

<https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/starting-school/>

Different occasions at school

Students adapt to the school environment differently. Change can be stressful for most students, so it is important to closely monitor your students' transition to school. You may find that a student who initially experienced some difficulties getting used to being at school becomes more comfortable with familiar routines over time. However, they might find changes to a 'typical' school day a bit more challenging.

A child's family can help you understand how to support their child both on a typical day, and when unexpected events occur. Having a way to communicate that something new is going to happen will help set the student up for a positive day.

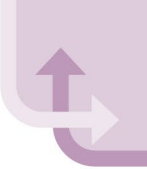


A typical school day can involve lots of movement, and time both indoors and outdoors.

What school occasions could you prepare students for?

If you suspect that a student might experience difficulties with an upcoming event or change to the usual routine, it is important to communicate with the student's family beforehand. Advance planning and preparation can help to make the change in routine more manageable for the student.

Common events that may take place at school	Events that may occur away from school
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School assemblies• Themed dress-up days (such as Book Week parade)• Sports days and carnivals• Cultural and religious events, festivals and ceremonies• Incursions (for example, visiting mobile farm, visiting performers)• Special visitors to the school (such as parents' days, guest speakers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excursions (for example, museum, concerts)• Visiting places in the local area• Sports events (for example, inter-school sports carnivals, swimming lessons)• Periods of remote learning• School camps or trips



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A new adult in the classroom (for example, relief teacher, education assistant, class helper)• Events that involve food (such as class parties, ordering food from the canteen, cooking activities)• Combined class timetables (perhaps due to weather, special activities)• Immunisations• Practice fire drills• Building works• Specialist lessons in different parts of the school (such as physical education) <p>Note: Some of these events might be considered part of the normal school routine in some schools and may require moving to a different space in the school or involve specialist teachers or visitors.</p>	
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Keep on hand a collection of fidget tools or comfort objects for events outside the classroom to use when needed.

What signs might suggest a student needs support for a change in routine?

Each student reacts differently to changes in routine. Different occasions at school can make some students feel nervous or uncomfortable. The way individual students respond at different times can also be influenced by other factors (for example, fatigue, social or sensory demands). For some students, even what seems like a small change in routine can be unsettling, while for others it is larger changes that are challenging. Moving from one activity to another, or leaving a task unfinished, can also make some students feel unsettled. Not all signs seem like a negative change but can still indicate stress. Here are some common examples of signs of stress to look out for:

- Unexplained illness (such as complaining about a stomach-ache to be excused from activities)
- Unusual changes in behaviour
- Difficulties communicating what they are feeling
- Asking lots of questions
- Avoiding new activities
- Increased stimming
- Talking about their favourite interest more than usual
- Increased anxious behaviours, excessive worrying
- Complaining of fatigue more than usual
- Behaviours that are out of character for the student (for example, covering ears, hiding, running away, shutting down, shouting, refusing to follow instructions or school rules)
- School phobia (student can't attend)
- Refusal to move to classes or different spaces

How can you support students to be ready for non-routine events?

Some events occur only once in a school year, for example, an off-site excursion or a district sports day. Working with the family in advance and preparing the student for these events can lessen the impact of the change on the student.

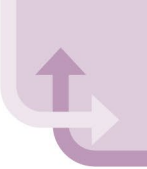
Supports and adjustments implemented to support the student if they feel overwhelmed by different occasions at school should be included in formal planning documents such as a behaviour support plan or an individualised learning plan. The plan should include strategies for the school to employ when the student encounters challenging new events at school.



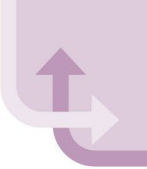
Discuss supports and adjustments with your school team to prepare your students for non-routine events.

Here are some strategies you could consider.

<p>Talk with families/support team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with the family in advance about upcoming changes in routine and ask if they feel their child might need some extra support. 	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite the family to meet with the school support team early in the school year to plan for how to prepare the student for special occasions. This could include a discussion about:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ length of time that their child can tolerate being outside of normal routine with an option to attend a part of the event with a plan to extend attendance over time○ the student’s possible triggers (for example, heat, noise, crowds) and ways to support the student; keep a record of these for reference throughout the year, and provide this information to relief and substitute teachers○ suitable comfort and fidget objects the student can use at school○ how the student can ask for help or take a break, especially if they have difficulty communicating their needs (the student might prefer to make a signal when they are uncomfortable)○ developing a plan together to support the student when they feel overwhelmed○ provision of a quiet area the student can access○ other adults in the school who can support the student (for example, education assistant, counsellor, sickbay attendant, office staff)○ how to communicate about the student’s needs (for example, phone call, email, a communication book sent between home and school, an app, a shared collaborative electronic document, or through the school portal or learning management system).• Discuss with the family how you might be able to talk to other students in the class about the child’s support needs (for example, triggers and possible response to triggers).• Consider how a student might benefit from:	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ specific roles or responsibilities to give ownership or some control over an otherwise unfamiliar event, for example, completing a task for the teacher that provides a movement break○ opportunities for choice (something as simple as options for where to sit can help).● Arrange a follow-up conversation with the family following events to discuss any support modifications for future events.● Ideally, arrange to meet with the family regularly to discuss any changes in their child's support needs.	
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Prepare the student

- If appropriate, visit a new location in advance to become familiar with the new environment.
- Let the student know in advance if there is going to be a change in the usual routine. Reassure them that most children feel a little nervous when they experience new situations at school.
- Use a visual planner to explain what changes in routine are likely to happen.
- Create a social story showing what the event or situation might look like for shared reading with the class.
- If the activity is likely to recur (such as a school assembly), agree on a place the student will always sit and where their support person will sit.
- Roleplay elements of the event, for example, getting a drink of water (with supervision if required), finding the toilets, going to the bus, eating lunch.
- Pack a bag with calming objects, headphones, hats, sunglasses or colouring-in activities for the student.
- Practise breathing and relaxation strategies they can use, like finger stretches or [five-finger breathing](#).
- Practise how the student will communicate if they are feeling overwhelmed or need support.
- Visit a quiet space that can be accessed during the event, and provide them with an exit pass, take a break card or help card they can show a teacher if they need a break (some schools put this on a lanyard that the student can wear around their neck).
- Offer mentoring and support from older students or peers (such as a buddy system).
- Talk with the student about upcoming changes in routine and plan what support they might need.
- Ask the student what they might need or want if they feel overwhelmed.
- Plan regular breaks during the event so that all students can recharge and can regulate their feelings with or without support, as required.

[Planning for change: Educators](#) [PDF] can be used as a prompt to guide discussions with a family about a student's support needs for different events. Alternatively, you may prefer to invite the family to provide advice using the family version of [Planning for change: Families](#) [PDF].