

Play and learning pack

Arrivals

An intentional teaching resource

September 2026

This Play and Learning Pack on arrivals was designed to help early childhood teachers, educators and leaders understand intentional teaching and how to strengthen it in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services.

About the early childhood intentional teaching model and supporting resources

These Play and Learning Packs were used in the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s [2025 research](#) to develop and test an [intentional teaching model and supporting resources](#). For this research, we used an iterative design-based methodology, working alongside educators from 13 diverse ECEC services. The resources provided information on foundational knowledge, beliefs and practices that support play-based learning with intentionality.

This series of resources supports more effective intentional teaching. These Play and Learning Packs were designed to help early childhood teachers, educators and leaders understand:

- what intentional teaching is
- what it looks like in practice
- how to strengthen it in their settings.

The Play and Learning Packs complement an intentional teaching model AERO developed with ECEC services. The model, the practice resource and the Play and Learning Packs, emerged directly from that research collaboration.

The intentional teaching model and supporting resources bring evidence-based approaches for effective intentional teaching together with the wisdom of educators and teachers to ensure both evidence-informed rigor and usefulness in everyday practice.

How to use this Play and Learning Pack

This pack is intended to support your use of AERO's intentional teaching model and practice resource. Focusing attention on a specific aspect of the program will support you in setting learning intentions for children and broader program goals. Using a stepped approach to guide your reflections supports you in engaging in meaningful planning for individual children and the whole group.



Step 1: Observation and reflection

Spend some time reflecting on how arrivals currently work at your service.

Read the information in this pack and ask yourself:

- What are our learning intentions for arrival times?
- How do our arrival routines work now?
- How do they promote feelings of welcome and security?
- How do our other routines and the organisation of the day support effective arrivals?

Identify if there are other things you can do to make arrivals smoother and more pleasant for children, families and educators.



Step 2: Planning for learning

Use the Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool to identify 'what stands out' from your observations and to plan your learning intentions.

Use your learning intentions to plan what you will do to achieve them.

Record your plans using the Intentional Teaching Planning Format.

Implement your plans.



Step 3: Reflection and evaluation

Continue to implement your plans, reviewing and evaluating them regularly and using the Thinking Tool to continue to plan your next steps. Reflect on the impact of your intentions and teaching strategies for educators, children and families.

Arrivals

In ECEC services, a significant portion of each day is taken up by routines and transitions. Often, because these times can be so busy, they are seen in purely practical terms, as something to get through as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to get back to the 'real' learning. However, such an approach misses the opportunities that these routines offer for learning.

Arrival is a critical transition point at the beginning of each child's day. Not only is it a time when many children (and their families) need some extra support, but it also helps set the tone for the rest of the day. A positive and happy arrival sets a child up for a positive and happy day.

A positive arrival also helps create a positive feeling about the service for families and reduces anxiety about their child's day. This can have a flow-on effect to the child, who, seeing their family's comfort level increase, becomes more comfortable themselves.

How we manage arrivals includes not just what happens at the gate or front door, but also what happens in the short period afterwards, as children engage with their peers and the learning environment.

Planning for arrivals, therefore, includes thinking about the development of play entry skills and other social skills, just as much as ensuring that everyone receives a warm welcome.

It also involves understanding children and their families, so you know which strategies are most likely to work in helping them feel safe and secure. Being attuned to each child's needs and preferences will help you to support them most effectively as individuals.

Routines and transitions are excellent chances to engage children in 1:1 interactions, and to promote the development of relationships, communication and social skills. For this to happen, they need to be well-planned, with the aim of ensuring that they are:

- calm and relaxed
- social and interactive
- enjoyable
- provide opportunities for independence and agency.

If you can achieve these 4 things, then your routines and transitions will meet the needs of children and adults at your service.



Strategies for warm and positive arrivals

A warm, personalised greeting

Make time to ensure each child is greeted individually. Get down to their level, use their name and welcome them. If the child would like it, a hug or a hand to hold can help too. Knowing each child well will help you know the level of physical connection they are comfortable with.

Plan staffing and rostering arrangements to make sure that educators and teachers have time to do this.

A calm and organised routine

It's much easier to come into a new space if it feels calm and safe. Plan the morning routine so that it allows time for arrivals, and children and family members don't feel rushed or pressured to say goodbye.

Visual schedules and routines can help children feel comfortable about what's happening and what will happen next.

Greet families too

Greet family members warmly too. Use their names and show an interest in them as well as their child. This will help reassure them that you care about them and will help their child to settle in for the day.

A welcoming and interesting environment

Make sure that there are interesting and engaging things to do at arrival time. Children may automatically gravitate towards interesting experiences, or you can suggest an experience for them to start with. Either way, something fun and engaging provides motivation to say goodbye and join the day.

Positive language and reassurance

Use positive words and phrases to reassure children (e.g., 'You're safe here', 'I'm happy to see you', 'We're going to have a great day today').

Validate emotions too (e.g., 'It's okay to miss Mum, she'll be back after work') and guide children to involve themselves in the program (e.g., 'What would you like to do today? There's [provide a small number of choices you think the child will be interested in]').

Knowing the children in your care will help you know who will respond best to validation, who needs a suggestion and who needs both!

Goodbye rituals

For some children, a consistent 'ritual' at arrival time can help them to settle into the day more easily. This could be a certain spot they will wave goodbye from, a task to undertake (such as feeding a pet or checking if the centre chickens have laid any eggs) or a set way of saying goodbye ('a hug and a kiss and a big goodbye' or singing a favourite song).

Consistency

For children who find arrivals challenging, consistency in routine and people can be helpful. It's not always possible when rostering shifts, but trying to make sure there is a familiar person present at arrival time can help to make this transition run more smoothly.

Learning potentials at arrival time

Learning area	Potential learning	Links to learning outcomes
Social skills and relationships	• Developing trust (in educators and the safety and security of the environment) • Developing friendships and play-entry skills	• Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Effective communicators
Executive function	• Self-help skills/independence • Making choices • Managing 'big' emotions and finding comfort from others	• Identity • Wellbeing
Communication	• Participating in conversation/interactions with adults • Communicating feelings and needs • Recognising or writing name for sign-on, identifying own locker tag, etc. (For older children)	• Connection • Effective communicators



Intentional teaching planning format

This template is informed by AERO's intentional teaching model and practice resource. These resources will support an understanding of intentional teaching and completion of this planning resource.

Group:**Date:****Area:**

Context/Background

What has been happening in this area recently? Who has been involved? What learning seems most prominent? What are the children most interested in?

Learning intentions

Front-of-mind (short-term) goals: What is your main learning focus for this area for this period of time? Try to keep this to one to 3 goals max.

Back-of-mind (long-term) goals: What other learning goals are you keeping in the back of your mind in case there is an opportunity to pursue them? Keep this to 5 goals max.

Learning provisions

Resources and materials: What specific resources and materials will you provide to support your learning intentions? How will you set them up?

Learning provisions

Planned experiences: Are there any pre-planned and/or adult-guided experiences you will plan for this area? If so, include details.

Teaching strategies: Based on your learning intentions, what teaching strategies are going to be most important to use to successfully achieve them?

Evaluation

What happened? Remember to focus on what learning occurred rather than just what the children did.

What next? Based on what happened, what is the next phase for this learning? Will you simplify, consolidate, extend or challenge what you have observed? Or will you change your focus and introduce something new?