



Starting childcare can be different to starting kindergarten or school. Depending on the age of your child, they may not be able to speak for themselves just yet. This can add layers of complexity when it comes to advocating for your child while they are adapting to a new environment. After speaking to Aussie Hands families and teachers, we have compiled our favourite pieces of advice



Research the childcare centre

Before enrolling your child into a service, it can be helpful to do some background research on different services and give the ones that interest you a visit. This will give you an opportunity to meet the educators, see the facilities, and get a feel for the environment.

Orientation visits are also encouraged to gain extra insight into how you and your child feel at the centre.

Most services will adapt to your child's needs, but feeling good about the service will ease the transition!



Establish Your Expectations

Before meeting with anyone from the childcare centre, it's good to think about how you would prefer the staff to handle particular situations.

Some good questions to think about are:

- What language do you want to be used to describe your child's hand difference?
- How do you want the educators to respond when other children ask about your child's hand difference?
- How do you want the educators to encourage exploration with their hand difference? When do you want them to step in and help?





Send Out an Email or Letter

You may find it helpful to write an email or letter explaining your child's hand difference. This is a great opportunity to get ahead of curious questions and establish the language you would like to be used. Aussie Hands member, Louise-Kate, wrote an email to be sent to parents. You may also wish to write an email or letter to be shared with all staff members at the centre.

Here is Louise-Kate's example:

'Emily will be starting at the centre. Emily has a hand difference which your children or yourselves may have not encountered before so to assist with any questions from the children we've written a little bit about her story.

Emily was born with a condition called acrosyndactyly where her fingers were fused together caused by what is known as amniotic bands syndrome. It is a chance event when part of the baby moves outside the inner pregnancy sack, it's not hereditary and not preventable. The incidence is 1 in 1200 births. Every case is different- usually impacting multiple body parts and causing loss of limbs. Emily's case is very mild and is being gradually improved by past and future surgeries so your children may see her in cast or bandage again in the next few months.

If your children notice:

As there's very little Emily can't do with her hand your child may not notice for a while if at all. Up until this point, we haven't had any cruel comments from children. We do find children notice her hand more than adults but are just naturally curious and non-judgemental.

The main thing we get asked by children is 'Why does she have small fingers?'. We normally explain: 'All people are born different with curly hair, blue or brown eyes, and this is another difference just one you don't see every day. Emily's hand can do pretty much anything yours can, it just looks different and that's ok. In fact, Emily's hand looks like Nemo's lucky fin and having a smaller fin didn't stop him!'

We haven't had many questions from pre-schoolers or below beyond this but are of course happy to answer them.'



Suggest Activities

Think of some fun ways for the kids to learn about your child's hand difference in an inclusive and safe manner. Limb Difference Awareness Week is a perfect time to think of activities for the centre, although activities can be useful at any time in the year.

There are some great storybooks you may suggest being circulated through the childcare centre.

A 'Sea of Diversity' themed activity is where everybody can talk about what makes each child different. This can then be linked back to Nemo and his lucky fin. Craft ideas include making fish out of paper plates or handprints and putting everybody's fish or sea creature against a blue backdrop.

Another activity is Rock a Sock. This is where kids take a sock to wear on their dominant hand to experience having a hand difference for a day.

For information on how to talk about your child's hand difference in more general settings, check out our resource [Telling Others](#).



Build a Relationship With Centre Leaders

Keep communication open between you and the staff at the childcare centre, and don't be afraid to approach them with any concerns.

It can be helpful to build a relationship with your child's room leader. This is the staff member that will have the most to do with your child and their activities every day.

It is also good to meet with the centre director. They can ensure that messages are passed on to all staff and that everybody is aware of your child's needs.

'Don't be afraid to ask questions, whether it be at long daycare, kindergarten or school. Don't ever feel like you can't ask a question. If you are not satisfied with the response that you get, ask another question.'

– Kindergarten Teacher, Kylie Mack



Relax!

Your child is going to be just fine. Kids are adaptable. The most important thing to children is that their friends can play with them which, of course, your child can do easily!