



big day out
for little fullas

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Department of Families, Housing,
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Why should my child attend an early childhood service?

There are many reasons why our children should attend an early childhood service, and this small book attempts to outline these.

All types of early childhood services offer educational programs. These programs give children the basics they need to build their education on when they begin formal schooling. Early childhood services also help children develop the social skills needed for primary school such as sharing, taking turns, and negotiating with each other.

Also all parents and carers need a break from their kids, to have some time for themselves and recharge the batteries. This break often helps us to be better parents.

Early childhood services can help take the pressure off parents.

“...I love it! I can get some work done while the kids are having fun!”

Therese (Parent, *Raymond Terrace*)





Who will be looking after **my child?**

Carers are the people who look after your child at a children's service. They form positive relationships with your child and are responsible for planning and implementing fun activities that encourage your child's development.

All people who work in children's services are carefully selected, and have had a background check to ensure they are the right sort of people to be looking after your child. Also, about half the staff in any children's service have training in child development.

Carers and teachers at early childhood services can become 'Aunties' and 'Uncles' teaching our kids lots of different skills.





Aboriginal Culture in Early Childhood Services

Our culture is based on relationships. In traditional society our children formed close relationships with lots of extended family. Today we may have lots of family around us but they have less responsibility for teaching our kids and our children may miss out on the benefits of forming relationships with a variety of adults.

All early childhood services have a mandate to support the cultural background of the children enrolled in their service. This means services that have Aboriginal children enrolled will include some aspects of Aboriginal culture in the activities they provide for all of the children in the service.

Sharing your culture with your child's early childhood service is a great way to be involved in your child's education. You may like to arrange a visit to the service for some traditional story telling or art or you may just like to visit informally.

An early childhood service that embraces, celebrates, and promotes our culture builds our children's self-esteem and pride in themselves.

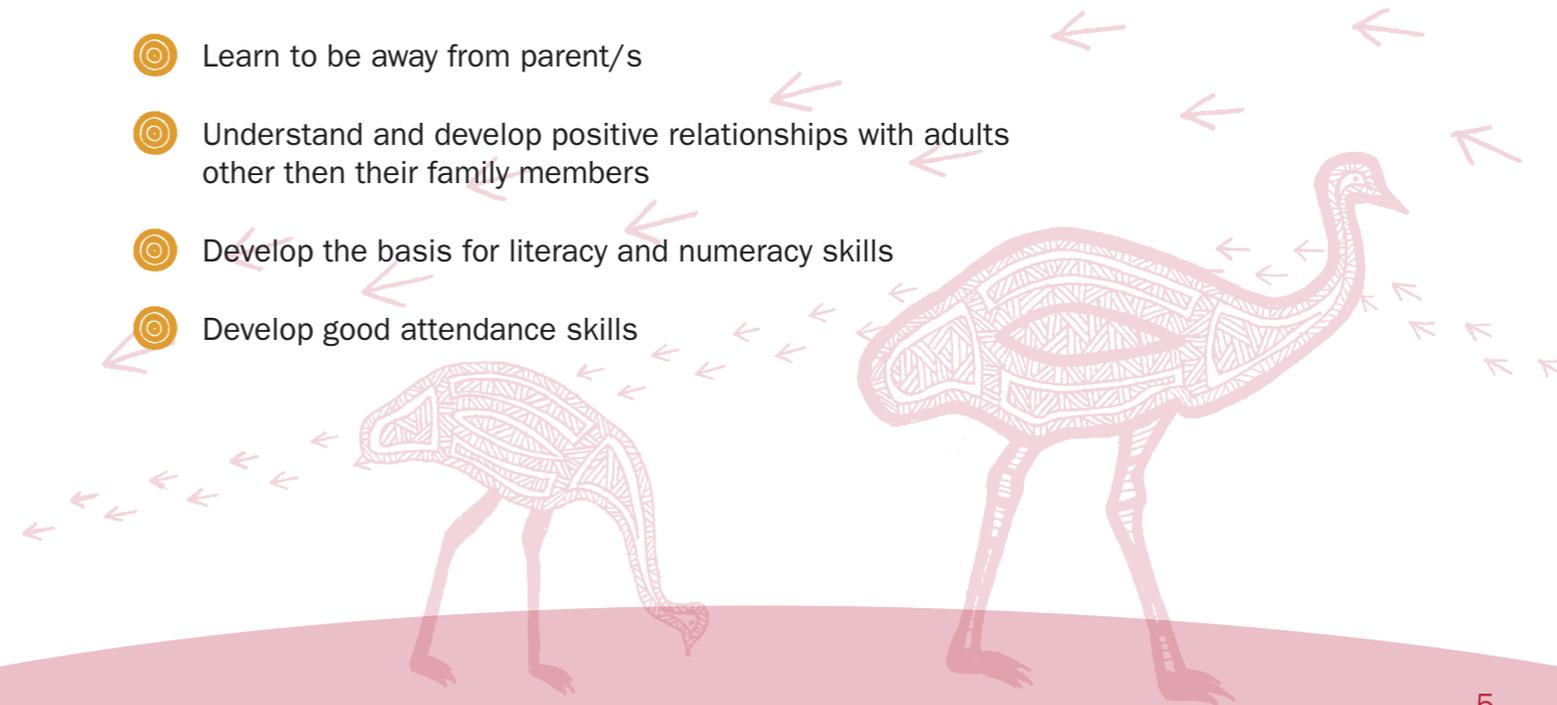
Why go to Pre-School?

Any time spent at a quality children service will benefit your child.

Research shows that children who attend one year at an early childhood service are better prepared for mainstream schooling.

Pre-School in particular helps children to

- Learn how to make friends
- Develop social skills, especially negotiation and turn taking
- Become more independent
- Learn to be away from parent/s
- Understand and develop positive relationships with adults other than their family members
- Develop the basis for literacy and numeracy skills
- Develop good attendance skills



Activities at Pre-School



Painting/Collage Children learn about mixing colours, shapes, textures etc. Lots of language is learned in these activities as the children talk about what they are doing. Painting/Collage is creative and self expressive. Painting is also a way a child may express their identity.

Drawing Children learn how to hold a pencil correctly, they begin to make marks on paper and develop the fine motor strength that they will need in order to learn to write. Drawing is also a fun thing for children to do.



Books there is no limit to what children learn from books. They learn about how the world works, and can go to any imaginary place. When reading books themselves or with adults children also learn about letters, words, punctuation, sentence structure and the sound of language. They are also learning lots of different words. Research has shown that the more words children know the better readers they will be. Children also love to sit and talk about what they see in books with their friends. Books can also be a powerful tool in promoting identity and culture.

Music is very appropriate for our children as it traditionally played a large part in our people's lives. It is about joy, self expression and feeling. Children love music and dance and also learn concepts about sound such as fast and slow, loud and soft.



Puzzles Children learn lots of thinking skills when they do puzzles. They learn about shape and colour, they solve problems, develop their fine motor and pre-reading skills. For example when trying to work out where a piece goes the child will use the picture clues and other detail to decide where to try it. Children often do puzzles together and this helps to develop their skills around friendship. Puzzles are also great to increase a child's self-esteem, they have a beginning and an end and children feel very proud of themselves when they complete it.

Dramatic Play Kids love to pretend. They pretend to be their favorite people and those they learn off. They take on roles and this helps them to understand the roles and responsibilities of other people. While doing all of these things children are learning social skills, how to get along with others, how to solve problems and negotiate, respect for others and how to make friends.



Gross Motor is outside play and is all about the kids learning about their bodies, and what they can do. Our kids love the outdoors and generally take more risks than non-Aboriginal children. While playing outside children are learning about balance, co-ordination, how to make friends and negotiate, and how to make choices about what they will do, where they will do it and who they will do it with.

Blocks teach social skills, such as team work as kids build things together. Children also learn concepts and mathematical language such as height, weight, biggest, longest, smallest, shapes and sizes etc. Children also learn problem solving, for example how to build a tower. Kids work out that they have to start with the biggest blocks first.



Types of **Children's Services**

Pre-School

- ☉ Typically operates from 9 to 3 during the school term
- ☉ Has an informal education focus
- ☉ Transition to school programs
- ☉ Activities planned around your child's interests and developmental needs
- ☉ Social interactions for your child
- ☉ Traditionally for children aged 3 – 5, but recently some pre-schools have been offering places for 2 year olds
- ☉ Is licensed and monitored by the Department of Community Services
- ☉ Preparation for big school
- ☉ Fee relief available
- ☉ Children tackle own lunch



Family Day Care

- ☉ Is a child care service based in a carers home.
- ☉ All family day care providers have to be assessed and approved by the Department of Community Services.
- ☉ Have only a small number of children, a maximum of 5 children under school age. Limits are placed on the ages and numbers of the children to ensure high levels of care. For example a family day carer could not have 5 babies as the carer would not be able to cater to their needs
- ☉ Is more like your child being at home for the day
- ☉ Children are required to take their own food for the day

Occasional Care

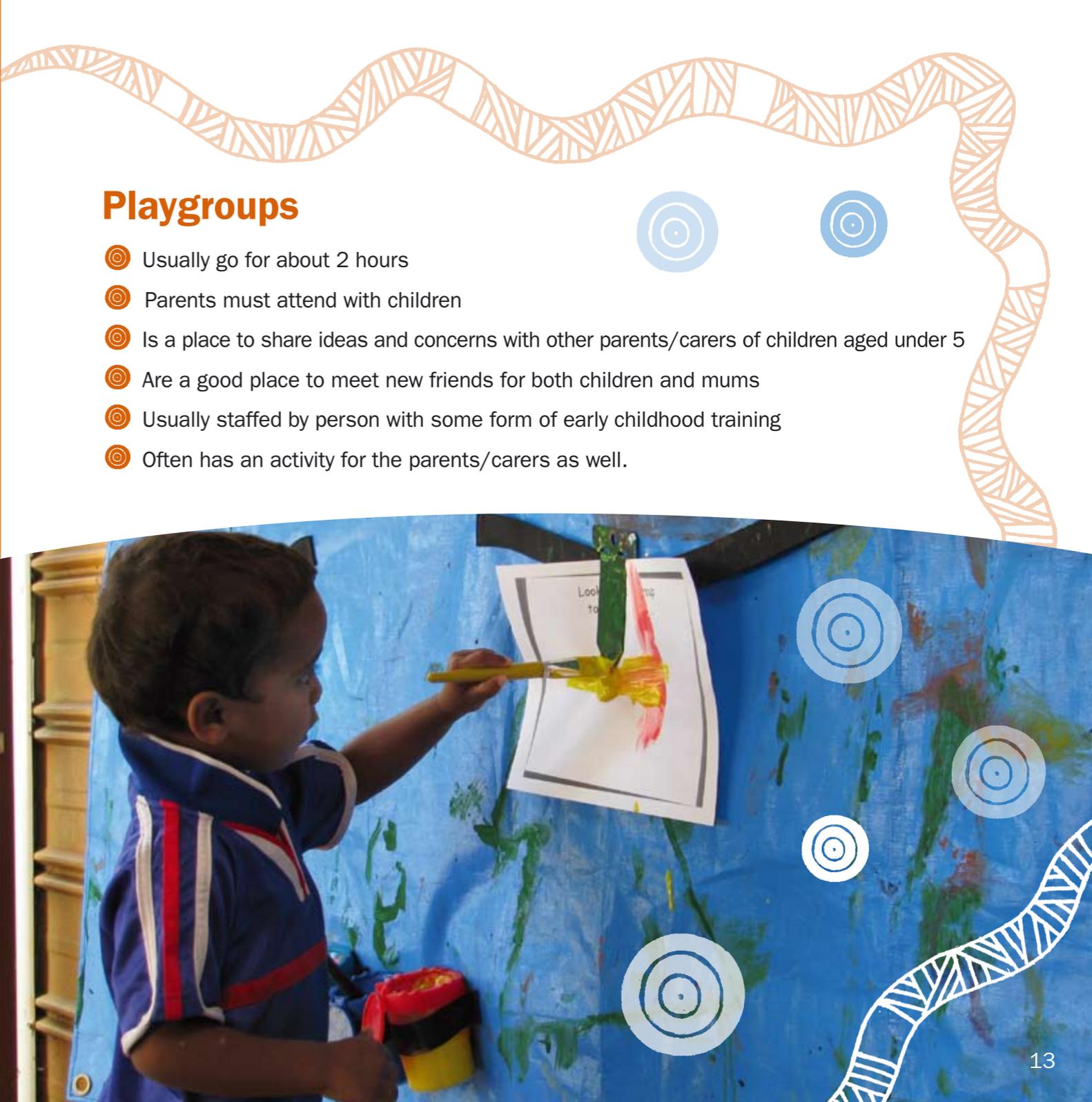
Occasional care is very similar to daycare. The difference is you do not have permanent days when your child attends. You book days as you need them.

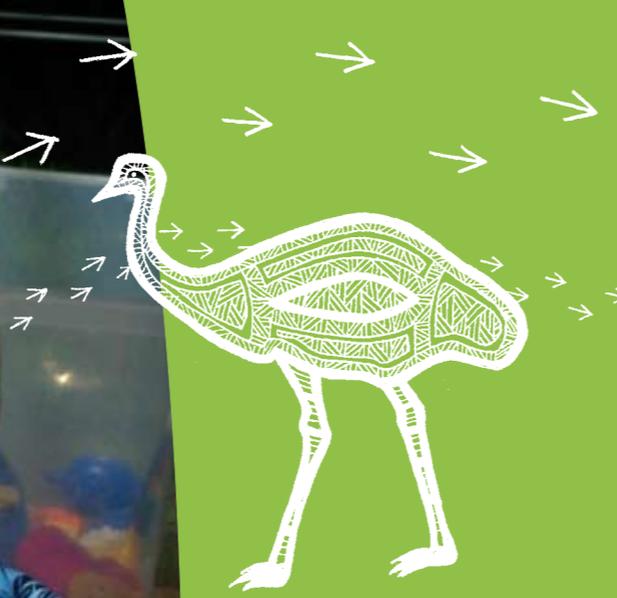
Child Care – Day Care

- ⦿ Longer hours than pre-school
- ⦿ Can provide placements for children from 6 weeks of age
- ⦿ Meals provided
- ⦿ Social interactions
- ⦿ Fee relief available
- ⦿ Early education, some offer a pre-school program
- ⦿ Is licensed and monitored by the Department of Community Services
- ⦿ Activities are still planned around your child's interests and developmental needs

Playgroups

- ⦿ Usually go for about 2 hours
- ⦿ Parents must attend with children
- ⦿ Is a place to share ideas and concerns with other parents/carers of children aged under 5
- ⦿ Are a good place to meet new friends for both children and mums
- ⦿ Usually staffed by person with some form of early childhood training
- ⦿ Often has an activity for the parents/carers as well.





Costs *of* Children's Services

The cost of providing all types of children's services is high. Good, professional staff and quality educational toys and games cost money, and part of this money comes from the fees you pay for your child to attend the service. However, both the Federal and State governments provide subsidies so that all families are able to afford to have their child receive the benefit of attending an Early Childhood Service.

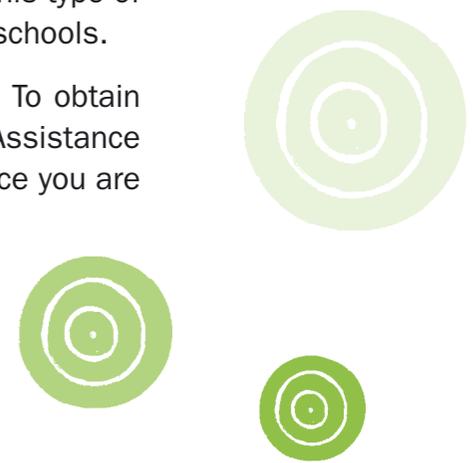
Pre-Schools:

Pre-schools generally receive their funding from the State government through the NSW Department of Community Services. The fee you pay will depend on your family's income. Holders of a health care card receive the lowest fees, generally between \$6 and \$15 per day depending which service you use. This is great value for money considering the benefits that it gives children.

Daycare Centres:

Long day care, family day care and occasional care centres offer subsidies through the Federal governments Child Care Benefit program. This type of care is often more affordable for low income families than pre-schools.

The fee you pay is again dependant on your families' income. To obtain assistance with child care you will need to register with the Family Assistance Office (Call 136150). Centrelink calculates how much assistance you are eligible for.





Preparing **Your Child** for Pre-School

There are a few things that you can do to help your child get ready for Pre-School and to make this a happy and fun time.

Take your child with you when you go to Pre-School to enroll and let them have a look inside and outside at all the fun things they will get to do.

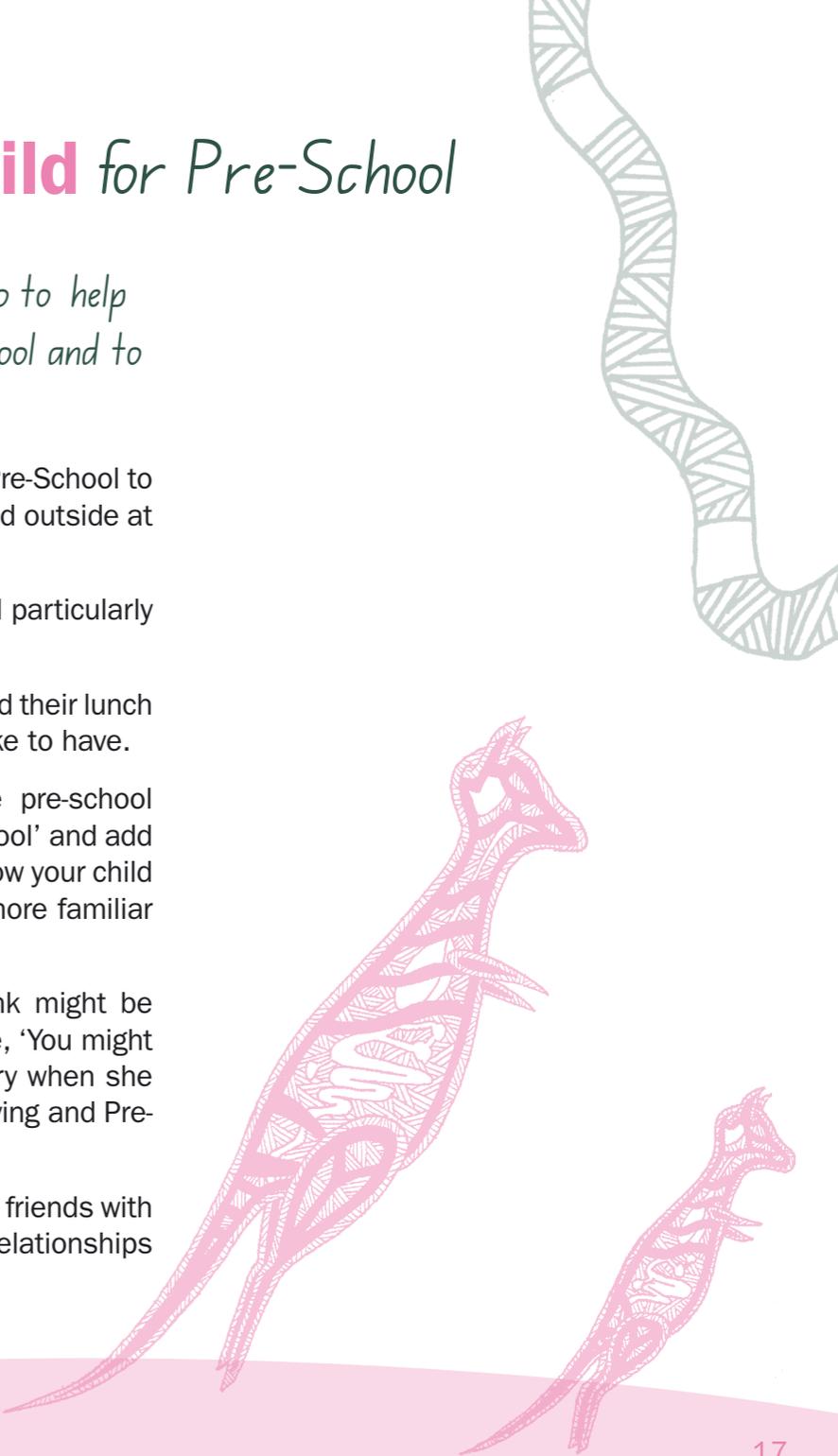
Talk with your child about pre-school and particularly the friends that they will have there

Take your child when you buy their bag and their lunch box, let them choose what they would like to have.

Whenever you drive or walk past the pre-school comment to your child, 'There's your school' and add something about Pre-School that you know your child will enjoy. This will help child become more familiar with the service.

Do Not talk about things that you think might be difficult for you or your child, for example, 'You might cry when I leave you', or 'Mummy will cry when she has to go'. This just puts the idea of crying and Pre-School together in your child's head.

Your child will enjoy Pre-School, will make friends with the children and develop positive, caring relationships with their carers.





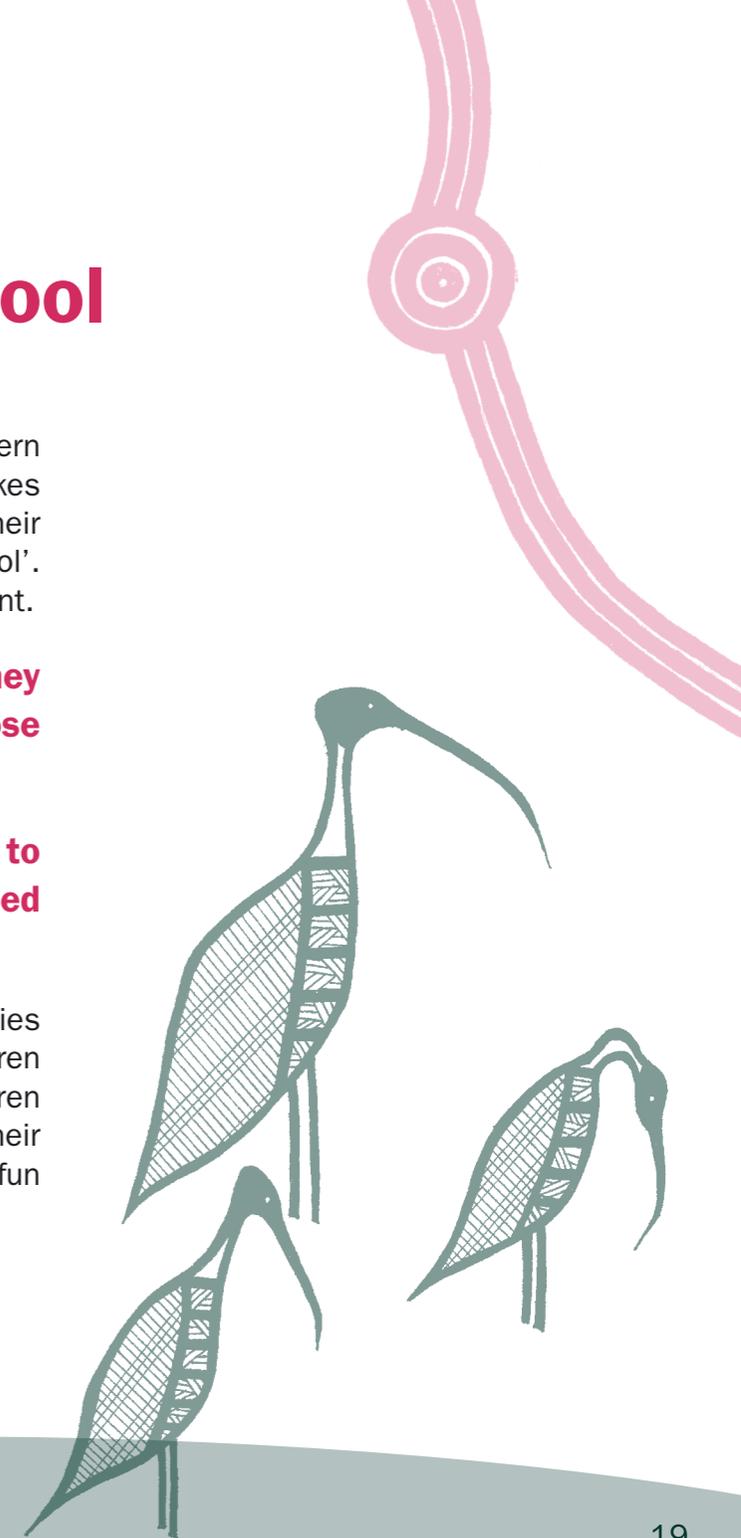
Pre-School as a **Preparation for School**

Going to pre-school gets children into the pattern of going to school on a regular basis. This makes it easier for parents and carers to get their children into a routine before going to 'big school'. Pre-School also encourages children's development.

Children who attend Pre-School before they go to school do much better than those children who do not.

Pre-School is a great place for children to practice and develop the skills they will need when they go to school.

Children particularly benefit from the opportunities for social interaction that pre-schools offer. Children can't get the experience of playing with other children they don't know on a personal level away from their parents anywhere else. Pre-School is a safe, fun place to do this.



School Readiness

You will at some stage be considering if your child is ready to go to 'Big School'. Children are eligible to go to school if they turn 5 before July 31, BUT children DO NOT HAVE TO go to school then. They may benefit from another year at pre-school. Legally children do not have to be enrolled in school until they are six.



Importance of Routine

Starting pre-school can be the beginnings of the routine children need to get into in preparation for going to 'Big School'. For example, get up, have breakfast, put lunch box in bag, get dressed and off to Pre-School. When children come home they can take their lunch box out of their bag and put it on the sink, put their bag away, and go and play.

These things may seem very simple but if children know how to do these things BEFORE they go to school it will make mornings and afternoons and getting organized and off to school a trouble free and 'painless' process.

Below is a list that indicates your child's readiness for school. Pre-School helps your child to develop all of these skills. It is not necessary that your child be able to do all of these before they go to big school, but at least half is advisable.

- Go to the toilet on their own
- Dress and undress themselves
- Talk to others
- Ask and answer simple questions
- Write/Draw with a pencil
- Recognize their name
- Count to ten
- Name some colours
- Identify some written numbers
- Stand up and talk in front of a group
- Play with others, share and take turns
- Look after their belongings
- Tell others of their needs
- Follow simple directions
- Use scissors
- Write their name
- Identify basic shapes
- Sit and listen to a story
- Identify some written letters
- Use a drink bottle, unwrap their lunch and eat off their lap.

All of these skills are taught in Pre-School



What can I do *for my child* at home?

The best thing that you can do for your child's education and overall development is to read to them every day.

Literacy Development

To help with your child's literacy development you can

- 🎯 Read to your child every day
- 🎯 Talk with your child lots, about what you are doing, about what is important to them, about anything at all. Just talk, and really listen to what your child has to say to you. Your kids know if you are not really listening to them.
- 🎯 Sing songs and nursery rhymes
- 🎯 Have lots of books at home, you can join the local library
- 🎯 Have writing materials available to your child, pencils and paper, chalk on the back cement etc.
- 🎯 Let your child see you write and let them help where appropriate. Let them know what you are writing for, eg a birthday card or a shopping list.
- 🎯 Let your child see you reading and again you can tell them what/why you are reading, eg recipes, newspapers, magazines or junk mail
- 🎯 Help your child to 'read' signs and familiar landmarks such as McDonalds, BP Vegemite, and traffic lights
- 🎯 Help your child to learn to write their name. Remember to start at the top left hand side of the page and to use foundation script. Foundation script is included in the back of this book. It is how children are expected to write when they go to school). Also accept and praise any attempt your child makes. Their name might be quite unrecognizable for some time, and this is OK. Also don't push your child to write their name. They will let you know when they are ready.



Numeracy Development

The following is a simple list of everyday things that you can involve your child in to help them develop their numeracy skills.

- Helping to hang clothes on the line works two ways. Kids can help count the pegs and identify the colours as they help you.
- Cooking can be all about measurement. You can count the cups of flour, talk about more or less, full or empty.
- You can talk about big and little, for example do you want a big drink or a little drink.
- You can have different sized containers in the bath for the kids to play with. This can help kids understand the concept of volume. Pouring also helps children develop their fine motor skills and hand to eye co-ordination needed when children are learning to write.
- Children can help to carry the shopping. You can talk about what is heavy and light, or too heavy for your child to carry. You can let your child help you to put things away and talk about positions such as above the baked beans, or in front of the weet-bix.
- Talk about fractions, such as “you can give half of the banana to your brother”. This is also about division.
- Pairing socks from the washing basket is about matching and grouping, the beginnings of multiplication.
- You can count anything and everything, for example steps you might need to walk down, or the number of forks you will need for dinner.
- Playing cards with your child is also great, they get to learn that each number has a meaning, for example 3 is three objects and not just the number between 2 and 4.

Nutrition

Most of the health problems faced by Aboriginal people today are related to what we eat!

Traditional diets included fresh fruit and vegetables, fresh meat and seafood, nuts and whole grains. When our kids were hungry they gathered fresh food straight from the bush, not straight from the pantry. As a result our communities were strong and healthy.

These days most of our food is processed. Processed food is usually made from the three white devils; white flour, white sugar, and white rice. These things are poison for our people, especially our kids.



Good nutrition starts at home. Kids imitate their parents so if you are eating healthy food, they will too.

All children need to have breakfast to start the day. Kids who don't have a healthy breakfast misbehave as their blood sugar drops. They may also lack energy and find it difficult to concentrate.

All pre-schools have healthy eating policies. Here are some suggestions to pack in your child's lunch box for pre-school:

Morning and Afternoon Tea:

- ☉ Fresh fruit (most kids love fresh fruit especially when it has been cut up into fruit salad)
- ☉ Dried fruit or canned fruit in natural juice
- ☉ Dairy foods including yogurt, custard, cheese and milk (you can freeze yogurt and milk products so that kids have 'ice-creams' at school)
- ☉ Vegetable sticks (celery, carrot, capsicum and cucumber) with cheese spread
- ☉ Rice cakes and corn thins
- ☉ Pikelets or pancakes

Lunch:

- ☉ Kids like things they can eat quickly so they can keep playing at pre-school. Cut up sandwiches into different shapes to keep their interest and use a variety of bread types. (Try making zebra sandwiches using one slice of white and one slice of brown bread)
- ☉ Wholegrain bread, pita or Lebanese bread and muffins are also a good choice.
- ☉ Try not to use fillings that will go 'soggy' as this will put most kids off their lunch.
- ☉ Boiled eggs and salad vegetables in a little box are also popular with the kids

Tip: Many kids have nut allergies and most early childhood services ask that parents not send any nut products to the centre. This includes peanut butter and nutella. Save these treats for home.

Pre-School Development

All children develop at different rates.

The following developmental milestones are a guide only.

- ☉ Jumps, climbs and can change direction while running
- ☉ Takes risks and enjoys physical challenges
- ☉ Names basic shapes and colours
- ☉ Is able to match and sort objects
- ☉ Is able to follow 2 step directions
- ☉ May be interested in writing their name
- ☉ Enjoys dramatic play
- ☉ Has a plan to their play, eg what they want to happen and how to get there
- ☉ Begins to share and take turns
- ☉ Enjoys simple board games
- ☉ Enjoys stories, and loves being read to
- ☉ Friends are very important to your child
- ☉ Speaks in sentences, uses correct personal pronouns such as his or hers

More detailed developmental information can be found in the 'Growing up Strong Wonai' publication. Your child's teacher is also a good source of information. You could ask them how they think your child is developing.



If you have concerns about your child's development?

Each child is different and they all develop at their own rate. However some children do have special needs and any extra help you give your child will benefit them. There are many early intervention and support services that can help your child. The earlier you get help for your child the better it will be for them.

If your child attends any kind of early childhood service the staff will support you to access early intervention and support services.

If your child does not attend an early childhood service you can approach one of the following service types and tell them that you have concerns about your child's development. They should be able to refer you to the appropriate service.

- ☉ Your GP
- ☉ Family support services
- ☉ Schools as Community Centres, located in some public schools
- ☉ Brighter futures services such as the Benevolent Society or the Samaritans

Alternatively if you phone Awabakal Pre-School on 49569132 the co-ordinator will help you find the right service for you in your area.

Don't be Shamed! Get your kids some support!



Health Screenings

There are a few health checks that your child can have done before they go to school to make sure that they are healthy and able to learn as well as possible. The two main checks are eyesight and hearing. Both of these can be arranged through your local doctor or by contacting Awabakal medical service on 4969 2424. Hearing screenings can also be arranged by contacting the Aboriginal Health Unit at Wallsend on 4924 6067. Some optometrists also do free eye tests, or they bulk bill them, just drop into your local one and ask. They usually have a sign up if they do these types of tests for free.

Otitis Media

Otitis Media is an ear infection that is highly prevalent in Aboriginal children. It can be difficult to detect but can have a devastating effect on your child's hearing which in turn can lead to behaviour problems and poor learning outcomes. If left untreated Otitis Media can lead to permanent hearing loss in children. As this disease is difficult to detect and easily treatable it is essential that all Aboriginal children have their ears checked regularly. As stated previously this screening can be done by Awabakal AMS or the Aboriginal Health Unit.





Common Questions

Q What if my child cries when I leave?

Your child may well cry when you leave him or her, about half of all children do cry when they are first left at Pre-School. Your child will be comforted and settled by a staff member. It is important for you to be reassuring and strong. Say goodbye to your child and tell them that they will have a good day and that you will be back to get them after lunch, or at 3oclock, you know your child best and you will know what they will understand.

You might want to start your child off with only half a day away from you so that it is less stressful for your child. You can also phone the service to make sure that your child has calmed down and is having a good day. The pre-school will phone you if your child is not settling. Pre-School staff deal with this sort of thing each time a new child starts. They are very good at reassuring children and helping them to have a good day.

Your child might cry a little for the first few weeks, but experience tells us all children settle into pre-School and end up loving the time they get to spend with their friends.

Q Who will be looking after my child?

Children's services employ high quality staff. Some of the staff have been trained at Universities and TAFE colleges and others have years of experience in the industry. All staff are subject to a background check that ensures they are suitable to be caring for your child.

Q How do I know that he/she will be alright?

The service has your child's best interests at heart. They will do everything they can to ensure your child has a happy day at pre-school. The service will contact you to come and collect your child if they are unhappy on that day.



Q How much does it cost?

The fees for children's services are based on your family's income. The more you earn the more you pay. Holders of health care cards pay the least, generally between \$6 and \$15 a day depending on which type of service you choose. You are required to pay for all the days your child is enrolled. For example if your child is enrolled for Wednesday and Thursday each week you must pay for both of the days even if your child was sick on one of the days. Some services are open in the school holidays, and others are closed. You do not have to pay for school holidays if your service is closed.

Playgroups are usually free or have a minimal cost such as \$2 per child which may be necessary to pay for the venue

Q What will my child need to take?

This will depend on if your child is attending a pre-school, playgroup, day care, or family day care. Your service will give you an enrolment package when you enrol your child which will list what your child will need. Generally a child care or day care centre will provide your child with all the food they need for the day. Your child will be required to bring their own lunch, drink and/or snack to pre-school, family day care and playgroup. There are rules about what your child is allowed to take to Pre-School. All services are required to have a healthy eating policy and foods that are poor in nutrition are banned. Your service will be really good in helping you to pack appropriate things.

Your child will need to take a hat to pre-school as well as a change of clothes. Some services will want you to bring a sheet or blanket if your child has a sleep during the day. Your child's belonging will need to be labelled with their name. Services discourage children from bringing their toys from home as they cause disputes between the children and toys can get lost or broken.





How to **help your child** to learn to **write their name**

- ① Start at the top left hand corner
- ② Encourage your child to trace the letters
- ③ Be patient as it may take months for your child to get it right
- ④ Praise any attempt
- ⑤ Teach your child the sounds the letters make

a b c d e f

g h i j k l m

n o p q r s t

u v w x y z