



HeartKids

Starting School: A guide for parents

Information to help parents of children with heart conditions prepare for starting school.

Why is communication important?

Starting and maintaining open lines of communication with your child's school is one of the best things you can do for your child's health and safety at school.

Starting school is a major milestone in any child's life. When your child has a heart condition, starting school comes with a set of unique challenges. Collaborating with and developing a good relationship with the school and teacher will deliver the best educational and social outcomes for your child.

What information will they need?

You are your child's advocate. Providing the school with as much information as possible helps them to create a suitable health care plan for your child.

Each school will have their own templates for health care plans. Ask the school about their template and what information they will need.

Important things to tell the school about your child could include:

- Any specific or notable behaviours
- What they can do physically, and any physical limits
- Any academic issues or areas for extra support
- Their usual appearance and what signals a problem (e.g. turning blue or cyanosis)
- Guidelines for daily care, including information about any medications
- Instructions for emergency care

You may also want to provide the opportunity for the school to meet with your child's cardiac nurse or other health professional to discuss their condition and care plan in more detail.



How do I maintain a good relationship with the school?

You can promote a good relationship by:

- **Keeping the school updated.** Tell them about any changes to your child's condition, medications, attitudes or behaviour at home.
- **Showing interest.** Ask the teacher for updates about your child's performance in class.
- **Telling peers.** Talking to your child's peers and their families can help to create an inclusive and supportive school environment for your child.
- **Notifying them of any treatments.** Give the school as much notice as possible if your child is requiring surgeries or procedures that may cause an absence from school.
- **Volunteering.** Getting involved in the classroom or school environment where appropriate is a good way to support your child and the school.
- **Meeting the teachers.** Get to know all the staff members and teachers involved with your child's education.



As a parent, it is also important to take time to understand the relationship and experience from the school's point of view.

Acknowledge and be understanding:

- Teachers have more than one child in their classroom
- A teacher's level of knowledge regarding your child's daily needs will be different to yours
- Your teacher needs time to get to know your child's intricacies and recognise the signs and symptoms of distress

What about safety on school excursions?

The school should prepare a risk assessment for each excursion. This includes an emergency plan. If you're unsure, ask the school about their plans.

You can enable your child to have a safe and enjoyable excursion experience by:

- Providing medications and ensuring these are stored safely
- Supplying information about the nearest hospital
- Providing an aide, carer or peer support if needed, or volunteering for the excursion if your child is happy with this arrangement (this may change as they get older)
- Researching the venue to ensure it's easily accessible and manageable for your child.



Things for teachers and educators to consider

Childhood heart disease is a general term for a range of conditions that affect the way the heart works. These conditions can be congenital (present at birth), or acquired during childhood.

Schools have a responsibility to provide a supportive environment for all students with a medical condition, including those with heart conditions.

Each condition and each child is unique. Support needs will differ from one child to the next. When supporting a child with a heart condition, schools may find it useful to think about these points:

- Acknowledging the person's condition is essential, but recognising and focusing on their ability as a student is equally important
- It is important to ensure all teachers are notified and aware of the student's care plan
- Make sure to listen to the student when they say they are not feeling well or need to rest
- Listen to parents' concerns as they know their child best
- Social inclusion is important for all children and interaction and playtime with peers should be encouraged
- Children with a heart condition may require more support or planning to ensure they are able to participate in some school activities
- Sometimes there are options to be inclusive by providing alternative or non-physical opportunities if the class activity is too strenuous
- It is important to remember to gain consent from parents before sharing their child's medical information.

Where to find more information and support

Royal Children's Hospital

This fact sheet has more information about school readiness.

 [School Readiness Fact Sheet](#)


Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions

Detailed information on things to be aware of when your child is starting school.

 secondscount.org

Starting a Conversation: School Children with CHD

This book has practical suggestions for how to develop supportive school relationships.

 [Learn more about this book](#)

Kids Health

Fact sheet for schools and teachers.

 [CHD and Schools Fact Sheet](#)

Ronald McDonald House

This Learning Program assists school-aged children with serious illnesses and injuries to catch up on missed education.

 [Learn more about the RMHC Program](#)

HeartKids

 heartkids.org.au

Learn more about CHD and the support HeartKids can offer you.

 1800 432 785

Call the HeartKids Helpline for support, advice and guidance.

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