

Your guide to: Teaching longer days

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Key points:

- The introduction of Pre-Prep may mean your service introduces a timetable with longer days to accommodate increased hours of Pre-Prep, and up to 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.
- Longer days will require a different pace for your programs. It is important children have times for rest as well as activities.
- Children enrolled in funded kindergarten places in some early childhood education settings will already be accustomed to longer day programs.
- Many Victorian services are already using 7.5-hour days to deliver highly effective programs.

Introduction

Longer teaching days have a different rhythm for both educators and children. With careful planning, all the positive aspects of a shorter day can be transferred into a longer day format. More time will be available to work with individuals and groups, as well as transitions and snack times.

All kindergarten programs, with either short or longer hours, provide well considered routines and rituals that are predictable and familiar. Teachers and educators support children to understand what comes next and provide a sense of security and comfort. It is these routines and rituals that are necessary for children to feel a sense of trust and belonging, so they feel confident to engage in play.

Early childhood environments are busy and there is much to do. However, as programs are re-structured to support increased hours, there is an opportunity to reflect on current routines and rituals and consider how the rhythm of the day can be slowed to support valuable moments that nurture children's wellbeing and learning.

When care is taken to ensure the teaching team has sufficient breaks, children have time for rest and quiet and routine activities are not rushed, longer days provide great environments for learning.



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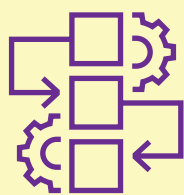
Communicating with families

Examples

Some of the benefits of longer days may include:

- more opportunities for children to access increased hours each week at your service as you roll out Pre-Prep. Increased access to early childhood education means enhanced learning and development opportunities for more children and families
- slower and deeper learning activities with extended periods of uninterrupted play
- more time to focus on activities and transition between activities - there will also be extended opportunities for children to socialise, make friends and develop their independence
- additional incursions and excursions can be incorporated into the program (for example, road safety, dental health, community visits etc.)
- more opportunities to involve families (for example, by inviting parents and carers to attend the service to 'stay and play').





Planning for changes to the length of the teaching day

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There are a variety of enrolment patterns that can accommodate varied and flexible hours. See the examples for some ideas. Once you have identified your service's timetable, consider the following:

- how you will create a sense of routine and build daily rituals. For example, think about family drop-off and pick-up, mealtimes, resting, managing belongings, packing up, toileting and greeting one another. These routines and rituals help to create secure environments and provide many opportunities for learning and connecting
- break times for the teaching team and how you will ensure the required ratios are maintained
- how you will work as a team when the children are together as a single group, and in smaller groups, including how children will move from indoors to outdoors
- what approach or method of teaching you will use to attend to the individual needs, capabilities, and interests of children.

Schedule times for your teaching team to meet as a group to plan and reflect on the introduction of longer days. Use the Early Years Planning Cycle in the [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework \(VEYLDF\)](#) to regularly reflect on expected and unexpected aspects of the program and plan new approaches in response to change.

A further consideration is the number of teachers and educators available to work longer days. For example, consider whether your existing teaching team can support longer days, or if you will need to employ more staff.





Questions for reflective discussion

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In programs that have longer days, it is important for the teaching team to check in with each other regularly. Discuss how unexpected interruptions to the program will be managed and confirm decisions about when and how planned activities will be supported. Agree who will be responsible for routine activities, such as packing outdoor play materials away at the end of the day.

Some key questions may include:

- How will you ensure individual opportunities for learning can be extended, particularly for children with additional needs and where 3- and 4-year-olds attend in the same group?
- How will teaching teams collaborate across the program and support children's continuity of learning throughout the day?
- How can you plan for a balance between whole-group and small-group activities during the day?
- How will you plan for and assess children's learning from participating in routine activities? Are there further opportunities for learning and development from routines?
- How will you ensure the program remains focused on the Learning and Development Outcomes in the VEYLDF?
- What will this mean for your teaching teams? How might professionals need to work together in new and different ways with longer days?

You can use the Early Years Planning Cycle in the VEYLDF to systematically reflect on and evaluate changes to your program as you implement longer days. This will support you and your team to evaluate your program based on evidence and in partnership with children and families. As your program expands, systematic reflection will also support your professional learning in the context of your practice.





Communicating with families

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Some families may be concerned their child will become overly tired in full-day programs. You can remind parents that many children attend kindergarten and long day care centres where they quickly adapt to the length of the day.

Discuss the individual needs of each child with their families and how to best support their transition to longer days. Ask families about their children's routines at home and what they do with ease and what they may need more support with. Some children may need to bring a toy or object from home or follow the same predictable routine when they arrive each day.

Make sure families have information about:

- how the program is offered across the day, including supporting families to adapt their child's hours of attendance as they transition to longer days (e.g., starting later or finishing earlier)
- additional items they may need to send with their child, such as lunch and a change of clothing
- how they can be involved in the program on a voluntary basis if they wish
- the benefits their child may experience participating in longer days
- opportunities for their child to rest or play quietly, as well as time to be active.

The VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome 'Children have a strong sense of wellbeing' focuses on children's healthy life practices, coping with day-to-day stresses, and their growing capacity to regulate their own wellbeing. Times for rest and quiet are opportunities to support children's learning about self-regulation of their own needs.

Consider and decide on communication methods you will use to communicate with families – for example, floor books, diaries, wall displays, emails, online platforms and portfolios. This will help ensure continuity for children, families and staff.

More information

- See the information sheet [Your Guide To: Rotational models](#)
- See the information sheet [Your Guide To: Multi-age groups](#)



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Notes - Contact your local [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) to get tailored advice to suit your specific circumstances.

These are illustrative examples and not based on an actual service. The examples are intended to provide an illustration of how services could adjust their program models to accommodate increased hours. The examples may not be applicable to or suit all services.

The examples show how services can offer additional hours to children eligible for Pre-Prep, in addition to the ongoing roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

You may need to consider whether changes to staffing arrangements require staff consultation under the relevant industrial instrument (e.g., an enterprise agreement or award covering your service). If relevant, your peak body or industrial representative may be able to provide advice.

Happy Hippos Kinder is a single-room service with 33 licensed places.

Celia, the manager of Happy Hippos Kinder, has a planning meeting with her staff to get their views on program model options for delivering 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, between 16 and 20 Pre-Prep hours, and up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep for children from priority cohorts.

It is anticipated there will be 21 children for each age group and 2 children from priority cohorts.

Staff are open to the possibility of multi-age groups and rotational models when starting Pre-Prep, along with longer sessions. The teaching team all see value in implementing changes incrementally, so they can see how things go and make refinements each year as they progress through the reforms.

The following examples are intended to show one approach to how Happy Hippos Kinder can gradually increase their hours of program delivery over time.

Example 1

This example allows for:

- 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten (3YO)
- 20 hours of Pre-Prep (PP)
- 25 hours of Pre-Prep for 2 children from priority cohorts.

This example includes 6 groups:

- 3 x 3YO groups - Dingoes: 6 children, Echidnas: 5 children, Quokkas: 10 children (21 children)
- 2 x PP groups - Wombats: 11 children, Emus: 10 children (21 children)
- Children from Pre-Prep priority cohorts (2 children)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Dingoes (3YO) Wombats (PP) Emus (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Dingoes (3YO) Quokkas (3YO) Wombats (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Echidnas (3YO) Wombats (PP) Emus (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Echidnas (3YO) Quokkas (3YO) Emus (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Non-teaching day
29 children 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours)	29 children 3YO: 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours) PP: 11am-4pm (5 hours)	28 children 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours)	27 children 3YO: 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours) PP: 11am-4pm (5 hours)	

This timetable offers 20 hours of Pre-Prep with 2 x 7.5-hour days and a 5-hour day. This is how the teaching team and families who provided feedback in a recent survey indicated how they would like Pre-Prep hours to be set.

One non-teaching day a week provides time for shared planning. Children from Pre-Prep priority cohorts can access 25 hours of Pre-Prep across the 4 days. (i.e. 2 x 7.5-hour days and 2 x 5-hour days).

There is flexibility in this model to shift around the days the children are attending if needed - for example, to match which days teachers and educators are delivering sessions so children can remain with the same team member, or to suit the needs of the family.

Example 2

This example allows for:

- 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten (3YO)
- 20 hours of Pre-Prep (PP)
- 25 hours of Pre-Prep for 2 children from priority cohorts.

This example includes 6 groups:

- 3 x 3YO groups - Dingoes: 5 children, Echidnas: 9 children, Quokkas: 7 children (21 children)
- 2 x PP groups - Wombats: 10 children, Emus: 11 children (21 children)
- Children from Pre-Prep priority cohorts (2 children).

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Dingoes (3YO) Quokkas (3YO) Wombats (PP)	Dingoes (3YO) Wombats (PP) Emus (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Echidnas (3YO) Emus (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Echidnas (3YO) Wombats (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts	Quokkas (3YO) Emus (PP) Pre-Prep priority cohorts
22 children 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours)	28 children 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours)	22 children 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours)	21 children 3YO: 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours) PP: 11am-4pm (5 hours)	20 children 3YO: 8:30am-4pm (7.5 hours) PP: 11am-4pm (5 hours)

This example has programs delivered within 7.5-hour days across the week, although some children may attend for a shorter session, so there are staggered arrivals on these days.

Children from priority cohorts can access 25 hours of Pre-Prep across the 4 days (i.e. 2 x 7.5-hour days and 2 x 5-hour days).

It may not be possible for the whole team to simultaneously attend planning, so it may have to be organised in smaller groups.

For further information on making changes at your service, refer to the Change Management Toolkit and contact your local [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#).