10. Supporting families who have difficulties with literacy

Families who have difficulties with literacy speak a language that has a written form, but have not developed the same level of skills as others to read or write it. This does not imply that families have no skills in this area, rather that they will require additional support to help them to participate in transition processes and programs.

Families who have difficulties with literacy often have little or no experience with formal learning environments and may therefore have little knowledge of transition processes and programs, or school systems and procedures. Some of these families may also have had difficult, traumatising life experiences.

Supporting families who have difficulties with literacy

This section is relevant for those families from English speaking backgrounds who have difficulties with the written aspects of literacy. For families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, see Section 6: Supporting diversity.

Some non-literate people or people with low literacy skills learn to keep it a secret, and it may not be obvious to early childhood services and schools that a family is having problems. Non-literate people will often have developed their own ways to engage with printed materials and complete written tasks.

There are a number of ways to improving communication with families who have difficulties with literacy, and many of these strategies can be useful to engage all families. Suggestions include:

- conveying messages as a sequences of illustrations or pictures that clearly depict the activities involved without the use of words
- holding family information nights about transition, where information is provided verbally to all families
• incorporating visual cues in information provided to families about transition-to-
school processes and programs
• talking with families about transition processes, and seeking their advice on how
they would like to be involved
• make use of multimedia tools, to provide information about transition processes,
and programs
• providing information about opportunities for families to improve their literacy
skills, such as the Council for Adult Education's courses www.cae.edu.au.

Families who have difficulties with literacy or families with low literacy skills may
have particular difficulties engaging with and completing the Transition Learning and
Development Statement. Early childhood services and schools can play a critical role in
helping families understand why it is important to contribute to the Statement for their
child.

By providing opportunities for all families to meet in person to discuss and complete the
Transition Learning and Development Statement together, families who have difficulties
with literacy can be encouraged to participate without having to identify themselves as
non-literate.

It is also important to acknowledge that some families who have difficulties with literacy
may prefer to have a friend or relative complete the Statement for them.

Working with families who have literacy issues can be challenging, and may require
educators to provide alternative models of support (should this be appropriate). In
considering the transition planning process for these children, early childhood educators
and Prep teachers should allow additional time to meet and speak with these families.