



Research indicates that early and sustained participation in quality education and care is especially beneficial for vulnerable children and can improve lifelong social, learning and development outcomes.

In recognition of this, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provides funding for eligible children to attend a free or low-cost kindergarten program for the two years before school.

## What is Early Start Kindergarten?

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) provides eligible three year old children with access to 15 hours of kindergarten per week for free.

ESK is available to children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and are:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or
- known to Child Protection or who have been referred by Child Protection to Child FIRST.

Applications for ESK are completed and submitted by the early childhood education and care service on behalf of the child.

## Supporting children's access to ESK

Child Protection, Child FIRST and family services professionals are encouraged to assist in enrolling eligible children in a free kindergarten program through Early Start Kindergarten (ESK).

Two year old children can be referred to an early childhood education and care service to ensure they secure an Early Start Kindergarten place for the following year.

## Finding a kindergarten service

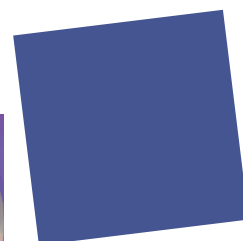
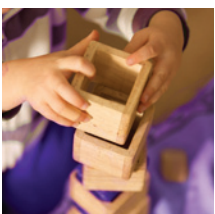
Kindergarten programs are offered in a range of settings, including children's centres, long day care centres, community kindergartens and some schools.

Vulnerable families may not be confident in locating a place and enrolling their child. You can work with the child's family to locate a kindergarten service that provides places for three year olds by visiting: [www.education.vic.gov.au/findaservice/home.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/findaservice/home.aspx) or by contacting the relevant local council.

## Referral process for Early Start Kindergarten

### Children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten

- ✓ Children who are, or have been, in foster care, permanent care or kinship care
- ✓ Children who are on, or have been on, statutory orders from Child Protection anywhere in Australia
- ✓ Children without substantiated concerns referred to Child FIRST from Child Protection
- ✓ Children from families who self-refer to Child FIRST where siblings have had involvement in Child Protection (protective concerns investigated or substantiated)
- ✓ Children who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



## Referral process



## More information

Staff in Departmental regional offices or Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESO) can assist families with any queries about kindergarten programs. If you are in doubt about a child's eligibility, contact your regional Department office for advice.

### Information for families

Information about Early Start Kindergarten and Aboriginal Early Start Kindergarten is available for families. For more information visit: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/kindergarten/Pages/earlystart.aspx>

| Region              | Location      | Switchboard  |
|---------------------|---------------|--------------|
| North East Victoria | Benalla       | 03 5761 2100 |
|                     | Glen Waverley | 03 9265 2400 |
| North West Victoria | Bendigo       | 03 5440 3111 |
|                     | Coburg        | 03 9488 9488 |
| South East Victoria | Dandenong     | 03 8765 5600 |
|                     | Moe           | 03 5127 0400 |
| South West Victoria | Ballarat      | 03 5337 8444 |
|                     | Geelong       | 03 5225 1000 |
|                     | Footscray     | 03 9291 6500 |