



# EARLY START KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD FIRST

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 Training 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.



## CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR EARLY START KINDERGARTEN INCLUDE

- 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

1. Identify a child that is eligible for ESK and discuss the initiative with the child's family
2. Contact local council or visit the Find a Kindergarten Service website to identify a service
3. Discuss the placement with the service and the child's needs to support their engagement
4. Assist the parent or carer to enrol the child at the service

## INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Information about Early Start Kindergarten and Aboriginal Early Start Kindergarten is available for families. For more information visit: [Information for families about Early Start Kindergarten](#)

## 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.

## REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACTS

### North East Victoria

Benalla: 03 8392 9500  
Glen Waverley: 03 8392 9300

### 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 8397 0300

For a list of all the Department's Regional offices, visit: [Department of Education and Training Regional Office Contact List](#)