



# HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

## Strategies and tips for returning to early childhood services after time at home



As social restrictions are easing and schools returning, many children who have remained at home are also returning to Kindergarten and Early Learning and Care services. For some children, this will be a smooth transition; for others, there may be some hesitation or simply a few questions. It is important to acknowledge that children might be feeling both excited and nervous at the same time.

Both excitement and nerves can trigger the same responses in their bodies and present in similar behaviours. There are a number of ways in which we can support our children to experience a positive transition back into their early learning environment.

### Communication: Make it part of your everyday conversation

Talk to your child about the return to their Early Childhood Service. It may be:

- talking about what day they will be returning
- counting how many sleeps
- a reminder of educators and friends your child may have missed and/or
- talking about some of your child's favourite experiences, whether it be drawing, painting, puzzles or outdoor play.

Despite the reassurances, some children will still be feeling anxious about this new adventure and talking about it too much can risk adding to the anxiety by making it seem bigger than it is. It is important to acknowledge your child's feelings of anxiety and assist them in dealing with these. Hugs, gentle words, deep breathing and some light distractions can help.

### Walk and drive past

If you are out on a walk or drive with the family and your centre is close by, make your route pass by the Kinder/Early Learning Service and point it out with some gentle discussion. For example, "Look, there is your Kinder/ Child Care. It still looks the same" or "Do you remember..."

### Bring something from home

By giving your child an option to choose their own clothing, or snack and lunch options, a sense of ownership over the transition process can be achieved and provide a sense of excitement for them.

Alternatively bringing along something they may have made, found or discovered during their time at home can be a connection for the transition back into the service.

### Use Storypark for reflection and connection

Spending some time with your child looking through some of the previous stories on Storypark, as a reminder of their educators and friends, is a great way of reassuring children and helping them feel connected and comfortable for their return. Keep it simple, look at photos and talk about the names of the educators and friends within your child's room/group.





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### Be organised, create routines

Nobody wants the morning of the first day to be rushed or stressful, so ensuring that everything is as organised as can be, and ready to go, can help. Being rushed can add to anxiety, so give yourself plenty of time to get ready and arrive on time.

With the approaching return to your early childhood service, you may consider establishing a flexible routine. This could be done in conjunction with your child. Visual reminders and prompts, such as writing or drawing pictures to reflect the routine on a piece of paper or calendar, are great motivators and guides for children. For example:

**Morning:** Wake up, get dressed, have breakfast, make lunch, car, Kinder/ Early Learning Centre.

**Night-time:** Dinner, Bath, Teeth, Story and Bed.

### Develop a strategy or routine for saying goodbye

A warm but short goodbye to your child, reassuring them and telling them the time you'll be coming back, is the best farewell. Linger may add to any anxiety a child may be feeling. It's tempting to give them that extra hug for encouragement but doing so risks causing more nervousness as the child wonders why you are staying longer or displaying more affection than usual. Pay attention to your own feelings, being mindful not to add to your child's heightened anxiety or excitement.

### Prepare you child for changes to the arrival routine at your early childhood setting

Arrival at, and settling into an early childhood service is going to look a little different. Some services will be greeting you at the front door or in the foyer area, to abide by the new guidelines. There may be social distancing markers on the floor. Other services will be operating with staggered arrival and departure times or changed entry/exit points. All children will be required to have their temperature checked upon arrival. Talking to your child about these changes will help ease anxiety as well.

Within the program, the environment and experiences will be spaced to encourage individual and small group play. A greater amount of time will be spent learning in the outdoor environment or offering indoor/outdoor programs. Bringing children together in groups, including for snack time, will be avoided where possible.

Talking about these changes in a positive way avoids the element of 'surprise' and allows children to adjust to the changes confidently, knowing that they are all part of keeping each other safe.

For more information on the changes and precautions implemented in ECMS services, please see these FAQ.

<https://www.ecms.org.au/covid-19-frequently-asked-questions-faq>

Whilst some things will look and feel a bit different and children will need to be gently guided and supported to adjust to these changes, it is important that most of our time and conversation is spent focusing on what remains the same and will be familiar; the building, outdoor space, teaching team, friends, toys/equipment, smiles, stories, singing, fun and laughter.

If you have any concerns or questions about the return to early learning and care, the teaching team at your local service are well equipped to support you.

