**Part 1: Building relationships with children and their families (video transcript)**

00:12 [Anne Stonehouse]

My name is Anne Stonehouse. This video series is part of an online resource that focuses on supporting transition to school for children and families for whom English is an additional language. The video component of the resource highlights ways in which early childhood education and care services and schools provide this support to ensure a positive experience.

Starting school can be exciting. However, it can be a bewildering and anxious time for some children and their families. The challenges are greater for children learning English as an additional language. It’s important that educators and teachers in the early years of school plan the transition process carefully for groups of children and for individuals. A well planned transition will support children to have a positive sense of identity and wellbeing at school. It’s equally important that families feel welcomed by the school and are comfortable with their child’s transition experience. What happens during transition to school can have long-term effects on children’s resilience and their image of themselves as learners.

Part One of this series highlights how early childhood education and care services build relationships with children and their families, for whom English is an additional language, to support transition to school.

01:38 [Vanessa Field - Acting Director, Springvale]

Creating a warm and welcoming environment for families and children here is paramount to the success of this service. They need to feel that sense of belonging and I think the key to that is having the opportunity to build a relationship with the environment and the people within the service. We’re very blessed in the fact that we have educators and management staff here from a variety of backgrounds that actually reflect the community. If we’re taking a family on the tour, I’ll often take someone who can do the interpreting for me as well, so we’re very lucky to just have staff members who can speak and relate to families straight away.

02:20 [Anne Stonehouse]

Families play a very important role in supporting their children as they make the transition to school. Educators and teachers develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with families. Families need to feel they are being listened to and that they belong. There are many ways in which services and schools do this. In this part of the video series you will see and hear about how families are supported to feel welcomed and a sense of belonging.

02:48 [Sophie – Parent, Springvale]

I find an open line of communication is probably best for everyone. We all have William’s interests in mind, William’s best interests in mind, and we require a team. And the team includes the parent.

03:00 [Sadia – Parent, Kingsville Kindergarten]

Every time when I came here to drop him, I spoke with teachers. When I picked him [up], I spoke, ‘How was his day?’, ‘What was the problem teacher was facing?’, and then we find solution together. But when I started first, I don’t know, because I only know the education system in Pakistan, not here. So, at first, I don’t know what are my rights and how I can … I don’t know the teacher will listen me or not listen me. I was thinking that he is not speaking, so the teacher will not accept it and the teacher will say that, when he will start speaking, then he can join kinder.

03:59 [Sadika Iqbal – Multicultural Aide, Dandenong West Primary School]

In the community room, like we have English classes, craft, cooking, playgroup. So I will take a parent to the other parents who have been here before, like one year or two year before, they have children in Year 3 or Year 4. I will introduce them to each other, ‘This is a lady who speaks your language’, and make them to feel so they can be a friend; they can talk to each other in their own language.

04:28 [Filiz Omer – Primary Wellbeing Worker, Dandenong West Primary School]

Our doors are always open, we have an open doors policy here, and that would mean that parents can come in, have the opportunity to meet the teacher and be able to ask those questions that they might be a little bit concerned or unsure about. It might be things around not knowing what to pack for their child’s lunch, or not being sure what they could do to prepare their child for a nine o’clock start. At the beginning of the year we like to invite the parents to a morning tea, which is part of our community hub activities, and that allows parents to meet the staff members in the school and be able to meet other parents who also have Prep children who have started at the beginning of the year.

05:21 [Joanne Richmond, Principal, Dandenong West Primary School]

So we try to build relationships with the families, spend some time talking to them, getting to know them. So, for example, we don’t send home the enrolment form with them, we have them come in and we sit with them and we fill the forms in together, and as you go through that form, often the family’s story will come out. Our role, as the school, is to help build some connections for the families with perhaps their own community or with the other children in the school and that helps the experience of being at school, a better, more rewarding experience for everybody. I know, this morning I was looking at, there’s two mums, they both have babies, they’ve got Prep children and they’re new arrivals to the country and they’re obviously friends and every morning I see them now bring their little babies to school and they sit outside with their children, waiting for them to go inside, and you can see that that’s a place where these two mums come and they feel safe and they can spend some time talking. So I see that perhaps as one of the bonus things that happen at school.

06:20 [Anne Stonehouse]

In order to build positive relationships with families, educators and teachers need to understand families’ needs, capacities and expectations. They need to learn over time about families’ life experiences and hopes for their children. We know that children’s personal, family and cultural histories shape their learning and development. Some children and families who are new to Australia have travelled a very difficult road to get here. Some families arrive and are supported by existing family and connections. Others arrive dependent on services to support their settlement; this can include refugees and asylum seekers. Knowing about these factors will affect how schools and early childhood services engage with families.

07:07 [Joanne Richmond, Principal, Dandenong West Primary School]

We’ve always had to work very hard to engage with different families and I think you have to really challenge the notion - I’ve often thought schools have sometimes; it’s a very stereotypical notion of what parental involvement is. It’s, you know, the parent coming into the classroom, changing the take-home books for the students. Perhaps it’s the parent going on the excursion or helping in the canteen. For our families, that doesn’t work. I see parent involvement, engagement, as the parents being part of the school community; it’s the community and the school working together. It’s not the school on its own, it’s not the community on its own, and it’s the school and the community together. And if the parents come, like those two mums sitting outside talking, parents coming up, meeting other parents, parents coming in talking to Hung, our Community Hub leader, about some programs that they might want to be involved in, going to an activity in the Hub, joining in to our playgroups, I see that as being involved in the school. I think perhaps one of the things that I’ve learned in my time as the Principal and Assistant Principal here at St Albans, is the impact that trauma can have on children. I don’t think that we often realise that sometimes children can present at school, they’ve never been to kindergarten, they’ve never had any involvement in early years experiences, and they’ll often present at school with difficult or challenging behaviours. Often I think, as teachers, we have attributed that to the child being poorly behaved, but it’s not that. What I’ve learnt is it’s the impact of trauma that that child has experienced. Many of our children that we have here have been in refugee camps, detention centres. Their families themselves have been displaced or they have experienced some trauma on their journey to Australia. And I think one of the important components that we do as a school is to help to make the school a safe place for the children and for their families as well. We need to ensure that the student’s wellbeing is considered, and then when the child is ready, then that’s when they’re really ready to learn and they make huge growth in their learning.

09:17 [Sian Malcher – Kindergarten Teacher, Springvale]

To develop the relationship’s really important and to try and find out more about the child is really essential. So like finding out that this little girl that I was working with, that she’s only been in the country for two months. That gives you a completely different perspective when you think about building those relationships, because you’ve got this child that’s—a lot of our children have been in Malaysian refugee camps, have been picked up from there, moved to a country that they don’t know. They’re often living with family members they haven’t met before. And then they come to another place—they haven’t been to childcare, they haven’t been to any kind of setting like this, and they’re there with people that aren’t speaking their language, in an unfamiliar environment, and then we’re saying, ‘Ok, go and play’. They quite often haven’t had experience with the activities; they haven’t seen a lot of the toys. So they’re all brand new things, so you need to know that.

10:17 [Sharon Thompson, Literacy EAL Coordinator, Wilmot Rd Primary School]

We’re trying to get that family and school relationship working, and through that, trying to say that, ‘You are the first educators of your children and we really value that and this is how you can help’, trying to bring them in. We also have parent classes here, learning English. And so the parents don’t see school as a scary place. So we’re trying to have them understand how much we value them as educators as well.

10:45 [Anne Stonehouse]

The Department of Education and Training can provide further information about supporting children learning English as an additional language, including information about:

* Multicultural Education Aides
* The New Arrivals Program and
* English as an Additional Language (EAL) Programs in mainstream schools.