

PREPARING FOR KINDER WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS ALBINISM.

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Overall

- Have **high expectations**
- Work toward **independence in learning** for the child (don't do the work for them).
- Do not allow them to do less because of their vision – have an expectation that they will do the same things as their peers (although they may take more time).

Parents – prepare your child for kinder

- You may not fully achieve all these, but do work towards them with positive encouragement and create an expectation that they will eventually be achieved.
- Encourage them to be inquisitive and ask questions, create and explore.
- Ensure their basic safety, but let them be free to try things and make mistakes.
- Encourage them to do things for themselves when possible (do not do things for them). Give them time to complete things, even if they may be slow to start with.
- Model and encourage reading and story telling (read to them too, or use audio books).
- Encourage them to have short breaks from concentrated work to rest their eyes.
- Use fun games, songs or puzzles to introduce them to letters and numbers so that they will recognise them easily at kinder.
- Encourage them to organise their belongings, pack up and put away toys, plan their routines or activities, so that they know where things are and what they are doing.
- Have them apply their own sunscreen (even if you have to top up) and routinely wear hat and sunglasses outside without reminding them.
- Endeavour to have them use a toilet and wash hands independently.
- Arrange regular play dates to develop social skills (if you don't use childcare).
- Connect with other parents of children with low vision or albinism, to share information and give each other support.
- Be enthusiastic and positive in all conversations about kinder!

Skills to work on

- Connect with organisations that may be a source of advice and practical assistance (eg Vision Australia [VA], Guide Dogs [GD] etc) for all the skills mentioned.
- Basic **movement skills** – other children learn these by watching others (to climb, jump, skip, hop, throw, catch, hit) but yours may need explicit teaching.
- **Orientation and Mobility (O&M)** – teach them the best way to move around in unfamiliar places and how they can do things safely. This may include long cane use. Teach small children how to “map” a new room, use their hearing and support a book on a stand. How to safely travel around the neighbourhood in all conditions.
- **Social skills** need to be taught as they miss out on facial expressions and a lot of other cues around them. How to listen for direction and expression in the voice, choice of words, to look at someone if they are speaking to you. Personal space and how to join a group conversation. How to ask others to explain what is going on or what the conversation is about if they are unsure.
- **Self advocacy** – how to explain to others what they see, and how others can assist them to know what is going on - in a positive way. To have the confidence to say “I cannot see that properly”. How to ask for help when it is needed and at the same time let others know how they cope and what they **can do**.

- Teach them to use a dome magnifier on a book. If they have an iPad, it may help if they can use the camera and enlargement function. If they can access these on their own, they will be more independent. iPads can also be used for listening stories.
- Use a slope board for books and drawing to reduce the amount they lean over to see – this will help prevent postural problems and reduce the risk of head aches and neck pain.

Orientation at the Kinder (for them and your child)

- Seek the support of a provider to work with the kinder staff to explain your child's vision and how this will affect functional vision, activity and learning. (eg early childhood education consultant from VA or GD etc)
- Have an orientation and mobility (O&M) expert visit the Kinder to advise on any modifications which may be necessary to ensure safety. This may include marking steps, changes in surface or objects with bright contrasting paint. Most are happy to do this as it is a requirement that all educational organisations provide safety and equal access.
- Have an orientation day (or two) when the childcare consultant and the O&M Instructor can work with the child and staff.
- If there is a charge for this you can use the Better Start funding or make sure it is included in the NDIS plan.
- Prepare a letter of introduction from your child (discuss it with them) – this can be shared with kinder staff and also other parents.

Once they start kinder

Having high expectations and building a positive relationship with teachers and the kinder, is one of the most important things you as a parent can do, to ensure the best educational outcomes for your child. When they begin kinder, it is likely to be a steep learning curve for both you and the teacher, but with good communication and preparation it will ensure a smooth transition for your son or daughter (they generally handle this much better than the parents).

Allow for a settling in time when they get to know your child

It may take the teacher time to learn about your child and to work out the best way to meet their needs and work with them. Even if they have had a VI child before, every child is different and it may take entirely different techniques and support structure to meet your child's needs. Orientation sessions beforehand are important, but sometimes things beyond the teacher's control can disrupt plans made (such as changes to staffing, funding or delays in equipment supply).

How you can help

- Have patience – sometimes the teacher will require gentle, continual reminding – your child is only one of 20 or more, some of whom have other special needs.
- Work with the child and teachers to understand how you can best support the child at home with their learning (opportunity to explore, practice and apply skills learned), making it fun for the child and not judgmental.
- If you are offered a class support person, check that they are helping from a distance (to have equal access), not doing things for them or sitting with them – this does not create independence and stifles social contact with their peers.
- You should be given the opportunity to discuss the child's progress and discuss a new Individual Learning Plan at least once a term. Be prepared to have an input into this.

Most of all don't worry – your child will most likely cope well and have a great time!