

Navigating School



Children in care may find going to school challenging. Changes in living arrangements can disrupt their sense of stability, while past trauma and the need to adapt to new social dynamics often make it difficult for the child to form connections.

Educational gaps and inconsistent academic support may further hinder their progress, making the school experience, in many instances, a tricky one to navigate.

When a child growing up in care starts school for the first time, or moves to a new school, there are several important steps you can take to ease the transition. Remember, each child is unique and these steps may need to be adjusted according to their individual needs and circumstances.

10 STEPS TO CONSIDER

1. **Gather essential documents (with the support of the child's social worker, if under Oranga Tamariki)**
 - birth certificate
 - health records
 - immunisation records
 - previous school records
 - any court or legal documents related to the child's placement.
2. **Provide background information**
 - Share relevant information about the child's history, including any trauma, special needs, or behavioural concerns.
 - Highlight any academic achievements that you're aware of, or challenges.

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3. Discuss educational goals

- Meet with school staff to set academic and behavioural goals for the child.
- Share insights into the child's learning style and preferences.

4. Meet with teachers

- Schedule meetings with each of the child's teachers to discuss individual needs and any accommodations required.

5. Develop a support plan

- Work with school staff to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP), if needed.
- Identify any additional support services, such as counselling or tutoring.

6. Establish communication channels

- Exchange contact details with teachers, school staff and the child's case worker.
- Set up regular communication to stay informed about the child's progress.

7. Attend school events

- Participate in parent-teacher conferences, school events and activities to stay connected with the child's school life.

8. Advocate for the child

- Speak up about the child's needs and rights within the school system - keep at it and don't be discouraged.
- Stay involved in decision-making processes about the child, such as educational planning meetings (see point 5).

9. Monitor progress

- Regularly check in with teachers and teacher aides to monitor the child's academic and social progress.
- Address any challenges or concerns promptly.

10. Encourage extracurricular activities

- Support the child's involvement in activities and clubs, as this can contribute to a sense of belonging at school.

ENCOURAGE THE SCHOOL TO USE PACE

When PACE principles (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) are applied at school, they create an inclusive environment which supports the overall well-being and academic success of foster children.

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Playfulness

Children in care often benefit from a playful and non-threatening learning atmosphere. Engaging and interactive teaching methods can help build trust and reduce anxiety, promoting a positive attitude towards school.

Acceptance

Providing unconditional acceptance helps foster children feel valued and understood. When teachers, teacher aides and peers accept the child where they're at, the child is more likely to feel safe and develop a sense of belonging in the school community.

Curiosity

Children in care may face unique challenges, and a curious approach involves seeking to understand their individual needs and experiences. This can lead to tailored educational strategies, recognising and addressing potential learning gaps or emotional hurdles.

Empathy

Empathetic understanding is crucial for foster children dealing with various emotions and uncertainties. Teachers who lead with empathy can offer the necessary emotional support, helping children in care navigate difficulties, build resilience and develop a positive attitude towards learning.

Caring Families Aotearoa can provide training to teachers and teacher aides about trauma and PACE. If the school is interested in our training options, please ask them to contact us on 0800 693 323 | training@caringfamilies.org.nz.

ABOVE ALL

Regular communication and collaboration with school staff and your care agency are the key components of a successful school placement.

For guidance on the rights of the child in your care at school, please refer to our [Education Rights for Tamariki in Care](#) information sheet.

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Caring Families Aotearoa (formerly Fostering Kids New Zealand) supports the thousands of children in care in Aotearoa, by supporting their caregivers.

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