**3 and 4-year-old Kindergarten – Similarities and Differences**

Age generally dictates when a child commences 3 and 4-year-old Kindergarten, but there may be other considerations about when to send your child to either 3 or 4-year-old Kinder. There are some similarities between our 3 and 4-year-old Kinder programs, due to the fact we have an overarching Centre Philosophy, provide play-based learning and are guided by National and State curriculums, but due to the differences in development between 3 and 4-year-old children, there are some differences in our programs.

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|  | **3-year-old Kindergarten** | **4-year-old Kindergarten** |
| Group sizes | 22 children with 2 staff members. Less children means a quieter atmosphere, less sharing of toys required, less wait times during routines such as handwashing, less children on the mat | 28 children with 3 staff members. The room is much busier, more sharing of equipment is required, longer wait times |
| Hours | 5 hours of Kinder | 15 hours of Kinder |
| Cognitive development | The children enjoy long periods of time to explore the activities available.  They may stick to their favourite types of activities.  There is a variety of puzzles and equipment available that are easier for the children to manipulate. As these tasks are mastered more complex activities are offered to challenge and extend. | The children are more active around the room, moving more regularly between the activities and areas.  More planned and directed play experiences are created to promote learning and skill development e.g. children are encouraged to put thought into activities and a teacher may ask them “what are you building?”  Puzzles and equipment may pose more of a challenge. |
| Social skills | The children are learning how to interact with peers, share equipment and play spaces.  Communication is increasingly becoming easier to understand. | Children are encouraged to approach a peer and ask for a turn next with equipment or ask to join in play, and work through social problems with assistance.  Communication skills are becoming more complex such as an increase in vocabulary. |
| Emotional Skills | The children are beginning to learn about feelings and emotions. They require assistance to regulate these as well as actions and behaviours. | The children are taught to recognise and describe their own feelings and self-regulate emotions, actions and behaviours. |
| Incursions/  Excursions/  Events | The group participates in incursions where the group stay on site. | Inclusions such as walks to the park, visits to schools and excursions that require increased road sense and ability to follow rules and boundaries are included in the program. |
| Play styles | Predominantly solitary (on their own) and parallel play (next to a peer) is expected, moving towards partner (playing WITH the other person) and small group play as the year progresses. | Partner and small group play are more prominent, moving towards larger group play as the year progresses. During this type of play the children need to be able to take on board other children’s ideas and incorporate these into their play. The play event is constantly changing as a result of the increased number of children and therefore ideas/opinions involved. |
| Program | Expectations of children are in line with age and stage of development, including shorter mat times, less structured activities, less instructions and increased assistance with self-help skills and routines. | There are increased opportunities to participate as a whole group, to stand up and talk in front of the group, to be more independent with belongings and self-help skills, participate in longer mat times and increased expectations of listening to and paying attention to teachers.  There are more structured activities incorporated, and with this, increased numbers of instructions the children are expected to follow e.g. 3 to 4 step instructions. |
| Motor skills | The children are introduced to writing and art and craft implements and equipment requiring gross motor skills such as ‘A’ frames, bikes and balls. | The children have increased fine motor muscle control, leading to an increased ability to use implements such as scissors and pencils.  Increased gross motor muscle development leads to increased gross motor skills and abilities such as jumping, hopping, bouncing balls. |

As we move through the year in each of the Kinder groups, we are working on assisting each child in preparing for their next transition. Our aim is always to ensure the children are well placed to be successful in this transition.

What are we getting the children ready for?

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| 3-year-old Kindergarten | 4-year-old Kindergarten |
| Transition to 4-year-old Kinder including:   * Experiencing less separation anxiety, improved ability to be away from parents and settled in the Kinder environment * Improved ability to play with peers rather than alongside them * Able to cope with a busier environment, more changes and more people * The ability to approach a teacher for assistance * Helping with packing up * Following the ‘group plan’ and routines * Familiarity with the Kinder environment to promote a sense of belonging and improved settling into the 4-year-old group * Being able to listen to the teachers | Transition to school including:   * Faster paced environment * Less rest/down time * Busier/crowded spaces * Increased ability to adapt to change e.g. change in teachers/classrooms * Bigger playground * Increased Resilience * Increased use of emotional skills such as the ability to self-regulate emotions, actions and behaviours * Increased use of social skills such as an interest in, awareness of and tolerance of others * The ability to concentrate for longer periods of time * Being able to follow through on several-step instructions * Increased independence and self-help skills * Decreased adult support * The ability to work in larger groups * Being able to follow routines such as lining up and packing up * The ability to communicate their ideas, interests and needs |

An important question to ask yourself if you are still in doubt about which program is best suited for your child is, have they been reaching their general milestones of development? Your Maternal and Child Health Nurse can assist you with this information.