs and so on.

   By celebrating and promoting the diverse backgrounds of children, families, early childhood educators and school staff, a positive difference to children’s wellbeing can be made.

   With an awareness and understanding of the needs of families, early childhood services and schools will be able to tailor transitioning plans, processes and practices to acknowledge and value diversity, being inclusive of all children and families.

4. **Responsiveness and Flexibility**
   Effective transitioning processes need to be responsive and flexible to the needs of children, families, early childhood services and school community.

   Looking closely at the practices throughout the transitioning process will help assess whether the needs of each child are being met.

   Actively listening to and hearing the voices of all members of the community will demonstrate openness to adapting to the needs of all.

   Plans, procedures and practices that are adaptive to the needs of children as they arise will generate a sense of trust from families.
What is the purpose of the NT Early Childhood Transitioning package?

This package is:

- a guide to support the Northern Territory Early Childhood Transitioning Policy
- a resource for schools and early childhood education and care service providers to support children and their families in creating inclusive and effective transitioning to preschool and school
- a resource to support the development of sustainable relationships, partnerships and collaborative goals with schools, children, families, communities and services
- a resource to empower schools to identify opportunities for planning and delivering evidence-based practices which maximise a school’s readiness in meeting the unique needs of every child and family
- a resource to identify the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the early childhood transitioning process
- beneficial for National Quality Areas 1, 5, 6 and 7 of the National Quality Standard.
How to use the NT Early Childhood Transitioning package

It is suggested that preschool and schools:

- discuss the package and work with families to ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute in setting objectives, actions and timelines
- review and adapt the transitioning processes to cater for each child and family
- use the package with community members and representatives who will be able to share the unique context and needs of their community
- annually review the unique needs and contexts of children and their families aligning with Goal 1: A Great Start for Children in the school's annual operational or business plan.

The package includes:

**NT Early Childhood Transitioning On A Page**

Use to begin identifying areas of strength and proposed areas for growth by reflecting on transitioning from the views of the four key stakeholders.

**NT Early Childhood Transitioning Statement**

Use to ensure the transference of knowledge about a child from one educator to the next at the conclusion of the school year. This will provide support for each child through their transitioning process.

This document could also assist in meeting the National Quality Standard reporting to parents requirements.

**NT Early Childhood School Action Plan**

Use in collaboration with children, families, communities and services to plan actions, timeframes and resources for a place-based transitioning process.

**NT Early Childhood Information pages**

Use to gain deeper information and ideas for engagement from each of the four key stakeholders. Shows areas of alignment with other key documents such as the National Quality Standards, the Early Years Learning Framework, the NT Preschool Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum.
Effective Transitioning Process Cycle

1. Establish partnerships
2. Gather contextual data and information
3. Set local strategies
4. Create place-based work plan
5. Evaluate and refine
Endnotes


