

# Workbook

Disability Standards  
for Education



## Advocating with and for your child: **Primary school**



This workbook is for parents and caregivers of primary students. It will help you and your child to plan and set up reasonable adjustments.

**This resource was co-designed by students with disability and their parents and caregivers.**

## About this resource

This resource was funded by the Australian Government. It was designed by students with disability and their parents and caregivers, with help from Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA).

The Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respects to them and their Elders past, present, and emerging. We pay our respects to the continuing cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Note on language

This resource uses person-first language (e.g. ‘student with disability’). But this approach does not suit everyone, and many people prefer identity-first language (e.g. ‘disabled student’).

It is up to each person how they choose to identify. We encourage you to ask your child what they prefer. We also acknowledge the deep history behind all these terms.

People use ‘**reasonable adjustments**’, ‘adjustments’, or ‘accommodations’ to mean the same thing. We use these phrases interchangeably in this resource. ‘Reasonable adjustments’ is used in the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. In this resource, we refer to these standards as the DSE.

We use the phrase ‘your child’ to mean any child you are responsible for. It is inclusive of parents, guardians, and caregivers.

## Additional Resources

This is one part of a group of resources. You can find these on the [Department of Education website](#) or scanning the QR code below.

This resource is also available in **Easy Read**, **Auslan**, and **several other languages**. You can access these using the link above or by scanning the QR code.



Scan the QR code to access this workbook in languages other than English.

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## Using this workbook

This workbook is for parents and caregivers of primary school children with disability.

This is a resource for you and your child. It will help you both come up with potential accommodations. These are actions or changes that let your child take part in every aspect of school life. Accommodations are also known as **reasonable adjustments**.

It can be hard to know what to ask for or what your child may need to feel supported at school. You and your child can use this resource to help you think and plan. You can also use it to involve your child in planning. Then you can bring your ideas into meetings with the school.

### An example of a reasonable adjustment

Anita's class is working on ball skills in PE. This isn't very fun for Anita, who has low vision and can't always catch the ball. Her aunt asks the PE teacher if the school can use different equipment. She suggests balls that are big and brightly coloured, or that have bells inside them. This change helps Anita to join in and build confidence in this skill. ([Credit](#))

Students with disability have the right to reasonable adjustments. These make it easier for them to take part in education in a very similar way to their peers. The idea of 'very similar' is called 'on the same basis' in the DSE.

For an introduction to your child's rights and the DSE, check out our resource [Explaining the Disability Standards for Education](#). The DSE make your child's rights part of Australian law.

## Getting started

Going through all the activities in this workbook can take a lot of time and energy. You do not need to finish everything at once. We recommend going through it over a few days or sittings.

We also suggest that you read the whole workbook before getting started. Feel free to highlight sections, make notes, or whatever will help you. You may find it useful to go over it with someone else.

There are four parts to this workbook. Some parts should be completed with your child. Other parts are there to help you start a conversation with them.

### The workbook covers:

1. [Part 1\) Setting a goal \(p.4\)](#)  
Knowing what you are trying to achieve with this process.
2. [Part 2\) Having the conversation \(p.10\)](#)  
Introducing this process to your child.
3. [Part 3\) Identifying barriers to participation \(p.27\)](#)  
Working with your child on this.
4. [Part 4\) Suggesting reasonable adjustments \(p.35\)](#)  
Working with your child on this.

You can use this workbook before the first meeting at the start of a school year. Or you can use it during the year when you need to adjust (or readjust) things at school. For example, this may be when something has changed or is not working, or when new goals are needed.

# Part 1) Setting a goal

When you go through this workbook with your child, it is useful to have a goal or vision in mind. This is something that you can go back to while you plan adjustments. Your goal or vision can be general or specific, depending on how you use this workbook.

You can also share your goal or vision with the school. This can help everyone get on the same page about what you and your child hope to achieve at school.

## The steps to setting a goal are:

1. [Step 1\) Ask yourself \(p.5\)](#)
2. [Step 2\) Ask your child \(p.6\)](#)
3. [Step 3\) Support your child to answer \(p.7\)](#)
4. [Step 4\) Come up with a shared goal \(or goals\) \(p.8\)](#)
5. [Step 5\) Record the goal \(or goals\) \(p.9\)](#)

This section will take you through these steps.



## Step 1) Ask yourself

You can ask yourself: *Why do I want to make reasonable adjustments? What am I hoping will happen? What are my child's strengths and interests?*

My goal (or goals) is:



*Example goal: For Lakshman to feel like he belongs and is part of the school community...*

## Step 2) Ask your child

It is important to encourage your children's sense of **agency** as they grow up.

Having agency means that you can shape your own life. It means you can play a role in deciding how and what you will learn. It also means that you can make your own choices. It is not the same thing as 'not needing support'. Instead, it is about being empowered to control your own life and claim your rights.

As part of this growth, it is a good idea for your child to be involved in deciding the 'goal'. You want to know how they experience school, and what success feels or looks like to them.

How you do this will depend on their age and interests. It will also depend on how they prefer to communicate.

### Some examples to discuss with your child:

- What does it feel or look like when you can join in with your classmates at school?
- What makes a day at school 'a good day'?
- What are your dreams for the future?
- What are you good at or enjoy doing?





## **Step 3) Support your child to answer**

**You could:**

- help them to draw a picture
- write a story together
- help them point to words or pictures on a list
- have a conversation.

Or you can come up with something else that works for you and your child.

**Write or draw in the box below:**



## **Step 4) Come up with a shared goal (or goals)**

The next step is to combine your ideas and your child's ideas.

Our combined goal or vision is:



*Example shared goal: To find more ways for Joshua to write and share stories, which he loves doing.*

## **Step 5) Record the goal (or goals)**

The last step is to record the goal (or goals). This doesn't have to be just written down. You may like to use other methods such as drawings, photos or videos, or even a combination.

This is how we will describe our goal or vision:



You may choose to share this with your child's school.

# Part 2) Having the conversation

Schools have to do three main things under the [DSE](#):

- 1. Meet with you.** They should meet with you to discuss whether your child needs any accommodations. They should also include your child in this process. (This is called **consultation** in the DSE).
- 2. Make accommodations.** These are actions or changes that support your child to join in with their peers. They may also be called **reasonable adjustments**.
- 3.** Put steps in place to **prevent** your child from being mistreated.

See our resource [Explaining the Disability Standards for Education](#) for more information on this process.

This section will help you introduce this process to your child. As your child gets older, they may become more and more involved in the process.

This means that they will be:

- joining meetings (or giving you ideas to bring on their behalf)
- pointing out barriers that make it harder for them to join in
- thinking about adjustments that could help them to join in.

It is a good idea to involve your child as early as possible in decisions that will affect their life at school.

This section will cover:

- [Conversation tips \(p.11\)](#)
- [Ways to have a conversation \(p.13\)](#)
- [About consultation \(p.17\)](#)
- [About reasonable adjustments \(p.22\)](#)

## Conversation tips

You will have many conversations with your child during their time at primary school. You might pre-plan some of them. Or they may happen naturally after a long day at school.

You know your child best, and what approaches will work for them. Below are some tips on how to have these conversations with your child.

Tips	Questions and explanations
Pick the right time to start this conversation with your child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your child in the right mood? Are they busy or stressed?</li> <li>• Do you both have enough energy in the tank?</li> <li>• Has something happened at school recently?</li> <li>• Are they reluctant to have this conversation? If so, ask yourself ‘Why?’</li> </ul>
Use familiar language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You know your child best – use the language and communication approach you know they respond to.</li> <li>• If your child has not started school yet, you can use familiar words or examples to help explain new terms like accommodations.</li> </ul>
Observe their behaviour and see what is working or not working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and emotional responses are also a form of communication.</li> <li>• Some changes may not work or may take time.</li> <li>• You can readjust accommodations at any time.</li> </ul>
Encourage your child to ask for what they need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support them in this process with phrases they can use at school.</li> <li>• Be open and receptive to them when they share their views and ideas.</li> </ul>

Tips	Questions and explanations
'Step back' and let your child take charge more as they get older	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to build your child's confidence and ability to self-advocate.</li><li>• This will be a gradual process and will depend on the individual child.</li></ul>
Support your child's sense of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does your child identify? Do they use a diagnosis as a label? Do they use the word 'disabled' or 'child with disability'? This may change over time.</li><li>• Encourage their sense of identity outside of a diagnosis as well. How do they want to describe themselves?</li></ul>
Think about when and how other people can be involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Everyone deserves to feel included and like they belong.</li><li>• Are there parts of the conversation that should involve other students or staff? Are there parts that you or your child do not want shared?</li></ul>

### **An example of picking a time and approach that works**

Niamh's son Will has not been getting a lot of support at school. This makes it difficult for him to finish his schoolwork or play with his classmates. When he comes home from school, he is often frustrated and angry.

Niamh wants to talk with Will before she goes to talk with his teacher. Will needs to have some quiet time after school, so she waits until the weekend. She also explains to him why they are having this conversation.

Will has been having trouble with handwriting. Niamh doesn't ask him to write things down or make a list. Instead, Will tells her about the different things he does on a normal school day. Niamh writes down the moments or activities that are making it harder for him to join in. She reads it back to Will and he agrees with what has been written.

### **An example of involving other people in the conversation**

Noor has just started her first year of primary school. She is the only child with Down Syndrome at her school.

Noor's parents and teacher want her classmates to know that Noor may do things differently at school. To do this, Noor agrees for her mum to come in and talk with Noor and her classmates. This helps the other students to learn how to play with Noor so that she is included.

Next year, Noor and her Mum work on a letter to her classmates. It explains the things she likes about school and the things she is still working on. It has sentences and pictures. Her teacher helps Noor to share the letter with her class and answer their questions. The teacher also asks the other students to share what they enjoy and are working on at school.

## **Ways to have a conversation**

Every child is different and will have a preferred way of communicating. How you communicate may change as your child gets older.

'Having a conversation' can mean a lot of different things. To introduce adjustments to your child, you may want to get creative.

### **For example:**

- Using the communication approach or tool that they prefer.
- Role-playing scenarios and situations.
- Using pictures or stories (or both).

Below are some examples of ways to introduce adjustments.

## Short story

You might like to come up with your own story or create one with your child. This story could be about your child. Or it could be about another child who also needs adjustments.

After telling your story, you can ask your child questions. This way you can check how well they understood it.

Key points in your story might include:

- When something makes it harder to learn or play, we want to do something about it!
- 'Doing something' might mean making a little change to how you do an activity. For example, how you start an activity, or how you explain it.
- Do things in a way that works for you. This is more important than just doing what everyone else is doing. Learning along the way and finishing the task is just as important.
- Everyone is different and needs different things. You're not the only one.
- Sometimes it's better to change what everyone in the class is doing.
- Making a little change at school can help your classmates as well.



## Social story

Your child may use social stories, either at home or at school. These can help your child to understand a task, situation, or concept (e.g. putting an adjustment in place).

Here's a checklist to help you create a social story:

- Identify the behaviour you want to target.
- Write the story from your child's perspective.
- Be specific and keep your sentences short.
- Be positive (i.e. use 'let's try this' and avoid 'don't do this!').

**There are 3 main types of sentences in these stories. Try to include all of them if you can.**

- 1.** Descriptive: Start your story with who is there, what is happening, and where it takes place. (Who / What / Where).
- 2.** Directive: Introduce the target behaviour.
- 3.** Perspective: Describe how other people feel and respond.

You can use photos or drawings as well as words to tell a social story. The best social stories are made with your child and use their own words and pictures. (Credit: [How to Create and Use Social Stories](#). Victorian Department of Education and Training.)

If you're interested in learning more, check out these [tips and templates to make social stories](#).

**An example of a social story for a child with autism**

I like being at school and learning.

But sometimes it can be loud in the classroom.  
When it is loud, sometimes I want to shout  
because the noise makes me sad or angry.  
This can make my classmates sad or  
angry as well.

When I put my headphones on,  
the classroom is not so loud.

When it is loud, I will ask my  
teacher for my headphones.  
When I do this, I am happy, and  
my classmates are  
happy too.

It is good to ask for my  
headphones when I need them.



## About consultation

Schools have to make adjustments that help their students to join in. But first, they must discuss this with you and your child. This is called **consultation** in the DSE.

### You should be part of conversations about:

- Whether your child's disability affects their ability to join in.
- Whether an adjustment needs to be made to help them join in.
- What this adjustment could be.
- Whether this adjustment is reasonable.
- Whether another adjustment needs to be made instead. There may be a few different ones that can be used. Some may be easier to make than others. If a different one is used, it should be equally as helpful for your child.

These conversations should happen before any decisions are made.

Consultation should also happen regularly during your child's time at school, for example:

- before they enrol
- at the start of every school year
- when your child has a new teacher
- when you or the school identify an issue or barrier that needs to be solved.

## Ideas for the conversation

Asking your child about their experiences at school helps you understand what support they need. It also helps your child to know that you value their opinion and will stand up for them.

### You can:

- Take your child through the different steps in the process. Explain who you will be talking to and why.
- Keep it positive (e.g. 'I'm going in to help you, how can we make it the best for you?').
- Think if your child recently met a challenge or gained a new skill. If so, acknowledge it. Explain that this new challenge is the next step in their learning ladder or school journey. You may want to share how you are also learning along the way.
- Relate this back to the challenge or issue in question.
- Ask your child how much they want people to know and how they want it shared.
- Use your child's language and model it back to them as you ask questions.
- Remind your child that they have rights and can share their wants and needs.
- Remind your child that the teachers and school are there to support them. They should not speak over your child.
- Ask your child:
  - What is going to work for you?
  - What is the issue? What do you want done?
  - How do you feel about it? What do you do when this happens?
  - How can we make this better?
  - What would you like me to say to the school?

**Do you have a meeting coming up with the school? Use this space to plan what you want to discuss with your child.**

A large, empty white rounded rectangle with a thin grey border, intended for planning a meeting with the school. It occupies most of the page below the introductory text.

## Involving your child

If your child wants to go to the meeting, support them to do this. When your child is very young, they may not go with you to these meetings. But you can still involve them in this process.

**To help prepare for a meeting, you can think about the following:**

### Things to keep in mind

Behaviour	Watch your child's behaviour and body language (not just their words).
Boundaries	Think about what information you will share with the school. Ask your child what they are comfortable with. (e.g. 'Our doctor said that you have trouble with motor control, we're going to tell the school. This is so we can ask for a computer during writing tasks. Is this okay with you? What else should we share with them?').
Excitement	Think about what gets your child excited about school. What are their strengths and skills?
Mindset	Think about how you talk about your child's needs. This is especially important when your child is part of the conversation.  Discuss your child's strengths and what they <b>can do</b> , not only what they <b>can't do</b> . You might need to remind the school if your child can't do something yet. They may need more support to work on a skill or task. Show their teacher how to bring out their best, and what they <b>should do</b> rather than what they <b>should not do</b> .
Trust	You need to build (or even repair) your child's trust that they will be listened to and taken seriously.
Voice	Use your child's voice / words / ideas whenever possible.

**If your child goes with you to the meeting, you can:**

- Role-play with your child beforehand. Which parts do they want to explain, and what do they want you to explain?
- Make it feel like an opportunity to share or a ‘fun’ interview. (E.g. ‘We want to hear what makes you happy at school...what makes you feel like you are part of a team...’).

What I will do in the meeting...	What my child will do...

## About reasonable adjustments

**Reasonable adjustments** are changes or accommodations. They support students to take part in education in a similar way to their peers. They can be people, materials or changes in how things are done.

The DSE explain what rights students with disability have. Reasonable adjustments are a key part of making these rights a reality. For example, a student with low vision has the right to take part in class activities. A reasonable adjustment might be letting them use a screen reader.

When adjustments are needed, schools **generally** have to make them. Schools do not have to if it would cause unjustifiable hardship. See [Part 4\) Suggesting reasonable adjustments](#) for more information on 'reasonable' and 'unjustifiable hardship.'

How we discuss adjustments can influence how a child feels about them (and how they feel about themselves).





**When discussing adjustments with your child, key messages might include:**

- You have a right to accommodations that help you to join in and succeed.
- Your teacher is there to help you and support you. Part of their job is looking out for you and putting adjustments in place.
- Everyone learns and plays differently.
- Adjustments are a good thing – getting the support you need is a good thing.
- Your adjustments are not special / cheating / extra. They are not unfair to your classmates.
- Lots of students have different accommodations. Some are easier to see than others.
- Adjustments often help your classmates as well.
- There might be some activities that you do not need or want support for. It is ok to let the school know that you do not need help for a particular task or subject.
- Getting help when you do not need it can be unhelpful for your learning. It is okay to say so.

You might decide to bring up accommodations with your child for a few reasons. It could be to explain why a change is being made in class. Or you might want to come up with accommodations with your child.

**In both situations, you might:**

1. Explain what an adjustment is (or what the specific adjustment is).
2. Explain why it is so important. Also, how it might link to other parts of their learning or school experience.
3. Encourage a positive attitude to the adjustment.

## Ideas for the conversation

Idea	Explanation
Explain what the adjustments do and why they are important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ‘I want you to have fun and learn at school. This will help make school a better place for you. This will help you to join in with your friends.’</li></ul>
Compare adjustments to other things in your child’s life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For example, you might live close to school and their friend might not. This friend uses a car or bus to get to school. This is a good thing because it means they can take part in school. Without a bus or car, they would be stuck at home all day.</li></ul>
Normalise adjustments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remind them that everyone learns and plays in different ways. Lots of students in the class will have adjustments as well.</li></ul>
Suggest that they teach their friends and do it together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This can help them feel included and proud of their adjustments.</li><li>• It is hard for a child to feel this if they are made to feel different or left out.</li></ul>

Idea	Explanation
Encourage your child to use their adjustments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If they do not want to, try find out why.</li> <li>• It may be that the adjustment is not helpful, or they may feel singled out. If this is the case, make sure they know you can do something.</li> <li>• An example is when the teacher prints your child's worksheet with large text. The teacher notices that your child feels singled out. They decide to give large text worksheets to every child. Your child feels more included.</li> </ul>
Show the benefits of using adjustments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help your child notice any positive changes.</li> <li>• Help them to share this with their teacher. Teachers like positive feedback too!</li> </ul>
Remind your child that their adjustments may help other students as well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can help them to feel proud of their work and the adjustments. E.g. when they explain them to their classmates.</li> <li>• An example is when, the teacher prints every worksheet with large text. This is helpful to your child with intellectual disability. It also helps their classmate who has a learning disability.</li> </ul>
Encourage them to practice and try	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It might take a few tries to find an adjustment that works.</li> </ul>
Be strengths-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on what they <b>can do</b>, not what they <b>can't do</b> yet.</li> </ul>

**Use this space to plan what you want to discuss with your child.**

I want to discuss...



...with my child. I will do this by...



# Part 3) Identifying barriers to participation

What is a **barrier to participation**? It is a part of an activity or the environment that makes it harder for your child to join in. A barrier is not something your child does or does not do.

## An example of a barrier participation

Jian's class has a music lesson each week that he loves. The music classroom has four steps leading to the door. Jian finds these steps hard to climb. The music teacher waits inside the classroom for all the students.

Not having adult support to access the classroom is a **barrier**. It is a **barrier** to Jian accessing the music curriculum. This **barrier** also puts Jian at risk. He is anxious once he gets inside and finds it hard to settle in to one of his favourite classes. Jian's mother raises these concerns with the classroom teacher and the music teacher. The two teachers agree to help Jian in and out of the classroom.

His teachers raise the issue with the principal. The steps also make it hard for students to lift instruments in and out of the room. A ramp is now being planned. This will help all students.

Figuring out what the barriers are is the first step. After this, you and the school can come up with adjustments to remove them. Your school may be able to suggest barriers that they notice as well.

## The steps in this section are:

1. [Step 1\) Reflect on school life \(p.28\)](#)
2. [Step 2\) Identify barriers \(p.30\)](#)
3. [Step 3\) Organise your information \(p.34\)](#)

You might decide to complete this section ("[Part 3\) Identifying barriers to participation](#)") and the next section ("[Part 4\) Suggesting reasonable adjustments](#)") of this workbook before a

meeting with the school. You can bring your ideas into the meeting and work on them together.

## Step 1) Reflect on school life

When we start thinking about adjustments, we often go to handwriting or taking tests. But there is more to school than this.

Recess, excursions, and other school events are all part of school life. These parts can also be known as **domains**. They are all covered by the [DSE](#). Your child has the right to take part in every domain of school life.

This table helps you explore different domains and examples of barriers under each.

Domains	Sub-domains	Example barriers
Physical environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Floor or desk activities</li> <li>Room transitions (moving from room to room)</li> <li>Mealtimes</li> <li>Playground</li> <li>Bathrooms</li> <li>Transport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheelchair user is not included in floor activities</li> <li>Toilet stalls are too narrow</li> <li>Desks or chairs are too high</li> <li>Classroom is only accessible by stairs</li> <li>Classroom is hot during summer, and it is not safe for the child to overheat</li> </ul>
Social-emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group work (indoor and outdoor)</li> <li>Sensory or social stimulation</li> <li>Social activities (classroom or recess)</li> <li>Transitions (e.g. from one class to the next)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child is stressed when they are asked to suddenly change tasks</li> <li>Fabric of school uniform is unpleasant and distressing to the child</li> <li>Child does not know how to join in during recess activities</li> <li>Child is not given a model of how to successfully interact with others</li> </ul>

Domains	Sub-domains	Example barriers
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task- or skill-based</li> <li>• Subject-based</li> <li>• Materials</li> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Homework</li> <li>• Mental or physical exertion</li> <li>• Attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child cannot hold writing utensils</li> <li>• Text or colour of printed materials are not legible to the child</li> <li>• Child is given back-to-back reading tasks without a break</li> <li>• Instructions are given all at once</li> <li>• Handwriting is the only option to complete tasks</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who (e.g. student to teacher, teacher to student, student to another student)?</li> <li>• How (e.g. text-based, speech, auditory, visual, behavioural, augmentative and alternative communication or AAC)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions are only given verbally to the class</li> <li>• No option for the child to communicate non-verbally</li> <li>• Child with hearing loss is sitting in the back row next to rowdy peers</li> <li>• No time is given for the child to process the question before giving an answer</li> </ul>
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assemblies</li> <li>• Sport events</li> <li>• School swimming</li> <li>• Excursions</li> <li>• Camps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus to the excursion is not wheelchair accessible</li> <li>• Child has to attend a sports day but is not allowed to compete</li> <li>• Child is left out of activities at camp because there are no low-energy options</li> </ul>

**Note:** The table above may not cover every part of your child’s school life or education. You may also think of other domains or sub-domains that are not included.

You can use this table to guide your thinking in Step 2 below.

## Step 2) Identify barriers

Try to think of ideas under each of the five domains of school life: *Physical environment, Social-emotional, Curriculum, Communication, and Events.*

These may not all be relevant to your child's situation. But it is worth going through them all. You may uncover a barrier that you did not know existed.

You can record your ideas in the table in [Step 3\) Organise your information.](#)

### Tips for identifying barriers

#### General

##### Ask your child:

- 'What's working at school? What's not working?'
- 'What do you need?'
- 'What is going to work for you?'
- 'Is there something else happening here for you?'
- Ask them how their day went – have a conversation.
- Ask them to describe a typical day at school.

##### Think about:

- What does your child want?
- What is the problem? How can it be addressed?
- What will this look like for your child in reality?
- How will your child carry this out? How do you make sure this happens?
- What are your child's behaviours linked to?





## Specific

### Transitions or unfamiliar situations

- Take your child to the new location and watch their behaviour. This response is a form of communication.
- Do a 'walk-through' or visit a new place beforehand. Ask your child about their opinions.
- Use technology to try something beforehand or do a virtual tour.
- Bring in previous experiences from home or another year level. Share these with the new teacher.
- Prepare your child for the unfamiliar. Explain what the new situation will be like and ask them what they will need.
- Meet the new teacher and take photos of the classroom setup. Then take your child through this information.
- Ask an occupational therapist to visit the location or look at photos with you. Or you may want help from another type of professional.

### Social

- Go through scenarios with your child. E.g. how to lose graciously after a game.
- Help your child to practise these social situations.
- Identify any barriers during these practises.

### Home

- Your child and your family should be supported after school as well. Your child will have homework. What happens at school will also affect them at home.
- Ask yourself:
  - How much energy / concentration / emotional energy does my child have after school?
  - Do they have enough left in the tank for after-school life?
  - If they do not, what needs to change at school or after school?
  - What adjustments are needed for homework to be done?

### **An example on how to identify barriers**

Hani is about to start Year 3. The Year 3 classrooms are in a different building that she hasn't seen before.

Hani's brother shows her the Year 3 classrooms so that she can get familiar with them. Hani tells him that the bathrooms feel very far away. She isn't sure she will remember where they are.

Hani's brother talks to the teacher. She puts arrows on the floor from Hani's classroom to the nearest toilet. Hani can follow the arrows when she needs to use the bathroom. Other students also find them helpful.

## **Ways to involve your child**

It is important to involve your child in this process. Your child is the expert in their own life and can help you to understand the challenges they face at school.

You can use your ideas from [Part 2\) Having the conversation](#) here.

### **To involve your child:**

- Have a conversation and ask specific and direct questions.
- Have your child give you an example of an experience or issue. Or tell you a story or summarise what they do every day at school.
- Take your child to the location, look at photos together, or role-play.
- Have your child draw a picture of themselves in different parts of school life. Then ask them to explain it to you:
  - A picture of you in class
  - A picture of you with your classmates
  - A picture of you in the playground
  - A picture of you doing your schoolwork.
- Have your child point to words or pictures that match what they feel or think.

**Write or draw ideas about barriers in the box below:**



## Step 3) Organise your information

As you think, you can add information to the table below. This can then be used when you come up with adjustments in the next section.

You can also bring this table into meetings with the school. They may have ideas and suggestions from working with your child every day

Domain	Barrier	Notes
Physical environment		
Social-emotional		
Curriculum		
Communication		
Events		

## Part 4) Suggesting reasonable adjustments

As your child goes through school, their needs will change. Their adjustments at the start of school probably won't be the same as when they leave.

You and your child can suggest tweaks to their adjustments over time. You may also need to suggest a change to an adjustment soon after it is made. Sometimes it takes a few tries to find a solution that works for everyone.

This means you will need to work with their school and teachers on a regular basis.

### What is a 'reasonable' adjustment?

Judging what is 'reasonable' will be different for every case. But your school should consider:

- Your child's disability.
- Your views and your child's views.
- How the adjustment will affect your child, including:
  - Their ability to achieve learning goals.
  - Their ability to take part in school.
  - Their independence.
- How the adjustment will affect the school, staff, and other students.
- Costs and benefits of making the adjustment.
- The academic requirements of the course or program.

It is very common to not know what to ask for. Often the school will have ideas that have worked for other students. Or you can ask a professional to help you. For example, a support worker or occupational therapist may have ideas.

It is not your job to come up with all the answers. Your school should work with you and your child to find solutions.

You can use this section to come up with ideas to take to your meetings with the school.

### **This section covers:**

1. [1\) Seeking out information \(p.36\)](#)
2. [2\) Working with your child \(p.41\)](#)
3. [3\) Putting it together \(p.43\)](#)
4. [4\) Next steps \(p.43\)](#)

## **1) Seeking out information**

Think back to your ideas from [Part 3\) Identifying barriers to participation](#). These barriers need to be removed.

You can work with the school to do this by coming up with adjustments. These should be about your child taking part in education. Your child has the right to reasonable adjustments to take part in a very similar way to their peers.

Go back to your vision from [Part 1\) Setting a goal](#). You want your adjustments to line up with this goal (or goals).

### Things to keep in mind

Student agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take on board what your child’s likes and dislikes in their adjustments.</li> </ul>
Be led by your child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As they move through school, they may not want an adjustment.</li> </ul>
Educate their teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes you may need to teach the teacher about an adjustment. This can lead to them being more comfortable and willing to use it.</li> </ul>
Support use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you support your child once these adjustments are in place?</li> <li>• For example, give your child a copy of their education plan. They can carry this around at school. Role-play how they could give it to new teachers, aides, and substitutes when needed.</li> </ul>
Trial and error	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may need to make changes to an adjustment. School should be a safe place for your child to try things out and see if they work.</li> <li>• You can help your child to find chances to test out what works (e.g. role-playing at home). It can help to do this even before the adjustment is made ‘official’ by the school.</li> </ul>
Think long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You want to build your child’s ability to self-manage and self-advocate as they get older.</li> </ul>

Schools do not have to make an adjustment if it creates too much of a burden for them. This is called **unjustifiable hardship**. An example might be that the adjustment is too expensive. More information is in the resource, [Explaining the Disability Standards for Education](#).

## Use what is out there

There are a lot of places where you can look for ideas. These ideas should use good evidence and help your child to join in.

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### School

- Go over paperwork from the school. (Or another institution, e.g. preschool). There may be a record of changes made to support your child.
- Ask the school. Often, they will have ideas from their work with other students.
- In these conversations, you want everyone to:
  - be curious and collaborate
  - avoid getting defensive or being unwilling to act.
- Building relationships can take time. Patience and good communication strategies are key. It also depends on the culture of the school (e.g. how willing they are to work with families and providers).

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### Professionals

- You may have a doctor, specialist or therapist who works with your child. You can ask them for ideas and advice. They can also provide credible documents to the school to back you up.
  - Ask for reports that you can give to teachers and schools. These should be easy to read and have practical suggestions.
  - Ask them: 'What does individual success look like? What can the school do to support this?'
  - Think of ideas used by professionals that could work in school as well. What works in therapy? What works at home?
-



Advocacy or disability organisations

- Connect with advocacy organisations. They may run events or forums where you can ask questions. Or you could meet people with similar experiences.
- Find groups and organisations. These can be disability-specific or not. They often have free resources that you can use.
- Find websites that promote the voice of children and students. They should use good evidence and value inclusion.

Other parents and caregivers (or students)

- Reach out to your local or school community. You can find like-minded families. They may have experiences that they can share.
- Develop a network of people to go through research with (e.g. family and friends). Get the thoughts of people who care about your child.

Social media

- Find social media groups for people like you.
- You can learn from others about their adjustments. They may also have tips on how to advocate in a way that the school will respond to.
- Make sure that they promote evidence-based ideas. There is a lot of misinformation in this space.
- Also make sure their values align with yours (e.g. about valuing your child's strengths and interests).

Here is space for you to take notes on your research:

Barrier	Ideas for adjustments

## 2) Working with your child

Your child will be the one affected by these decisions. You want to include their voice and perspective. You can use your ideas from [Part 2\) Having the conversation](#) here.

To work with your child:

- Pick the right time / day / week.
- Use language that is easy and familiar.
- Involve them and ask direct, specific questions.
- Have a conversation where you come up with ideas and solutions. Ask them ‘Wouldn’t it be great if...?’
- Reflect on past experiences with them. This can help them to recognise when they need to reach out for help.
- Try things out. Then:
  - Ask them ‘What’s working? What’s not working?’
  - Role-play situations that they may be in.
  - Their needs or opinions may change based on the situation at hand.
  - If they are very young, you may need to watch their triggers and behaviours.
- Pay attention to your child’s behaviour. What is it telling you about what they need?
- Use additional methods (e.g. make a social story).
- Help them feel empowered. You can do this from a young age.

This conversation will depend on your child and how willing they are to have it.

**Write or draw in the box below:**



### 3) Putting it together

Use the table below to record your ideas in the ‘Adjustments’ column.

Bring it with you into meetings with the school and:

- in the ‘Use’ column, circle or mark ‘Y’ (for yes) if these ideas are put in place and circle or mark ‘N’ (for no) if they are not
- in the ‘Notes’ column, record the details of these decisions.

Domains	Adjustments	Use	Notes
Physical environment		Y / N	
Social-emotional		Y / N	
Curriculum		Y / N	
Communication		Y / N	
Events		Y / N	

## 4) Next steps

After finishing each part of this resource, you should have something that you can use. This could be:

- **Part 1)** A goal or vision of what you and your child are aiming for with their education.
- **Part 2)** A plan for how to discuss the process with your child.
- **Part 3)** A list of potential barriers.
- **Part 4)** A list of suggested adjustments.

You can bring these resources into meetings with the school. Use them to share what you know about your child's needs and strengths.



## Get ready for the meeting

The next step is to organise this meeting. This may be an ad-hoc meeting with the teacher. Or it could be a meeting with the school to make an education plan for your child.

Use the table below to start planning:

Before your meeting, think about:	Notes
Who am I meeting with?	
What is the meeting about?	
What do I want to get out of the meeting?	

<b>Before your meeting, think about:</b>	<b>Notes</b>
What do I need to bring to this meeting?	
What paperwork or medical evidence do I need?	
How can I involve my child in this meeting?	

**In the meeting, the school may:**

- Have ideas of their own from working with your child or other students with similar needs.
- Need to get more information. This could be from a health professional or similar.
- Try to identify another adjustment that is easier to make. This new adjustment should be just as helpful.

Any adjustments that you agree on should be made within a reasonable period. How long this takes will depend on a few things. (For example, whether the school needs to apply for funding or wait for your child to be assessed.)



## Web links


If you want to print this resource, the main web links are included below:


 *Disability Standards for Education 2005:*  
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767>

 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD):  
<https://www.nccd.edu.au/disability-standards-education>

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 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC):  
<https://humanrights.gov.au/>

 How to create and use social stories (Victoria Department of Education and Training): <https://education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/howtosocialstories.docm>

 Social Stories (NSW Department of Education):  
<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/learning-from-home/teaching-at-home/early-learning-resources/a-strong-start-to-school/social-stories>







<https://www.dese.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005>