



ACT
Government


Education and Training

Preschool Matters



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Minister's Message

Welcome to preschool – an exciting time for both parents and children. This is your child's first interaction with school, teachers and the education system, and it is important to get off to a good start.

The ACT Government understands how important early education is in giving your child the opportunity to thrive.

Families are the first and most influential educators in any child's life. Creating strong and effective partnerships between parents and their child's education ensures our young people get the best start in life.

The Preschool Matters Program acknowledges and recognises your expertise in your child's education and the importance of your involvement and engagement in the preschool program.

Preschool Matters works with ACT preschool services and organisations to ensure that parents are actively engaged in the enrolment and orientation processes, and throughout the preschool program.

This publication is for you – to give you advice about local ACT preschool programs, and to outline ways in which families can become involved in their child's early education.

Again, congratulations. I wish you and your children every happiness and success throughout your school years.

Joy Burch MLA

Minister for Education and Training



Preschool Services in the ACT

ACT Public Preschool

All ACT Public preschool education programs are part of an ACT Public Primary School. The ACT Government provides quality preschool education for children in the year before they attend school. Children must turn four on or before 30 April to be eligible to attend preschool.

Catholic Education

Catholic Early Learning Centres provide quality preschool and childcare programs for children who are four years of age by 30 April. Centres are located regionally and are open from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm throughout the school year.

Independent Schools

Preschools of Independent schools offer a diverse range of options for preschool education including Christian, Anglican, Catholic, Montessori and Community preschools. The variety of schools in the sector reflects the diversity of the community in the ACT and the preferences of parents for a particular style of education for their children.

Centre Based Care

Many centre based care services provide preschool education for children in the year before school, as well as education and care for children from 6 weeks of age. Each centre is unique and may be operated by a not-for-profit organisation, profit organisation or community organisation. All centres implement the National Quality Framework.

Family Day Care Schemes

Family Day Care services offer education and care for children in a home setting. Families can access full-time care, part-time care, before and after preschool/school care, vacation care and emergency care. A number of agencies coordinate Family Day Care including YWCA Family Day Care, Communities@Work and Community Services.



Occasional Care

Occasional Care preschool services offer flexible booking arrangements for periods of an hour to a full day, depending on individual circumstances and centre capacity. Please contact the individual services for additional information.

Playschool

Independent Playschools are specifically designed to prepare three to four year old children for preschool. Playschools are unique to Canberra providing play based educational programs in a preschool style format. Session times and age groups vary. Please contact individual services for further information.

Playgroup (ACT Playgroups Association)

Playgroup is an informal session where parents, carers, babies and children aged from birth to school age come together in a relaxed and friendly environment. Playgroups are run by and for the parents who attend. Playgroups are usually held once a week for a two hour session in a variety of venues. Please contact the ACT Playgroups Association to find a playgroup near you.





Partners in Preschool

Parents and carers play a critical role in their child's early education. In early childhood education parents are seen as children's first and most influential educators. Parental and family engagement is regarded as crucial in supporting children's academic success and wellbeing.

'Parents play a critical role in providing learning opportunities at home and in linking what children learn at school with what happens elsewhere. By participating in learning interactions and activities outside the school, parents become important actors in a child's learning'

(ARACY, 2012, p. 17)

'Research tells us that families and communities contribute in unique ways to the learning process. The greatest impact is made when there is a focus on linking behaviours of families, teachers and students to learning outcomes'

(ARACY, 2012, p. 50)

What does this mean to me? How can I be involved?

There are many ways in which families and parents can be involved in their child's preschool education.

Parental involvement opportunities at the preschool could include: volunteering on site at the preschool; attending excursions and events; serving as a representative on the preschool committee or School Board; or even sharing a skill (e.g. gardening, cooking, and language).

Parental engagement opportunities at home include: asking about and being engaged in your child's preschool day and learning; finding ways to explore their interests and expanding that knowledge; reading books and asking questions, and exploring mathematical concepts during everyday activities (e.g. following a recipe).

These are only a few ways you can become involved in preschool and it is important that families contribute in ways that they feel most comfortable. Talking to your local preschool service about how you might contribute is the best start. Ask some of the questions suggested to the right of page. Answers from services will vary but the most important factor is developing a positive partnership between home and preschool. "Improved learning outcomes are enhanced when parents and school staff work together to support an effective learning environment in both home and the school" (ARACY, 2012, p.19).

It is communication that enhances this partnership. It's okay to ask questions no matter how big or small they might be; open, ongoing and two way communication is an important tool in supporting your child's successful preschool experience.

'In genuine partnerships families and educators value each other's knowledge and roles, communicate freely and respectfully and engage in shared decision making'

(DEEWR, EYLF, p. 12).

Questions to ask your preschool service:

- How can I be involved in my child's education?
- How can I support my child at preschool?
- Can I spend time in the preschool?
- Are there things I can do at home with my child that can help with their learning?
- Are there some resources or books I can read to better understand?
- What parent/family activities do you offer?
- If I have a question, can I email, call on the phone, come and see the educator?
- What opportunities are there for me to contribute to decision making?
- What ways can I communicate with the preschool teacher?
- What events do you hold at the preschool?

Reference List

Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S., and Sanders, E. (2012). Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research. A report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Family – School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.

Australia Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Council of Australian Government (2009). Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia.



The Early Years Learning Framework

Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia is an important resource for early childhood education.

The Framework provides an opportunity for all early childhood educators across Australia to work towards:

- a clear focus on children's learning and wellbeing
- a shared language for curriculum in the early childhood field
- a base for planning, promoting and assessing learning
- improved quality in early childhood settings
- cultural security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families
- including families and communities in children's learning.

(DEEWR, EYLF, 2009, p. 3)

The Early Years Learning Framework is Australia's first national framework for early childhood educators. It guides curriculum decisions and supports learning outcomes in early childhood education through the implementation of the principles and practices of the Framework. Fundamental to the Framework are the ideas of Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Framework forms the foundation to ensure that all children experience quality learning and teaching. It conveys the highest expectations for all children's learning from birth to five years, including transitions to school.



The Framework communicates these expectations through the following five Learning Outcomes:

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

The Framework provides broad directions for early childhood educators to facilitate children's learning, and is designed to be used in partnership with families.

References

Australia Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Council of Australian Government (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia.*



Support at Preschool

Preschool is an important year for families and children. There is a diverse range of services and support agencies that families can utilise to support their child throughout the preschool year.

Child and Family Centres

Child and Family Centres provide a range of universal services based on the needs of children and their families in Gungahlin, West Belconnen and Tuggeranong.

At times, children and their families require additional assistance. The Child and Family Centres work closely with families to determine the additional assistance required and the best way that this can be provided across the government and the community.

The centres bring together a range of professionals with the aim of delivering services in a child centered and family focused way.

Some of the services available from the ACT Government's Child and Family Centres include:

- parenting information
- maternal and child health clinics
- speech pathology and physiotherapy drop in clinics
- individual work with children and families
- relationship counselling.

Contact:

Postal address: GPO Box 158,
Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone:

Gungahlin 02 6207 0120
Tuggeranong 02 6207 8228
West Belconnen 02 6205 2904



Children's Policy and Regulation Unit

The Children's Policy and Regulation Unit (CPRU) – a section of the Education and Training Directorate – administers the legislation covering approved education and care services and licensed childcare services in the ACT.

The role of the CPRU includes:

- Providing information about education and care in the ACT to families, services and the community
- Issuing approvals, waivers and licenses for providers, services, and certified supervisors
- Monitoring compliance with the *Children and Young People Act 2008* and the *Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Act 2011* through announced and unannounced visits, data collection and review, targeted monitoring campaigns, and email and phone contact with services
- Quality assessment and rating of education and care services in accordance with the National Quality Framework
- Investigating complaints relating to compliance with the relevant education and care law and

The CPRU is staffed by professionals with experience and qualifications in children's education and care.

Contact:

Post address: PO Box 158,
Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone: 02 6207 1114



Therapy ACT

Therapy ACT is a program area of the Community Services Directorate. It provides a range of multidisciplinary therapy and support services for people with delays in development and developmental disabilities.

Therapy and support services are available for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social work and psychology. There is no charge for these services.

Contact:

Telephone: (02) 6205 1277



Canberra Preschool Society

The Canberra Preschool Society (CPS) is an incorporated volunteer organisation and a peak body in education advocacy in the Australian Capital Territory. The Society was formed in 1943 as the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Association and was incorporated in its present form in 1975. The CPS strives to be a strong effective voice for preschool parents in the ACT and to assist parents to have an active role in their preschool community.

Contact:

Postal address: P.O Box 733,
Woden, ACT 2606

Telephone: 02 6286 2527

The Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools Inc (APFACTS)

APFACTS is the parent voice for non-government school parents in the ACT. APFACTS has a strong focus on parent engagement in schooling and opportunities for parents in preschool and beyond to be part of programs, committees and discussions on how best parents can support their children's learning from preschool to beyond.

Contact:

Postal address: PO Box 4034,
Weston ACT 2611

Street address: Room 6, Weston
Community Hub,
Cnr Gritten St and
Minns Pl,
Weston ACT 2611

Telephone: 02 6287 3538



Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations is the peak body for public preschool, primary, high school and college parent groups in the ACT. The council helps P&Cs to organise insurance and manage legal obligations, and make submissions to the ACT and Commonwealth Governments on behalf of public school parents.

Contact:

Postal address: Sports House,
100 Maitland Street,
Hackett ACT 2602

Telephone: 02 6241 5759





National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework (NQF) is part of the Australian Government's reform agenda for early childhood. It is being implemented collaboratively with all State and Territory Governments, beginning from 1 January 2012.

The NQF is underpinned by a regulatory framework known as the *Education and Care Services National Law* and *Education and Care Services National Regulations* and *The National Quality Standard*. This sets minimum requirements for education and care services and requires all providers to improve their services in a number of Quality Areas. These include the educational program, children's health and safety, relationships with children, partnerships with families and communities and service leadership and governance. Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with families and the community to achieving quality outcomes for children is the focus of Quality Area 6.

All approved services offering preschool programs are required to undertake a self assessment and develop a quality improvement plan. An assessment is conducted by the Children's Policy and Regulation Unit to determine the quality rating assigned to the service. Research shows quality service delivery positively impacts on children's development learning and wellbeing.

The National Quality Framework provides families with accessible information to help them make informed choices about services.

There are a number of specific regulations that strengthen parental engagement in preschool services. The following are some examples:

- Child assessments or evaluations for the delivery of educational programs are required to be documented in a way that is readily understandable by the parents of the child. Information about the educational program is to be kept available with the contents and operation of the program displayed in a place accessible for parents.
- Information about the educational program which details how the program relates to the child, and the child's participation in the program is to be given to parents and copies of documentation in respect to the child are required to be kept.
- The provider must ensure that education and care is provided which encourages children to express themselves, allows the development of self esteem, maintains the dignity and rights of children, gives positive guidance to display acceptable behaviour and has regard to family and cultural values.



- Parents of a child must be able to enter the service at any time.
- The service must have policies and procedures which are available for families and parents must receive notification of any changes to policies or procedures.
- The provider must ensure that a copy of the Law and regulations is accessible for use by parents of children enrolled at the service.

A high quality preschool service is one in which children and their families are welcomed, included and supported to participate safely and effectively.

Further information:

ACECQA – <http://www.acecqa.gov.au>

ACT Education and Training Directorate
– <http://www.det.act.gov.au>



Reading with your Child

Children begin the road to literacy long before their first day of formal schooling. Children's earliest literacy encounters occur with their families beginning in infancy. Therefore, it is important that parents and carers are aware of the kinds of ways they can best facilitate learning for their child. Research shows that children who are in a home environment rich with literacy experiences achieve greater success when it comes to reading ability and engagement during the school years and beyond.

The emphasis for parents when helping children establish strong foundations for their future literacy skills is fun. Reading should be associated with relaxed and enjoyable experiences. It is equally as important to foster a love of literature and curiosity about the world around them as it is to know the alphabet.



Getting your child off to a good start in reading

Engage your child in an environment that is rich in language experiences. Show them that you value reading by:

- Reading with your child daily. Make it part of your routine. Reading picture books with your child helps develop the context of written words and a love of reading, models reading behaviours and introduces children to story language
- Surrounding your children with high quality children's books
- Visiting the library
- Buying books as presents
- Browsing in a bookstore rather than a toy store
- Providing your child with a special area or shelving in their room where their books are kept
- Reading aloud with enthusiasm and animation to your child every chance you get e.g. bedtime, waiting rooms and playing audio books in the car
- Singing songs and nursery rhymes together, playing funny word games, making up silly rhymes
- Telling jokes
- Going for a walk and reading the signs in the neighbourhood, reading the signs in the supermarket.

Be a role model

Show your child that all members of the family read, not just for pleasure but also as a function of everyday life. Show them you are a reader by:

- Getting excited about reading and writing
- Reading silently in front of them
- Reading aloud from recipes
- Writing lists together
- Composing a letter to relatives together
- Flicking through magazines in front of them, sharing anything funny or interesting
- Looking up information to a question they may have
- Sharing favourite books from your childhood with them
- Reading and sharing brochures in waiting rooms.



Reading with your child should never be a test

It is important that children have opportunities to succeed in literacy and see themselves as successful readers and writers.

Set your child up for success by:

- Letting them read the same book over and over again; allowing them to 'pretend' to read a book and make up the story
- Allowing them to look at the pictures for enjoyment and as insight into the story
- Praising any attempts that they make as they learn to read, in the same way that you praised their attempts when learning to speak, and be just as excited
- Not correcting them everytime they make meaningful substitutions such as bunny instead of rabbit. Emphasis should always be on reading for meaning and understanding
- Facilitating play with language through books and writing with crayons and pencils in a way that is risk and judgement free
- Talking about links between the story and their own experiences.

Finally expect that they *will* be readers and writers just as you did when they achieved other milestones such as talking and walking. Remember that children all learn at a different pace and while there are average timeframes for developmental achievements it is important to celebrate every success whether it be memorising a book, holding a book the right way, or understanding that the print on the page conveys meaning. These are all important pre-reading milestones and they are the beginning of functional reading. Praise any attempts made. Build a positive and loving relationship around literacy.



Connecting home and preschool

Developing and maintaining strong connections between home and preschool is recognised as an important element to children's literacy development. High quality preschool learning environments recognise literacy capabilities as important aspects of communication and that they are vital to successful learning across the curriculum. Experiences in early childhood settings build on children's prior knowledge and the range of experiences with language and literacy that children have within their families and communities (EYLF, p. 38). Ways to connect may include:

- Taking opportunities to be involved in the preschool program
- Borrowing books from the preschool library
- Sharing stories from home
- Reading to children in home languages
- Accompanying your child on visits and excursions
- Reading notices, emails and newsletters together.

FAQs

Q. Which preschool should I choose?

- A. In the ACT we are proud to have a diverse range of preschool services available to families. Choosing the right preschool service can be a difficult decision for families. Your decision will depend on your family's needs and the environment that you and your child feel most comfortable with.

Q. How do I enrol?

- A. You can enrol in a preschool service by contacting your local service directly. Enrolment requirements and times may vary depending on which service you choose.

Q. How do I find out when preschools are enrolling?

- A. Enrolment times and dates can vary depending on the preschool service you are choosing. ACT Public, Independent and Catholic preschools have specific enrolment periods, while Long Day Care services can enrol at any stage across the year. More information about enrolment times and procedures is available from your local service.

Q. Does the preschool offer an orientation program?

- A. As a part of the National Quality Standard, preschool services offer a range of orientation processes and procedures to support an effective transition for your child to preschool. This might involve visiting the service with your child and spending some time becoming familiar with the environment before they start. You can seek more information about orientation from specific services.

Q. How much does preschool cost?

- A. Preschool costs can vary depending on the service your child attends and the hours in which they attend. Through Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, ACT Public Preschools offer 15 hours per week for 40 weeks free for children in the year before formal schooling.

Q. How old does my child need to be to go to preschool?

- A. Once again this very much depends on the preschool service you are attending.
- Long Day Care services – preschool programs could include children 3-5 years of age.
 - Public Preschools – children must turn 4 on or before 30 April.
 - Catholic Preschool (Early Learning Centres) – children must turn 4 on or before 30 April.
 - Independent Preschools – ages vary depending on the school. Enrolment at some sites can start from 3 years of age.

Q. What will my child learn at preschool?

- A. In early childhood settings the curriculum is delivered through play-based learning and recognises the importance of communication, language (including early literacy and numeracy), and social and emotional development.

The Early Years Learning Framework specifies that early childhood education should enable children to:

- Have a strong sense of identity
- Be connected with and contribute to their world
- Be confident and involved learners
- Have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Be effective communicators.

Q. How many days will my child attend?

- A.** Attendance at preschool programs varies for Public preschools, Long Day Care services, Independent preschools and Catholic Early Learning Centres. Sessions can run up to five days a week. ACT Public Preschools provide 600 hours of preschool education for children in the year before formal schooling. This is normally delivered as 30 hours per fortnight across 40 weeks per year.

Q. What should my child be able to do before they start preschool?

- A.** There are no requirements about what children should be able to do before they attend preschool. The Early Years Learning Framework acknowledges that all children are unique and that learning varies depending on the child, their family and previous experience before preschool.