

Transition into Outside School Hours Care

By Sonja Tansey

Attending outside school hours care (OSHC) for the first time can be a challenging and overwhelming experience for children, particularly if they are also settling into school for the first time. However, OSHC services can provide new children and their families with reassurance, stability, new friendships and strong relationships that can contribute positively to smooth transitions into both OSHC and school. This will create positive short and long term outcomes for children in their outlook and success in these new environments. To support new children and families beginning OSHC it is important to communicate and work with families and the school community.

New experiences for children and families

Children beginning their first year of OSHC and school will often be used to smaller care environments such as their home, long day care, family day care or preschool. The transition to larger OSHC and school environments, where there are fewer adults to attend to their needs, can be a challenging adjustment for some young children. For some children their first day at school can also be their first day in OSHC. At a time when they are dealing with their first school experience they will also be coping with the unfamiliar OSHC routines and environment.

Children will vary in how long they take to settle into school and OSHC. Some will settle well on the first day, others may show distress or withdraw for some weeks before settling happily and confidently. Even quite confident children can find the adjustment to the structured school environment and the need to be more independent difficult at first. Children often also experience great excitement at this time, which can make them tired and irritable by the end of the school day. Child care professionals can reassure children and families that the early weeks at OSHC and school are a time of adjustment and that it is normal for children to experience some excitement and uncertainty.

Families can also take time to adjust to the new routines and requirements of OSHC and school. They may experience variations between the access and communication they have with the OSHC and school settings. Many families will be used to the 'open door' policy that operates in many early childhood environments, where they can visit, discuss concerns and participate in the program at any time. While this type of contact may still be possible in the OSHC setting, the school may require families to make prior appointments with the teacher if they wish to discuss any issues.

OSHC services can provide a valuable communication link between families and the school. By being aware of the communication policies of relevant schools, OSHC services can support families to discuss any issues with the school that will help their child make the transition to school. If families have concerns about how their child is settling in, they can usually arrange time with the school to discuss this with their child's teacher, the principal or the school counsellor.

Settling into OSHC

To help children settle into before and after school care and vacation care settings, child care professionals need to promote positive relationships with children. Providing plenty of opportunities for unstructured play and physical activity will help new children to form friendships and to unwind and relax at the end of the school day.

Child care professionals may also find it helpful to make special arrangements for young children who are attending school and OSHC for the first time. For example, where possible, they may consider organising to collect or drop children off directly to and from their classroom for the first few weeks of the year, or they may implement a routine to ensure that new children are provided with breakfast or afternoon tea before older children.



Children often feel particularly tired and unsure during the first few weeks attending OSHC. During this period, child care professionals can help children to manage this by ensuring that they can access quiet places to rest, to be alone or to interact calmly with peers and adults.

It is also important to ensure that children are provided with the opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast before school or a nutritious snack after school, as this may help to reduce children's tiredness and anxiety. A relaxed environment that allows children to choose their own experiences and who they interact with will also allow them the freedom to spend time and develop relationships with other children.

Importance of routines

Steady routines and a welcoming environment will also help new children to feel at ease. Younger children in particular will feel reassured by a consistent routine that allows them to anticipate what will happen next and to know what is expected of them. This is especially important in relation to procedures for moving children between their school and the service. As children become more familiar with the routine, they will be able to become more independent in caring for themselves, and ensuring that they are where they need to be for transitions.

Some children resent being in care and would prefer to be at home or spending time with their friends after school or during school holidays. Experiences especially arranged for new children can encourage a sense of belonging and willingness to participate in the service.

When children attend vacation care for the first time they will need to be reassured about the different routines and activities that will take place each day. Preparing new children well for excursions by explaining safety and behaviour rules will be crucial for safety and enjoyment when leaving the OSHC premises.



Social adjustment

As children begin at school and OSHC settings they often experience heightened social awareness. They may be more aware of their peers and have a strong desire to fit in with friendship groups and to conform to rules. Child care professionals can assist children to feel at ease in the service by facilitating their participation in group experiences and supporting them to form friendships.

New children may also need to adjust to mixing with older children, often aged up to twelve years. Allocating an older 'buddy' to assist new children can help to build relationships between older and younger children. However, it is important to ensure that older children are not expected to take care of or be responsible for younger children. Child care professionals need to appreciate the interests of older children, and talk with them respectfully about whether they wish to participate in the buddy system.

Children who are starting at an OSHC program they haven't attended before may also find it challenging to join already established social groups at the service, and even children who have attended other services may experience difficulties in this area. This can occur quite often where children attend a different vacation care component of a service because their regular before and/or after school care program does not offer vacation care. Child care professionals need to support new children to join in with established peer groups, and this can be achieved by talking with children at the service, and taking an active role in introducing the new child to others in the service.

Building relationships with new children

Promoting children's social development in OSHC is a key factor in assisting their successful transition into the service. Supporting the development of core social skills such as sharing, turn taking and playing well with other children will assist children's short and long term success in OSHC and school.

Child care professionals can also take an active role in creating a responsive and respectful relationship with new children at the service. This will help them build self-esteem and resilience, which in turn will assist them to settle effectively into the OSHC program. Regular and genuine interactions and conversations between child care professionals and children are fundamental to the development of meaningful relationships.

To facilitate the development of strong relationships, child care professionals can invite new children and their families to spend time at the service prior to starting care. When children begin at the service, it is helpful to take the time to talk to them about their interests and seek

their suggestions for activities they would like to be involved in. Observing and taking an interest in what children are doing, and providing them with positive feedback and guidance, can also promote positive relationships between adults and children.

When children arrive after a day at school, they will often want to talk about their day and openly express their feelings about their experiences. It is therefore important to arrange the environment, routines and experiences so that child care professionals have opportunities to talk freely with, and listen attentively to, new children.

Child care professionals also need to be sensitive to what may have happened for a child throughout the day, and to ensure that any problem the child may have experienced at school is not carried through into the after school program. For example, a child who has been disciplined at school for challenging behaviour issues may need to have some quiet time to regroup. Child care professionals at the service may need to support the child to move on to a positive OSHC experience.

Before school care can also be a good time for child care professionals to talk with children about what is going to happen during the child's day, and to help them to anticipate how they might deal with certain routines or activities at school.



Strategies to help children settle

- Clearly explain the OSHC routines and describe the experiences and activities available at the beginning of each session.
- Provide a balance of experiences that allow children to have quiet time and physical activity.
- Provide activities that allow for recreation and having fun.
- Make sure children have access to breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea or snacks when they are hungry – this may be as soon as they arrive or after a period of play.
- Find regular opportunities for positively reinforcing new children's behaviour.
- Consistently remind new children of OSHC routines and rules in a positive way.
- Assist children in tasks that may require them to take on a new level of independence such as tying shoe laces and taking care of their belongings.
- Encourage children to make friendships.
- Provide some activities and experiences that young children may be familiar with such as dress ups, playdough, construction, books and puzzles.
- Provide opportunities for children to be involved in small and large group experiences.

Creating links for effective transitions

To help new children make effective transitions into OSHC, services can build links with prospective families, relevant schools and surrounding early childhood services. Finding opportunities to provide information and communicate with all stakeholders will enable OSHC services to prepare new children for OSHC and to be aware of the issues related to children's transition into the program. For example, by communicating with early childhood services about their programs, OSHC services will be able to provide familiar experiences for new children who have come from these services. Communicating regularly with relevant schools about their timetable for new children will also help child care professionals to understand the needs that new children may have before and after a day at school.

Strategies for building links between families, schools and the community

- Have information available for new families about the OSHC service and invite them to visit the service.
- Talk to early childhood child care professionals about the range of experiences children may be used to.
- Communicate with local school teachers about the class timetable and experiences provided for new children.
- Develop leaflets/brochures to inform the community about your service, including the experiences that children will have at OSHC.
- Invite children from local early childhood services, such as long day care, family day care and preschools, to visit the OSHC service regularly with a supervising adult.
- Provide orientation opportunities for children who may be commencing OSHC in the following school year.

Supporting families

Child care professionals in OSHC services can play an important role in supporting families who have concerns or are anxious about their child starting OSHC and school. Child care professionals should put new families at ease by giving them clear information and opportunities to discuss issues and ask questions. Communicating positively and regularly with families about their child's early weeks in OSHC will also help to raise issues and resolve any problems with transition as they arise.

OSHC can often be a very significant part of a child and family's life, particularly where a child spends a lot of time in the service. Supporting effective transitions for children and families, that are founded upon good communication and positive relationships can shape the beginning of an effective, ongoing relationship ■

Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance

Principles: 2.2, 3.1, 3.3 and 5.1-5.4

Tips for families in the early weeks

OSHC services can also support families to assist their child's transition in the early weeks of OSHC and school by providing suggestions for supporting their child at home. Encourage families to:

- Give the child time to settle in and expect some uncertainty.
- Find time to talk to and reassure the child everyday.
- Keep home routines steady and try not to introduce too many extra curricula activities in the child's first term.
- Introduce regular routines such as packing the school bag the night before, going to bed on time and getting up at a regular hour with plenty of time to get dressed and have breakfast.
- Make afternoons and evenings after OSHC and school relaxed and restful.
- Make sure the child arrives and is picked up at the right time everyday.
- Obtain information from the school about the timetable and routines for the child's class
- Ensure the child gets enough sleep.
- Try to attend or participate in OSHC and school activities when invited such as social events and school sport days and assemblies.

References and further information

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For more information on OSHCQA please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.

Telephone: 1300 136 554 or (02) 8260 1900
E-mail: qualitycare@ncac.gov.au
Level 3, 418a Elizabeth St
Surry Hills NSW 2010

www.ncac.gov.au