

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : Your child's education

Education is important for children and young people. There are many ways parents can support their child's education. The information in this sheet provides you with some ideas.

Choosing the right school

Most teenagers in Australia attend schools in their local area. However some parents apply to schools further away because they think these colleges will meet their child's education needs better.

You may have concerns that your child may have difficulty settling into school because of:

- a lack of education.
- low English literacy skills.
- or they have other special needs.

Talk to the teaching staff at several schools before deciding which one you will try to enrol your child in.

Questions to ask

The following questions may be useful to ask:

- Are there children from our home country or cultural background already attending this school?
- Are there any bi-lingual teachers at this school who can speak to my child in their own language?
- Do the teaching staff understand the issues that migrant and refugee children face when settling into a new country?
- Does the school have links with support services for migrant and refugee young people?
- Does the school have a tutoring program or other extra support for children who may need this?

Which school is best?

There are advantages to going to the local school. Children meet other young people in their area and begin to feel they belong to their local community.

However sometimes a different school may meet your child's needs better. Choose to enrol at the school that will best support your child's education and welfare.

English language schools and centres

Most states in Australia provide English language programs for newly arrived young people who have limited or no English language skills.

These programs aim to teach students the English language skills they need in order to study in primary or secondary schools.

For information on the type of English language support provided in your state see:
<http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/beginning-life/booklets/english.htm>.

It helps if families are part of school life

Australian schools encourage and welcome families to take part in their children's life at school.

Research suggests that when families take part in their children's education young people:

- feel more connected to school.
- are likely to do better in their school work.
- attend school more often.

Schools often have social events to give parents a chance to meet each other. Parents can also get to know the teachers.

Going to these events can be a great way for a family to begin to become part of the local community.

Ways to join in

Some families find it hard to come to school because their English is poor.

Maybe you have never been to school yourself. This really doesn't matter.

There are many jobs that parents can do to help:

Help with after-school care: with sport, dance, music, theatre, cooking and other activities. You can share some of your special skills.

Help organise school events, concerts, sports days, festivals, exhibitions. Most of these events

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need people to help sell tickets, make food or other tasks.

Offer to help translate school notices.

Help in the school canteen to make and sell lunches.

Offer to help with school camps or trips. Parents are often needed to help the teacher look after students when they are travelling around, or when they are away on camp. If you can speak two languages your help will be even more valuable.

Get to know the teachers

When you get to know the teachers, you can start to talk with them about:

- what your child is learning.
- how the school can help when there are problems.
- your child's strengths and interests.

How can I help with homework if I don't know what to do?

Families can still help their children even if they can't do the homework themselves.

The most important thing for your child is that you:

- show an interest in what they are learning.
- make sure your child has time to do homework.
- make the home quiet for an hour or two each night so your child can study. Or you can send your child to the school library to do their homework.
- make some time each weekend to spend together as a family. Often study and housework can take over family life. Sometimes there is little time for enjoying each other. Having fun times together is important.
- allow your teenager to spend some time with their friends once all their other work is done.

Support for Students

A **Student Welfare Officer** is available at most schools to help with any problems children are having.

Families can ask to speak to the welfare officer if they have concerns or the young person can go to them by themselves if they want help.

Bullying and racism

Some children at school can be unkind to others. They might be racist and say hurtful things.

If other children are being mean to your child, it will make it hard for them to learn. Some children fight back when they are teased, others become withdrawn and depressed.

What you can do

- If you think your child might be having a hard time at school because of teasing or bullying talk to them. Try to find out what is going on.
- Listen and support them, rather than blame them. Your child needs you to be the person who believes their story, even if others don't.
- Make an appointment to talk to the teacher or the school welfare officer. Ask for an interpreter if that will make things easier.
- Find out if the school has programs to teach students about bullying and racism.
- If the situation does not improve and your child is very unhappy, you may need to think about changing schools.

Some children don't like school

Some children struggle to fit in at school. They may:

- find the work too difficult .
- find the work boring.
- have trouble making friends.
- be easily distracted.

What you can do

If you are concerned that your child is losing interest in school or not coping:

- talk calmly to you child about how they feel about their life and their future.
- talk to the teachers or the welfare officer at your child's school about your concerns. Don't let pride or shame get in the way.
- find out if your child is struggling with their school work and what can be done to help.
- think about whether there are problems in the family that are affecting your child and what can be done to make things better.

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There can be more to life than school

If your child is fifteen or older and is finding school just too difficult or stressful, then you might want to look at other options for them.

As a parent, you might find this very hard. When children have the opportunity to study and don't take it, parents often feel they have worked hard for nothing.

But some young people try many different things before deciding what they really want to do. Support your child to explore what is possible. If they haven't been able to cope in secondary school, don't give up on them.

Your support is important. Some young people work for a few years and then return to school later when they are older and better able to cope with education.

Other Options

Is there a **course at the local TAFE College** that might suit your young person better than their school? For a list of and links to Australian TAFE colleges see: http://www.webwombat.com.au/careers_ed/directories/tafe.htm

Is your teenager good at working with their hands? Perhaps **learning a trade** may be a better option than secondary school. Talk to your teenager about whether they would like to apply to get an apprenticeship so they can learn a trade? See: <http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>

Does your local community centre or neighbourhood house have **short courses** that might interest your teenager if they are not up to doing full-time training at this time?

Maybe **working in a paid job** might be better for your child now. They might return to education when they are older.

→ Tips from this Fact Sheet

- Australian schools encourage and welcome families to take part in their children's life at school.
- Talking to teachers will help you to understand more about your young person's life at school.
- All parents have something to offer the school community: language skills, activity skills, cooking skills and many other talents.
- Most schools have a Student Welfare Officer. This person can help you and your young person to talk about problems.
- There are many ways of learning; finding the right way can take time and effort.

→ Related Help Sheets

- Settling into a new country
- Adolescent development
- Improving Communication

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→ Useful resources

Department of Immigration

'Beginning a Life in Australia'

<http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/beginning-life/booklets/english.htm>

Melbourne Citymission

Information Resource Kit for the Horn of Africa Communities

- Education and Training Pathways 3-CD set in 6 languages.

Tel: Western (03) 9680 8237

Centre for Multicultural Youth

'Understanding the Victorian Education and Training System: A Guide for Newly Arrived Young People'

- Available to download in 12 languages

http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/193/1/GuidefornewlyarrivedYP_English.pdfhtt

Strong Bonds

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