

Advice for families: Free Kinder in sessional services

Free Kinder is available for all children enrolled in funded kindergarten programs at services participating in Free Kinder.

Savings for families

Children enrolled in sessional kindergarten services receive a free program, saving families up to \$2,563:

- For 3-year-old children, Free Kinder means a free kindergarten program between 5 and 15 hours per week (200-600 hours per year)
- For 4-year-old children, Free Kinder means a free kindergarten program of 15 hours per week (600 hours per year).

Eligibility

Free Kinder is for everyone. You do not need to be an Australian citizen to be eligible to access Free Kinder.

Your child can receive one year of Free Kinder in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program and one year in a Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program. Your child can only receive Free Kinder at one service at a time. Your kindergarten service will ask you to sign a form to confirm that your child is receiving their funded kindergarten program at their service.

Sessional kindergarten services that offer more than 15 hours each week

Some sessional kindergarten services participating in Free Kinder offer extra kindergarten hours or care hours for a fee. These extra hours are optional. If you don't want the extra hours, your child can attend the 15-hour program free of charge.

For information on fees or hours provided, please ask your kindergarten service.



Other allowable charges

You may be charged the following:

- a registration fee when you enrol your child for kindergarten. This fee is allowable as it is not related to the delivery of the kindergarten program.
- an enrolment deposit, but this is refunded if your child starts attending the service.
- the cost of one-off excursions (e.g. entry and transport costs).

Children from a refugee background, children known to child protection, Aboriginal children and those holding Commonwealth concession cards will not be charged for excursions.

Some services may request payment for excursions at the beginning of the year. In these cases, services should refund any surplus funds that have not been used for the cost recovery of excursions at the end of the year.

Your service may ask you for a voluntary donation or to participate in fundraising. You can choose if you want to donate or take part in fundraising.

You will not be charged:

- for incursions or regular excursions (e.g., Bush Kinder, weekly music sessions) that are a core part of the kindergarten program.
- compulsory out-of-pocket fees or levies, e.g, maintenance fees, membership fees.

If your child changes kindergarten services during the year

If your child moves to a different sessional (standalone) service that is participating in Free Kinder during the kindergarten year, the service that you are moving from will stop receiving the Free Kinder payment and your new sessional service will receive the Free Kinder funding so you can continue to receive a free program.

If your child moves from a sessional kindergarten program to a kindergarten program in a long day care service during their kindergarten year, the service will stop receiving the Free Kinder payment and your new service will receive the Free Kinder funding so they can pass the savings on to you.

More information about Free Kinder in long day care services is available at vic.gov.au/kinder



Play-based learning and your child

Young children are naturally motivated to play. Research shows that in children's early years, play is also the best way for them to learn and grow.

What is play-based learning?

Play-based learning supports children to explore and make sense of themselves and their world. It builds on children's natural curiosity.

Through hands-on exploration of the world around them children learn in many ways. For example, playing with sand helps children learn about mathematical ideas, such as weight and volume, and playing with dolls and dress-ups helps children to learn about families and how to relate to others.

This approach to early childhood education supports children to learn and extend their development through activities and experiences that they find enjoyable and interesting.

Programs that help children to learn through play are supported by educators who will provide children opportunities for:

- **adult-led learning** where the educator plans or introduces a play experience, idea or topic to purposefully direct the child's learning
- **child-directed play and learning** where the child leads their own learning through exploration, imagination and experimentation
- **guided play and learning** where educators involve themselves in children's spontaneous play and extend their learning as opportunities arise.

Why is play-based learning important?

Play-based learning is now widely understood to be one of the most important ways to support children to develop the skills and understanding they need to live well now and into the future.

There is strong evidence that the pathways in children's brains are positively influenced by the exploration that happens during play.

Play supports children in all areas of their development, including their understanding of themselves and relationships with others, their connection to the communities they live in, how they communicate effectively with others and how they think about and solve problems.

Positive attitudes towards learning, such as persistence, curiosity and imagination are all developed during play. These attitudes set children up for a life-long love of learning.

Play-based learning important approaches at home

Children are learning all the time. There are many opportunities for children to learn at home, including in everyday activities such as getting ready in the morning, preparing meals or doing household jobs provide great learning opportunities.

Consider some of the ideas below:

- at bath time, introduce science and maths concepts such as floating, sinking, heavy, full, empty, half, and so on, using a simple container in the water
- when hanging out the washing, ask your child to hand you one, two, three pegs, sort pegs by colour, or talk about bigger, longer, smaller, and so on using clothes
- at mealtimes, describe ingredients, flavours, colours, textures to introduce new words and concepts, such as where the ingredients come from
- when reading books, use the pictures to prompt further conversation or explain the text
- when driving or walking, describe what you are seeing, ask open questions.



Starting Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

What is a kindergarten program?

Kindergarten (also known as kinder) is an early education program for young children aged three to five, led by an early childhood teacher.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten has been introduced across Victoria, which means families can now access two years of government-funded kindergarten for their children before they start school.

How will my child benefit from kindergarten?

Kindergarten helps your child to learn and grow. Research shows that quality kindergarten programs support children to thrive throughout their lives.

This includes supporting them to develop positive relationships, problem-solving skills, ways to manage their emotions, and approaches to exploring, discovering and learning about themselves and the world around them.

Children who attend kindergarten programs are generally more independent and confident and are more likely to make a smooth transition to primary school.

Taking part in a quality kindergarten program from three years old leads to positive effects on a child's learning and development. It has even greater benefits for children who need extra support or are experiencing vulnerable circumstances.

When can my child start kindergarten?

Children can attend kindergarten programs in the two years before they start primary school.

Families with children born between January and April can choose which year to start at Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. These children can start in the same year they turn three, or in the year they turn four years of age. Due to staff requirements, some services may ask that children start attending at kindergarten only after their third birthday.

This may mean that some children may not start until part-way into Term 1 and have less time overall as part of a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program, in comparison to their peers.

If this is the case for your child and you accept a place, kindergartens will hold your child's place until they are old enough to attend.

Kindergarten services will discuss with you directly about how they can support your child to join their program once they turn three.

When your child starts at kindergarten directly relates to the age they will start at primary school. When enrolling at Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, we encourage families to plan ahead and consider the age they would like their child to start at school.

If your child was born between:	Your child is eligible to attend Three-Year-Old Kinder in:
1 January 2019 – 30 April 2019	2022 or 2023
1 May 2019 – 31 December 2019	2023
1 January 2020 – 30 April 2020	2023 or 2024
1 May 2020 – 31 December 2020	2024
1 January 2021 – 30 April 2021	2024 or 2025
1 May 2021 – 31 December 2021	2025
1 January 2022 – 30 April 2022	2025 or 2026

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Refer to the **Selecting a kindergarten service for your child** factsheet. Children can attend a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program at either a long day care (childcare) centre or at a standalone (sessional) kindergarten.

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You can also use the calculator on vic.gov.au/kinder and enter your child's birthdate to find out what year your child can start Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.



Where can I get advice on the best time to start kindergarten?

Each child learns differently. They have unique learning and developmental needs and interests; for example, children might become toilet trained, learn how to draw and hold a pencil, develop different communication skills, or deal with strong emotions, like frustration or anger, at a range of different ages.

In partnership with you, teachers and educators will provide programs to suit your child's individual learning and development. In some cases, your child may benefit from starting a kindergarten program later. You know your child best, and there are steps you can take if you are unsure about the best time for your child to start. Consider seeking advice from trusted early childhood professionals by:

- attending kindergarten information sessions or open days at your local services and talking with early childhood teachers or educators
- speaking to your child's current educators. If your child attends a long day care program, their educators will be regularly assessing their learning and development needs
- talking with your child's Maternal and Child Health nurse, family doctor and any other professionals your child sees (for example, speech therapist, physiotherapist or paediatrician).

These conversations will help you make an informed decision about when to start your child at kindergarten. If you feel that your child may benefit from being older when starting school (that is, five years old turning six during their Foundation year), then consider starting your child at Three-Year-Old Kindergarten later.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is for all children

Kindergarten programs are for all children. If your child has a disability or learning difficulty, the educators will talk with you about how the program and environment can support your child.

If you need support to enrol your child in a kindergarten program or to find a program that suits your family, talk to your local services or contact your local council.

Can my child go to a second year of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten?

Children's learning and development does not follow a straight line – each child learns differently throughout their early years. This means deciding when your child should start school is a decision that is best made when your child is closer to school age.

All children in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program will move onto Four-Year-Old Kindergarten the following year. A second year of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will be considered when a child shows delays in key areas of learning and development.



