

# Choosing a kindergarten service



## Every family is different, and the kindergarten you choose should meet the needs of your child and family

Start thinking about choosing a kindergarten service as early as possible.

This early planning will also assist with exploring options for additional support that may be required to include your child in the kindergarten program.

See the tip sheet on *Planning with the Program Support Group* which includes a *Planning guide for the year before your child starts kindergarten*.

Your Maternal and Child Health Nurse and local council can give you information about kindergarten programs in your local area.

You may also have heard about other kindergarten programs outside your local area which interest you.

## Visit the kindergarten service

Once you have a short list of kindergarten services, make appointments to visit and meet the kindergarten staff.

There are some general things to look for when you visit a kindergarten service, such as how the staff interact with parents and children, the facilities and equipment, and the types of activities.

You will then have specific questions about how the service can meet your child's needs.

This may include discussion about your child's medical needs, physical access, and other issues depending on your child's disability.

## Kindergarten certificate

All State Government funded four-year-old kindergarten programs in Victoria must display the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development kindergarten certificate.

This means that the kindergarten program is funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and is planned and taught by a qualified early childhood teacher.

## Approachable staff

You should feel confident that kindergarten staff can keep your child safe and meet their needs.

A positive approach from kindergarten staff will go a long way towards making kindergarten a great experience for your child.

Staff with a positive approach tend to:

- focus on your child's abilities
- engage directly with your child, not just through you
- work with your child at their own level and pace
- make time to meet with you and any relevant specialists
- think about creative ways to adapt the kindergarten program to include your child

By asking the kindergarten teacher about their experiences with children with a disability you may get a feel for how the service might go about including your child. A teacher who does not have experience teaching children with a disability may also be a good teacher for your child if they are welcoming, enthusiastic and positive.

## Things to look for when you visit a kindergarten service

- Kindergarten certificate
- A warm welcome when you and your child arrive
- Positive interaction between the kindergarten teacher, parents and children
- Secure grounds that are clean and well maintained
- Children who are well settled and engaged in activities
- Opportunities for children to play in groups and alone
- A balance of indoor and outdoor activities
- Enough equipment for all the children
- A welcome invitation to visit at any time

## Physical environment

When looking at a kindergarten service, your first impression will probably be of the physical environment.

As well as being safe, clean and well equipped, you will want to know that the kindergarten service can cater for the physical needs of your child.

**“After my first conversation with the kindergarten teacher I was already feeling positive about the move. She invited me to come in and complete the application for funding with her, which was a great opportunity for her to get to know what my son’s needs would be.”**



The kindergarten teacher, Preschool Field Officer or Early Childhood Intervention provider can offer suggestions for modifications, equipment and education resources.

Minor modifications, such as grab rails and ramps, can be provided through Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services. For more information see the tip sheet on *Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages*.

### Program modification

Ask the kindergarten teacher how your child can be included in the program. For example, how a child in a wheelchair could be included in outdoor physical play, or how a child with limited hand movement could be included in table activities.

While the kindergarten teacher may not have all the answers, you should feel reassured that they will explore ways to include your child in all program activities.

### Complex care needs

If your child has complex medical or personal care needs, ask how the kindergarten service can meet these needs. You will want to be reassured that your child will be cared for safely and with dignity, privacy and respect.

### Other things to think about

Think about the broader needs of your family as well as the specific needs of your child, when choosing a kindergarten service.

Other things that can influence your decision may include which kindergarten service older siblings attended, how far you want to travel and whether children from your chosen kindergarten tend to go to a particular school.

### Registering and enrolling

As there is high demand for places in kindergarten programs, it is a good idea to register as early as possible at your preferred kindergarten service.

Places are offered to children according to certain criteria, often on a ‘first in queue’ basis.

Enrolment procedures vary, so ask the kindergarten service or your local council about the enrolment procedure for the kindergarten service you are interested in.

Try to visit a number of kindergarten services and trust your own instincts. You need to feel comfortable that the service you choose will be responsive to your child and family.

A kindergarten service should never decline to accept your enrolment due to perceived difficulties associated with your child’s disability.

If you believe that your child’s disability has been a factor in you being denied access to your preferred kindergarten service, you should seek advice and advocacy from the Association for Children with a Disability or another disability advocacy service.

## For more information

Find-a-kindergarten  
online directory  
[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/findakindergarten](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/findakindergarten)

Links to local council websites  
Municipal Association of Victoria  
[www.mav.asn.au](http://www.mav.asn.au)

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

Kindergarten Parents Victoria  
Phone 9489 3500 or  
1300 730 119 (rural callers)  
[www.kpv.org.au](http://www.kpv.org.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)

 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.