

Selecting a kindergarten program for your child

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From 2023, kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-olds are free at participating services across Victoria.

This means families can access two years of play-based learning programs for their children before they start school.

Deciding on a kindergarten program for your child is an important and exciting decision that will depend on which services are available in your community, and your family's needs.

Here are some things to consider when selecting a kindergarten program.

Finding a kindergarten program

Every child is different. This means the kindergarten service you choose should be a good fit with your child and family. It's a good idea to start looking for a kindergarten program early, as enrolment processes vary across Victoria. Most services accept applications when children turn two.

Children can attend two years of kindergarten programs at a range of early childhood education and care settings, including sessional kindergartens and long day care centres.

A long day care centre can offer a full day of education and care, including a kindergarten program, led by a teacher. The kindergarten program is offered over an extended time, which can be helpful and convenient for working families.

At a sessional service, a kindergarten program will run on certain days and at specific times. These days and hours are set by the kindergarten service.

No matter where your child goes to kindergarten, teachers and educators will work with you to create a program that supports your child to learn and grow.

To find your local kindergarten and for information on how to choose the right service for your child, visit vic.gov.au/kinder. Find a Kindergarten Map, visit findakinder.educationapps.vic.gov.au/

Look for the Kinder Tick

The Kinder Tick helps Victorian families find a kindergarten program for their child. When you see the Kinder Tick displayed at an early childhood service, you can be confident that:

- the program will be led by a teacher
- children will benefit from play-based learning
- the kindergarten program is approved by the Victorian Government
- the program complies with government guidelines and the National Quality Framework.

These expectations are the same in all early childhood services that offer kindergarten programs, including long day care centres and sessional kindergartens.

Quality programs for your child

The quality of a kindergarten program is important and will help ensure your child is supported to learn and grow.

The National Quality Framework is the rating system that ensures early childhood education and care services meet high national standards. These standards help make sure your child is safe and is given opportunities for learning and development. You can look at services' ratings by visiting: startingblocks.gov.au

All government-funded kindergarten programs must meet Victorian Government safety and quality guidelines and are developed in line with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF). The VEYLDF provides practice principles to guide early childhood professionals to work together, with children and with families to achieve the best outcomes for every child.

Learn more when you speak to your local service

To help decide if a kindergarten program is the best fit for you, your child and your family, below are some questions to consider asking a service when you speak to them about enrolling:

- what does the program include?
- how will my child's individual needs be met?
- is there a government-funded kindergarten program? Is the program led by a teacher?
- how does your service rate against the National Quality Standards?
- what sort of qualifications do your staff have?
- how does the service support children with additional needs?
- what happens if my child is unwell, upset, or unsettled?

- how are food and drink given to my child? How does the service manage allergies? How are families informed of what children are eating?
- how does the service give medication?
- how does the service communicate with families?
- how does the service manage toilet training and rest and relaxation?
- are places available for the days and hours your family needs?
- what are the hours of operation? Does the service operate throughout the year or only during certain times, like school terms?
- are there additional fees or costs to attend?
- is there a fee to be placed on the waiting list?
- does the service offer wrap-around care before and after the kindergarten program?

Enrolling your child in a kindergarten program

Most services have an enrolment process that opens the year before a child starts a kindergarten program, so it helps to enrol when your child turns two years old.

Once you have selected a kindergarten program, it's helpful to talk to the service and teaching staff to seek more information about the enrolment process and, if possible, visit the service.

