

Settling into childcare



◆ Things to know about the transition into childcare

We know that making the decision to send your child to childcare is a difficult one, and one that you need to be emotionally ready for to be able to help your child settle. You have to work out what will work best for you and your whanau, and find a place that makes you and your child feel at home.

It's hard, but it's important not to show your child any negative emotions you may be feeling about sending them to childcare or leaving them. Your child will pick up on your unease and this can often hinder the settling process by making them apprehensive, anxious and concerned.

Are you sure childcare is a good choice for your whanau?

Early participation in early childhood settings supports tamariki to gain positive social and academic skills which will support their life long learning journey (Tolley, 2009).

Feeling at ease within the centre you have chosen to send your child is a must. For this to happen, you and your child need to become comfortable with not only the environment, but with the routines and customs of the centre, and of course with the teachers too. This is all important so you and your child both know what to expect when you officially start.

Getting to know the teachers is important, and to support this, in your enrolment pack we have attached a brief description of each teacher in our team at Learning Adventures Henderson. Please feel free to talk to any of the teachers on board and discuss any concerns or ask any questions you need to.

On your visits before officially starting, we recommend staying in one area that you feel your child may enjoy the most. It's a good idea to be as boring as possible, so your child is encouraged to further explore their new environment and the exciting things on offer. Please always remember to be there emotionally for your child, this is all new and different for them, and although often as adults we view these things as small, these changes for a child can be huge.

Talk to your child at home about the centre, about the fun things they can do there and the teachers and other children they have seen on their visits. Discussing the centre positively with your child well before they start is a good way of giving them reassurance that it will be fun and show that you are confident they will settle after you have left. They too will be feeling anxious, unsure and confused about this big change that is coming.

For example, you could tell your child “Tomorrow is your first day at Learning Adventures, you really liked the train track they have there!”

There are a few different things that can happen when a child first starts in childcare...

1) They fit right in immediately, make friends and are confident to go and play with anything, anywhere. This is quite unusual, but does happen for some children, especially if they have had a lot of experience in social situations previously.

2) They seem fine initially, on their first few visits or days at the centre they are happy to explore and meet new friends, however, then they seem to suddenly change and are upset when coming in.... This can be quite concerning for many parents, and sometimes causes a feeling of guilt or regret. It is important to note that this is a perfectly normal part of transitioning for some children. They have realised that this is happening regularly, and now that a new routine is taking place, the novelty has worn off. Try to stay calm when this happens, reminding them of all the fun they have here and continuing to stick with your settling routine before, during and after drop off.

3) This last transition process is definitely the hardest... Your child could be crying and screaming when you bring them in to do drop off. The best way to support your child through this difficult time, is to do the following:

- stick to your drop off routine, if they are already upset when you bring them in, it is best to leave as quickly as possible so that your child can settle. Often the emotions you are feeling as you watch them so upset, can further fuel their own feelings and increase the length of time it can take to settle after you have left. Prolonging the process, or returning when they are still upset confuses your child and can extend the length of time it will take for your child to feel comfortable coming in.

- Work closely with the team of teachers so they can be ready to assist you through the drop off process, usually a teacher will have seen and will come to support and take your child so they can have cuddles, support them through their emotions, and settle them into an activity they enjoy.

Your own emotions

- It is completely normal for you to get emotional during these transition times, but in order to support your child the best that you can, try your best to stay positive whilst you are with them. If you find you still need to let your eyes leak, have a box of tissues and some eye drops in the car. Some parents choose to take the first day or so of their child attending childcare off work/normal routine, just in case.

Sometimes once your child has been attending for a few days, they may become upset in the car on the way to the centre, or even during the morning at home when getting ready to come.

Again, this is very natural, as they are becoming familiar with what the routine is and start to feel sad about leaving the current love of their life (You).

Staying calm and positive throughout these times will show your child that you are confident in their ability to have fun, make friends, and settle in once you have left. Con-

tinuing with your regular routine as normal during drop off and pick up times will further develop their understanding that you always come back. This will in turn help them to feel comfortable with having a good time at the centre, even though they are away from you.

Our team will ensure that your child develops a sense of belonging in the centre. You can help with this by filling out the “All About Me” form within this enrolment pack. This helps us to understand their background and interests and will give us the opportunity to look back at a family photo with your child when they are feeling sad.

“Once your child gains a sense of belonging, they will start exploring their surroundings, and begin to engage in social activity and develop a passion for knowledge that sets them up for a lifetime of learning” (Hewlett, 2018)

At Learning Adventures Henderson, we try our best to support each child, in their own special way. Many children respond well to being picked up, carried, cuddled or talked to when they are feeling upset (particularly at drop off time), however this can be different for other children.

For some children, being picked up, cuddled or talked to by someone they still think is a bit strange can be further upsetting. In these situations, our very capable and experienced teachers will respect the child’s feelings and wish to self-soothe and may see that the child responds better to being given some space.

If this happens a teacher will check in with them every few minutes or so, or have a teacher sitting close by for comfort when the child is ready. They will also try to distract them with resources they have enjoyed on their transition visits.

In their own time, your child will decide it’s rather boring where they are, and seek social interaction or explore this new and exciting environment that is eager to be discovered (Gerber and Johnson, 1998).

◆ Pick up time

At the end of the day, you may find that you come to pick your child up, and can see them busy playing, but when they notice you, they start to get upset again. This is very normal, they are so happy to see you again, however, they are still coming to terms with the separation anxiety they experienced in the morning. This will also become less frequent as time goes on and they become accustomed to the everyday routine of coming to and from the centre. Please be prepared for this to take a few weeks, especially depending on the frequency of their time here. For example, the longer the gap between their days here, the longer it may take them to be fully settled here.

◆ Tips to help with settling

- Send your child’s favourite blanket or snuggle toy from home as a comfort.
- On arrival, encourage your child to become involved in an activity.
- Always say goodbye. Sneaking out gives children a terrible fright when they realise you are gone and makes them much more apprehensive about coming again.

- Once you've said goodbye, leave. The more you fuss over your child, the louder they will become. Prolonging the process only makes your child's anxiety worse.
- Take a photo book about the centre to look through at home with your child (Ask a teacher if you have not already been given one) This way you can have a little bit of the centre at home and your child can reassure themselves by referring back to their book at any time.
- Have short, positive discussions about starting care with your child. Tell them how happy and excited you are about them coming to the centre.
- Read books with your child about coming to the centre, 'Maisy goes to Nursery' is a great one, or learn some of the songs sung at the centre, YouTube will have most songs available.

