

Section Two

Preparing to Start School

2.1 Planning Entry to School

Registration for Kindergarten usually takes place in January and February prior to the beginning of school. Children are eligible to start Junior Kindergarten in the September of the year that they turn four years old. Although children can start school at age four, they are not legally required to start school until the year they turn 6 years of age. The decision on when to start is an individual one, and may depend on the child's development and needs. For many children with speech and language delays, early enrolment will provide a language rich environment for the child to develop speech and language skills, it will also help school staff better understand the child's educational programming and communication needs in order to access appropriate services.

The Preschool Speech and Language Program provides speech and language services to children. If you have concerns about your child's speech and language skills, and your child has not been receiving any speech and language services before they start school, they may be eligible for the program. As there is an overlap of services for children who are in Junior Kindergarten, parents should find out whether their child is eligible for services by contacting the local Preschool Speech and Language Program.

For children who are receiving services from the Preschool Speech and Language Program, reports and information about your child may be shared with the school with your consent. Depending on the local community agreements, the transition from the Preschool Speech and Language Program and the school may occur at the start of Junior Kindergarten, during or at the end of Junior Kindergarten or in Senior Kindergarten. When the reports have been shared, you may be invited to meet with the school staff for discussions about your child's speech and language development this may occur as part of regular reviews of your child's progress with the teacher/school team.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

It is important to share information about your child's needs before your child starts school. Information and assessment results can help the school to plan for your child's arrival and will help to ensure that your child's needs are met at school. The information that you share is confidential and will only be used by school staff to help your child.

2.2 Getting the Help You Need for a Smooth Transition to School

For many parents, getting ready for school can be a stressful time. There are many community agencies and organizations that can help you. Staff at the Child Care Centre, the Preschool Speech and Language Program and other agencies that support your family will have information about the transition to school. The Ministry of Education has a document called, *Planning Entry to School, A Resource Guide*. It includes information on the process and examples of successful practices.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Many schools offer parent information events or visits to support families of children entering kindergarten. Look for information in the Kindergarten registration package, or ask the school staff, when you register your child, if there are any upcoming events for parents. Attend any information meetings or ask for an individual meeting with school staff.

2.3 Preparing for a Case Conference or Transition to School Meeting

Some children with speech and language impairments may have other significant needs, for example, when they have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder or Cerebral Palsy, and the school may arrange for special education staff to contact you and obtain your permission to talk to current service providers. This may result in a *case conference* or *transition to school meeting* at which the family and the preschool service providers meet to share information and discuss the child's needs and available resources.

If your child requires a case conference or transition to school meeting, there are a number of things you can do to prepare for the meeting. In addition to providing copies of reports and assessments, bring information which describes the whole child. Make sure everyone is aware of your child's strengths.

- Organize your documents into a binder
- Bring copies of recent reports or assessments
- Bring information about your child
- Bring a photo of your child
- Prepare a list of questions that you have for the school staff

You may also want to bring a friend or a community agency staff to support you at the meeting. The extra person can make notes for you and remind you when there is something you wanted to talk about but may have forgotten.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

The OAFCCD Website has information on preparing a 'Parent Resource Binder' and creating an 'All About Me Booklet' on your child. For more information check the OAFCCD website at: parents-as-partners.ca

Additional Sources of Information:

Planning Entry to School, A Resource Guide (2005) Ministry of Education

Community Care Access Centres Location and Service Information, available from the provincial website: www.ccac-ont.ca

Ministry of Children and Youth Services Website: www.mcys.gov.on.ca

Children's Health: Preschool Speech and Language Program and Infant Hearing Program, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care Website: www.health.gov.on.ca

District School Board Parent Resources on Starting Kindergarten, to find links to all schools and school boards, Ministry of Education Website: www.edu.gov.on.ca