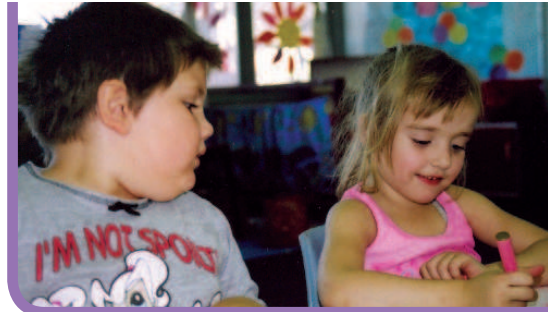


# Planning with the Program Support Group



## Through the Program Support Group, parents and staff work together to include your child in the kindergarten program

Good communication and planning by the Program Support Group (PSG) can lay the foundation for a positive kindergarten experience for your child.

Planning with the Program Support Group involves a series of regular meetings to plan and review your child's kindergarten experience.

All children with additional needs can benefit from the active involvement of a Program Support Group.

The Program Support Group should meet well before your child starts kindergarten.

See the *Planning guide for the year before your child starts kindergarten*

at the back of this spread for an overview of tasks and activities to keep in mind during this time.

## Members of the Program Support Group

Parents are key members of the Program Support Group. Your knowledge, experience and ideas are crucial to the success of the Program Support Group.

Members of the Program Support Group may include:

- one or both parents
- the kindergarten teacher
- early Childhood Intervention staff
- the Preschool Field Officer
- other professionals or therapists
- the Koorie Preschool Assistant

Each of these people is recognised as having skills and knowledge that will assist your child.

Program Support Groups aim to bring together key people with knowledge about your child to share ideas and develop a plan to maximise your child's experience of kindergarten.

## Understanding your child's needs and abilities

During Program Support Group meetings you will have to talk about your child's diagnosis, medical issues, and development. Talking about your child's needs in detail isn't always easy, and you may feel a range of emotions during this discussion.

Try to focus on what your child can do but also be clear and specific about the type and level of support your child will need.

## Working together

As a parent, you are an equal partner in supporting your child at kindergarten. You know your child better than anyone else.

By sharing information with the kindergarten staff you will help them to support your child to have a positive kindergarten experience.

Working together means listening to all points of view but you should feel comfortable to question anything you are unsure about.

## Regular communication

The Program Support Group should communicate regularly so that there is a co-ordinated approach to your child's program.

## Program Support Group (PSG) meetings

Regular Program Support Group meetings are an opportunity to:

- celebrate your child's achievements
- monitor your child's progress
- plan for the next term
- discuss issues or concerns

A regular Program Support Group meeting once a term is an opportunity to share important information about your child. This is in addition to the quick chats you will have with the kindergarten teacher.

Find a quiet moment before each meeting to write down the things you want to talk about.

If you want to take a friend or advocate with you for support, make sure you tell the other members of the group beforehand.

While you will have formal meetings together as a group, you may also have informal contact with each of these people on various issues.

## Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages

If your child is eligible, the Program Support Group will assist the kindergarten teacher with an application for a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services Package.

For more information see the tip sheet on *Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages*.

**“There were a number of things that set the foundation for a very successful year at kindergarten but they didn’t just happen by osmosis! They were the result of careful planning, consultation and ongoing communication between the kindergarten staff, committee, early intervention staff and myself.”**



## Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan

The Program Support Group should develop a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan for your child.

The plan should identify the goals, resources, strategies, services and actions needed to include your child in the kindergarten program.

### Setting goals

Children learn and acquire skills at different rates and every child is valued for the contribution they can make.

The Program Support Group should have a positive approach to setting goals and understand that your child will learn at their own level and pace.

The goals should be realistic and achievable within the time your child is at kindergarten, which will be about 10 hours a week.

When setting goals with the Program Support Group, keep in mind:

- your child’s learning strengths
- what motivates your child
- your child’s interests
- things your child can do without assistance
- how your child communicates

Keep an open mind about the goals and how they might be achieved. Others may offer good ideas that you may not have thought about.

Agreeing on goals is a group decision, but don’t be afraid to speak up if you disagree with a suggestion.

### Resources

Equipment in kindergartens is designed to support the needs of all young children. Your child will have an opportunity to use a wide variety of equipment and materials available to all children in the program.

The Program Support Group should identify any modifications, equipment or other resources that will assist your child’s inclusion and independence at kindergarten.

This includes finding out how to access these resources and making sure they are in place for the start of the kindergarten year.

If needed, equipment can be specifically designed to assist your child with communication, understanding their environment, standing and mobility, and fine motor skills.

### Strategies for learning

The Program Support Group should develop strategies that will help your child achieve their learning goals.

This can include staff training, changes to the kindergarten program, plans for managing complex care needs or behaviours, equipment and modifications.

Staff training can include learning more about your child’s disability or medical condition, using equipment such as standing frames and communication aids, supporting your child to actively participate in activities and assisting their mobility.

Changes to the kindergarten program can include a range of things, depending on your child’s needs.

For example, a child with a hearing impairment can be seated so that they can see the teacher’s face when they are speaking.

A child who is unable to stand independently might use a standing frame outdoors while the other children are on the climbing frames.

A child who is unable to use scissors independently might be able to use spring loaded scissors.

### Other services

The Program Support Group might want to explore additional support from services and professionals not directly connected with kindergartens.

These may include services such as a toy library or equipment hire service, respite care, support group or playgroup.

As services are changing all the time, ask the Preschool Field Officer or your Early Childhood Intervention Services provider for up-to-date information about these and any other services available to your child and family.

### Actions

The Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan should clearly state what needs to be done, by whom and when.

The plan will only be as good as the actions that follow. If agreed actions don’t seem to be happening, follow up with the kindergarten teacher.

**“We only had one hiccup during the year, when my son’s care needs changed and it was my wish to introduce the use of a suction machine to his daytime care needs. I am pleased to say that we worked through this issue, but only because the lines of communication between the staff and myself were kept open.”**



## Children with complex care needs

Thoughtful planning and good training will be needed to make sure staff have the skills and confidence to look after your child’s personal care needs.

Conditions that need complex care can include epilepsy, percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) feeding, tracheotomies, anaphylaxis, behaviours of concern or other conditions where staff need specific skills and training beyond general first aid.

Some kindergarten services will take the attendance of a child with complex care needs in their stride, while for others it may be a new experience.

### Planning

All of your child’s care needs should be discussed with the Program Support Group (PSG), and included in the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan for your child.

Planning should identify staff skills and training needs, responsibility for tasks, the storage of medication and care supplies, and anything else needed to ensure the service meets your child’s complex care needs.

The Program Support Group should plan for specific facilities if required, such as an area where your child can have privacy for personal care.

Your child’s medical and personal care needs are confidential, and your child is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity.

Kindergarten services must record details of any medical conditions and attach a copy of management procedures for the condition in your child’s enrolment record.

Management procedures are often developed together with your child’s doctor. Families are responsible for providing all personal care supplies.

### Training for staff

All staff should be trained to provide care for your child. This ensures that your child’s attendance at kindergarten doesn’t depend on the availability of just one staff member.

If your child has complex care needs, they may also be eligible for a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services package which may cover the cost of staff training.

The Program Support Group should also review the kindergarten’s emergency response plan in light of the care needs of your child. The reviewed emergency response plan should be part of the training plan for all kindergarten staff.

### Medication

There should be clear processes in place for the use and storage of medication. Changes to medication must be formally written up, signed and dated.

Check with the service as to how they record this information. Many kindergarten services have a form to complete which is then included in your child’s kindergarten record.

## For more information

Office for Children and Early Childhood Development  
[www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au)

Children’s Services Guide  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
[www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

Association for Children with a Disability  
Phone 9818 2000 or  
1800 654 013 (rural callers)  
[www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)

### Regular communication

Follow up with the kindergarten teacher and staff regularly to see how they are managing, and if they have any questions about the care they are providing for your child.

In addition to talking to kindergarten staff, using a communication book is a good way to keep staff up-to-date with any changes to your child’s care needs.

Your child’s care needs should also be reviewed in regular Program Support Group meetings.

With good planning and staff training, you should feel reassured that your child will be in good hands.



*"We followed up with a meeting to discuss my daughter's needs in detail and I felt very reassured by the teacher's positive approach. There were no negatives, no uncomfortable moments and there was no hesitation. The teacher listened to everything I had to say and I felt very at ease with her ideas and her calm, confident attitude."*

This planning guide is a quick reference to the tasks and activities that you and the Program Support Group will need to keep in mind during the year before your child starts kindergarten.

## Planning guide

### for the year before your child starts kindergarten

#### Term 1: February – March

- If you haven't already done so, decide on a kindergarten service and enrol your child as early as possible.
- Start planning with the Program Support Group for your child's inclusion in the kindergarten program.

#### Term 2: April – June

- If your child has a severe disability, familiarise yourself with the application process for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services.
- Go to one of the regional information sessions about Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services.

#### Term 3: July – September

- If your child is eligible, the kindergarten service should submit an application for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services by the end of Term 3.

#### Term 4: October – December

- Kindergarten services are advised of the outcome of Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service applications in late October.
- The kindergarten service and the agency funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide support should organise to have this ready for your child to start kindergarten the following year.
- Attend kindergarten orientation sessions together with your child.
- Further develop and refine your child's Kindergarten Inclusion Support Plan to make sure that all elements of the plan will be implemented from the start of the kindergarten year.

 **Association for Children with a Disability**

This series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets was developed by the Association for Children with a Disability in partnership with the Victorian Government's Office for Children and Early Childhood Development.

