



A Guide for Parents

Managing a Graduated Introduction to Kindy

Children who struggle with intense separation anxiety will benefit from a graduated introduction to Kindy, whereby short visits to the classroom are gradually increased over a number of days or weeks.

When following a graduated approach, there are several factors to keep in mind.

This guide offers some direction on how to structure a graduated approach, and outlines some strategies to help gently transition your child into the Kindy environment.

Please use this information as a guide only and always follow your intuition and your child's lead. Speaking with the school psychologist (or other child psychologist) for tailored support is recommended.

This guide builds on content covered in the *Starting Kindy and Managing Separation Anxiety. A Guide for Parents* information sheet.

Please familiarise yourself with this guide before reading on.
All strategies in this guide need to be implemented in consultation with your child's teacher.

1

Start the term with short days

Arrange with the teacher to have your child attend short days in the first week or two as a 'phasing in' period. Establish a convenient time to collect your child each day to avoid disrupting the rest of the class (perhaps after recess or lunch).

It is advisable to allow your child to stay for any free play periods if possible as this will help your child build a positive association with Kindy. Take note of how your child is adjusting during this time and make adjustments accordingly.

For example, if your child clearly wants to stay for longer than planned on a given day, then allow them to do so whenever possible.

2

Be prepared to stay

It may be necessary to accompany your child to class in the initial phases (this is best for highly sensitive children). This will allow them time to adjust to their new surroundings and routine without the threat of separation.

During this phase, your child may need to stay close by your side; this is normal and should not be discouraged. It is important to avoid pressuring your child to step away from you or join in with peers.

3

Be part of the class

While it is important to allow your child to stay close by your side if they need to, it is also important to balance this with helping them to integrate into the class. Try to have your child at least attend to and watch the class activities as much as possible (passive participation).

For example, if the class is going outside, then go outside with them. If the class is sitting on the mat, then sit with them. The goal is to help your child be part of the class and learn to follow along with the routine as much as possible. Allowing them to break off from the group and do separate activities is not advisable (unless there is an over-riding reason to do so).

4

Try sports casting

If your child is reluctant to join in class activities, do not pressure them.

Instead gently and indirectly encourage them using a technique called ‘sports casting’. Sports casting simply involves holding your child’s hand (or whatever feels natural to you) and commenting on what is happening around you in ways that might interest them. This might sound something like “Look how high Anna is going on the swing – it looks like her feet can touch the sky” or “look how big Eric’s sandcastle is”.

The goal is to appeal to your child’s natural instinct for curiosity and play. Be sure to monitor how your child is responding and don’t over-do it. If you can feel your child withdrawing further, then take a break and try again later.

5

Foster a relationship between child and teacher

Building a quality relationship between child and teacher is the most critical element to a successful transition to Kindy.

Without this, sensitive children will continue to struggle. It is important for parents to engage with the teacher at each visit as your child will take cues from you as to how to feel about others. So be sure to greet the teacher with your child each morning and say goodbye at the end of each day. Direct any questions your child might have to the teacher and scaffold them in doing so.

This might sound something like “I’m not sure how this works, let’s go and ask Mrs Brown together”. If your child is unable to do the talking, then do it for them, but try to construct your question in a way that incorporates the child’s perspective (ie., “excuse me Mrs Brown, but we are wondering how this toy works”).

The goal is to model to your child that the teacher is a safe and approachable person who can help if needed.

6

Start to introduce short separations

As your child becomes more comfortable, start to build-in short separations. Start with a few minutes at a time (e.g., go to the toilet, or get a tissue) and then move to longer separations of about 10-15 minutes (e.g., move the car). As a guide, you can try to increase the time by doubling it every few days but always be guided first by your child. If you rush the process, you will lose your child’s trust and end up back where you first began.

Make sure that your child knows you are leaving each time and emphasise that you are coming back (e.g., “I’m just going to move the car and I’ll be right back”).

7

Be contactable and prepared to return early during separations

During periods of separation, there will likely be times when your child will ask for you. If this happens, it is important that the teacher (or assistant) contacts you to return. It is important that you and the teacher are both clear about this as it is common for teachers and staff to try to manage the situation without you.

While this might be well intentioned, such an approach risks breaking the child’s trust and can therefore undermine the whole process. Think about how you might you feel in a situation where you were scared and asked someone to call a loved one for you. If they refused and insisted that they help you instead, would you trust them? Probably not, no matter how ‘nice’ they were. Remember, our main priority is to build a relationship with the teacher – this requires trust.

8

Expect set backs

It’s important to remember that progress is never linear when it comes to children. There will be days when your child struggles more than others. It’s important to be accepting of this and stay within the limits of what your child can tolerate.

Don’t force longer separations if your child is having a particularly clingy day (even if you have managed lengthy separations in the past).

9

Work in partnership with the Teacher

Be sure to communicate with the teacher each day and establish a plan for separations. Make sure they are aware of when you are planning to increase your time away, and be sure to signal to them when you are leaving. This lets them know when your child might need some extra support.

In Summary

The above offers some guidance on how to structure a graduated entry to Kindy for your child. Please use this information as a guide only and be sure to trust your own intuition. Monitor how your child is responding to the suggested techniques and make adjustments accordingly.

Remember that the most effective way to help your child adjust is to build a relationship with the teacher (and assistant) so this should remain a focus throughout the process.

This guide should not be considered a substitute for tailored advice from an experienced and appropriately qualified professional.