YOUR GUIDE TO BECOMING A SCHOOL-BASED TRAINEE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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WELCOME!

This workbook is your personal guide to understanding what it's like to work in a childcare centre as a school-based trainee. You'll learn what's expected of you, how to make a great first impression, and how to work safely and professionally with young children.

You'll also find activities and questions to help you prepare for your placement and demonstrate that you're ready to begin!

WHAT DOES A TRAINEE DO?

As a trainee, you support qualified educators, help with routines, and learn through hands-on experience.

✓ You're not expected to know everything.
✓ You'll be given guidance.
✓ Asking questions is a good thing!

✅ Your role includes:

- Assisting educators during daily routines such as playtime, mealtimes, rest time, and group activities.
- Setting up and packing away activities, toys, and resources.
- Helping to keep learning areas clean and tidy throughout the day.
- Observing educators to see how they manage children's needs, behaviour, and transitions.
- Joining in play activities with children when invited – always under the guidance of an educator.
- Following instructions from the team and asking questions when you're unsure.

- Being part of the team – showing enthusiasm, respect, and a willingness to help.

🚫 A trainee is *not* responsible for:

- Supervising children alone (you must always be with a qualified educator).
- Handling behaviour or incidents on your own – always notify an educator.
- Providing direct care (such as nappy changes) unless asked to assist under supervision and with proper training.

💬 Important things to remember:

- Always check with your supervisor before doing something new or different.
- If a child is upset or needs help, stay calm and get the attention of an educator – don't act alone.
- Listen and learn from the experienced staff – they want to support you to succeed.
- It's okay to make mistakes – what matters is that you're open to learning and improvement.

You are here to learn, to grow, and to start your journey into the world of early childhood care and education. Approach each day with curiosity, kindness, and responsibility, and you'll make a great start.

📝 Activity: Describe two things a trainee might do in a day at a childcare centre.

SAFETY AND SUPERVISION

Keeping children safe is the number one priority!
Always keep an eye on children and follow directions from educators.

When you're working with children, safety always comes first. As a trainee, your job is to be aware, alert, and responsible — because young children depend on adults to keep them safe every moment of the day.

👀 What does supervision mean?

- Always watching children – not just being near them.
- Being close enough to intervene quickly if needed.
- Knowing how many children are in your area and where they are at all times.
- Making sure play spaces are safe, tidy, and free of hazards.

🔍 Your safety responsibilities include:

- Following instructions from educators carefully, especially during outdoor play, mealtimes, and transitions.
- Reporting any hazards (like spills, broken toys, or unsafe equipment) to staff straight away.
- Helping to keep areas clean and organised so that children don't trip, slip, or get hurt.
- Watching for signs of unsafe behaviour like climbing on furniture or rough play, and letting an educator know.

🙅‍♀️ What NOT to do:

- Never supervise children alone – you must always be with a qualified staff member.
- Don't use your mobile device or distract yourself while children are playing nearby.
- Don't leave your post without checking with the educator in charge.
- Never ignore a problem – if something seems unsafe, speak up.

✅ Tips to help you succeed:

- Be present and focused – children move quickly and accidents can happen in a moment.
- Think like a safety scout: Is this space safe? Are the children playing safely?
- Ask questions if you're unsure – safety is a shared responsibility.

Even though you're still learning, your eyes and ears can make a big difference. Being reliable, aware, and careful shows that you're ready to be part of a professional childcare team.

📝 Activity: List three ways you can help keep children safe during the day.

INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN

Children need warmth, kindness, and respect.
Be calm, friendly, and always get down to their level to communicate.

Working with children isn't just about keeping them busy — it's about building trust, encouraging learning, and creating a positive environment. The way you interact shapes how children feel and behave.

🤝 How to interact well:

- Get down to their level – crouch or sit so you can see eye-to-eye with the child.
- Use a calm and friendly voice – speak clearly and gently.

- Show interest – ask questions about what they're doing: *"What are you building?"* or *"Can I help you paint?"*
- Join in play rather than just watching. Follow their lead and let them show you what they enjoy.
- Encourage and praise – say things like, *"I love how you shared those toys,"* or *"That's a great drawing!"*

💬 Good communication:

- Listen to children without interrupting, even if the story seems small.
- Use positive, simple language – avoid shouting or harsh tones.
- Give clear instructions, like *"Let's put the blocks away before snack time."*

🚫 What to avoid:

- Never use sarcasm, mocking, or belittling comments.
- Never yell, threaten, or punish children.
- Avoid ignoring children when they're asking for attention or help.

🎯 Helping children learn:

- Encourage children to solve problems by asking questions: *"What could we build next?"* or *"Where could we put this piece?"*
- Support social skills by noticing and praising positive behaviour like sharing or helping a friend.

🧠 Be patient:

- Children can get frustrated, tired, or upset — stay calm and kind.
- If a child's behaviour is unsafe or concerning, gently redirect them to another activity or ask an educator for support.

Every smile, word of encouragement, and moment of shared play helps children feel secure and valued. Your positive energy makes a big difference!

📝 Activity: Write or draw how you might respond if a child is feeling sad.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Always greet families with a smile. If they ask questions, let an educator respond.
Never share information about children on social media.

Families are an important part of the childcare community. As a trainee, you represent the service — so it's important to be polite, positive, and professional whenever you speak with parents or carers.

😊 First impressions matter:

- Always greet families warmly with a smile and a friendly "Hello" or "Good morning."
- Make eye contact and use respectful body language.

- Speak clearly and cheerfully, even if you're feeling shy.

💬 What you can say:

- Simple greetings like:
    - *"Hi, I'm on placement here today."*
    - *"It's nice to meet you!"*
- If a parent asks you a question about their child, it's best to respond with:
    - *"I'll just check with the educator for you."*

🚫 What you should NOT do:

- Never give information about a child's behaviour, health, or development — that's the educator's role.
- Never use your phone or personal social media to take or share photos of children.
- Never take photos of yourself for social media wearing your work uniform, whether you are at work or not.
- Don't gossip, complain, or talk about private matters where families can hear.

📱 Social media warning:

- You are not allowed to post anything about your placement, the centre, the staff, or the children online — not even in private groups or chats.
- This includes photos, stories, or comments — even if they seem harmless.

🧍 Remember your role:

- You're still learning. It's okay not to have all the answers.
- When in doubt, always check with your supervisor or another educator.
- Be friendly but professional — just like you would in any workplace.

By showing families that you're respectful, responsible, and supportive, you help build trust in the service — and in yourself.

📝 Activity: Practise introducing yourself to a parent. Write down what you would say.

DAILY ROUTINES AND TRANSITIONS

You'll help children move through the day—eating, sleeping, playing, and learning. Support transitions calmly and join in group times respectfully.

In an early childhood setting, the day is built around routines — familiar patterns that help children feel safe, settled, and ready to learn. Your role as a trainee is to support these routines and help children move smoothly from one part of the day to the next.

🧩 Typical routines you'll assist with:

- Arrival time – welcoming children and helping them unpack their belongings.
- Meal times – setting tables, encouraging hand washing, and helping children eat independently.
- Rest or sleep time – helping to set up bedding, speaking quietly, and staying calm so children can settle.
- Indoor and outdoor play – helping with setup, joining in respectfully, and tidying up.
- Group time – sitting with children during stories, music, or learning activities.
- Departure time – assisting with packing up and preparing children to go home.

🔁 What are transitions?

Transitions are the moments between routines, like:

- Moving from playtime to lunchtime,
- Cleaning up before rest time,
- Coming indoors after outdoor play.

These moments can be tricky for children, so your job is to help make them smooth, calm, and positive.

✅ Your role during transitions:

- Follow educator instructions and be ready to support the group.
- Use calm, friendly language like: *"It's nearly time to tidy up. Let's start with the blocks."*
- Help children feel comfortable — some children find transitions stressful and may need extra encouragement.
- Model appropriate behaviour — participate in group time, help others follow routines, and always show kindness and patience.

🚫 What not to do:

- Don't rush children or raise your voice.
- Don't ignore children who are struggling — let an educator know.

- Don't stand back — transitions are one of the best times to show initiative!

Routines and transitions are at the heart of the day in childcare. Your support helps children feel confident, secure, and ready for what comes next.

📝 Activity: Circle the times of day you might help with:

- Morning arrival
- Lunchtime
- Sleep time
- Group time
- Going home

LOOKING PROFESSIONAL

Dress neatly, wear your uniform, tie your hair back, and keep nails short and clean.
Avoid heavy makeup or strong scents.

When you walk into a childcare centre, you represent not only yourself, but also your school, your training organisation, and the service you're placed at. That's why it's so important to look and act professionally from the very first day.

👚 Dress the part:

- Wear clothes that meet the standards set by the centre — clean and ironed.
- Match it with black pants or shorts that are neat and practical.

- Shoes must be black, closed-in, clean, and comfortable — no sandals, slides, or sneakers with holes.
- If you are given a name badge it must be worn clearly every day.
- Wear a hat when outdoors — a wide-brimmed or bucket hat is ideal.

💇 Hair and grooming:

- Hair should be tied back securely — this keeps it out of your face and safe around children.
- Nails must be clean, short, and free from bright polish or fake extensions.
- Avoid heavy makeup, false lashes, and bold perfumes — keep it fresh and simple.
- Shower daily, brush your teeth, and use deodorant — good hygiene matters!

📵 Phones and distractions:

- Your phone should never be taken into the rooms. It must be off or on silent and kept in your bag — no checking it during your shift- this applies to all devices (tablets, watches, glasses, etc.).
- Don't take photos, videos, or check social media at the centre — this is a serious privacy and safety issue.

🧍 How to act professionally:

- Be on time — aim to arrive 10–15 minutes early.
- Greet staff and families with a smile and a friendly attitude.
- Follow all instructions, show good manners, and avoid gossip or negative comments.
- If you're unsure, ask respectfully – no one expects you to know everything!

📝 Why it matters:

Looking professional tells others:

- That you are serious about your role,
- That you can be trusted around children,
- And that you are ready to become part of the team.

A positive first impression can open doors to future job opportunities. Dress, speak, and act like someone you'd want to work with.

📝 Activity: Draw or describe what you think is the perfect trainee outfit.

USING YOUR INITIATIVE

Don't wait to be told—look for ways to help! If you're not sure, ask.
Doing small jobs like wiping tables or refilling tissues shows you care.

One of the most important things you can do as a trainee is to look for ways to be helpful — without waiting to be told. That's called using your initiative, and it's a sign that you're growing into a confident and capable team member.

🔍 What does initiative look like?

- Noticing something that needs to be done — like wiping a table or restocking tissues — and doing it!

- Asking educators, “Can I help with anything?” or “Is there anything you'd like me to do?”
- Offering to sweep the sand, pack away blocks, or clean paint pots after an activity.
- Keeping an eye on things and stepping in to support, especially during busy times.

✋ When to ask and when to act:

- If it’s something you’ve already been shown how to do, go ahead and do it!
- If you’re unsure, ask first — this shows respect for safety and procedure.
- Always check before picking up a child, preparing food, or changing nappies — these require permission and proper training.

🧠 Smart initiative isn’t:

- Doing things without asking that could be unsafe or against centre rules.
- Taking over tasks meant for qualified staff.
- Ignoring instructions because you “thought it would be okay.”

🗣️ Helpful phrases to use:

- “Would you like me to tidy this area?”
- “I’ve finished that task — is there anything else I can do?”
- “I noticed the floor is messy — would you like me to sweep it?”

🎯 Why initiative matters:

- It shows you’re engaged, aware, and willing to help.
- Educators will see that you’re someone who can be trusted.
- It builds your confidence — and may even lead to more responsibility over time.

Taking initiative doesn’t mean doing everything — it means being thoughtful, proactive, and ready to contribute. That’s what makes a trainee stand out.

📝 Activity: Tick the tasks that show initiative:

[ ] Checking your phone

[ ] Offering to help clean up

[ ] Watching others do everything

[ ] Sweeping up sand

CLEANING AND HYGIENE

Good hygiene is part of keeping everyone healthy.
Wash hands regularly, wear gloves when cleaning, and wipe down surfaces.

In an early childhood setting, cleanliness is a top priority — not just to make things look nice, but to keep children safe from germs, illness, and injury. As a trainee, you'll play an important part in maintaining hygiene throughout the day.

🧽 Everyday cleaning tasks you may assist with:

- Wiping down tables before and after meals or messy play.

- Sweeping or mopping floors when spills occur.
- Tidying and disinfecting toys after use — especially if they've been in mouths or on the floor.
- Keeping bathrooms and nappy change areas clean (with supervision and appropriate training).
- Helping with laundry – such as folding towels or sorting washing.

🧴 Personal hygiene is just as important:

- Wash your hands often, especially:
    - After using the toilet
    - Before and after meals
    - After outdoor play
    - After wiping noses, handling rubbish, or cleaning
- Use hand sanitiser when required – but washing with soap and water is best.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes, and dispose of tissues immediately.

🚫 What not to do:

- Don't ignore mess — if you see it, help clean it.
- Don't use sprays or cleaning products unless you've been shown how.
- Don't wear gloves for food handling unless instructed — clean hands are usually enough.

✅ Helpful habits:

- Notice what needs attention — sticky spots, full bins, scattered toys.
- Ask your supervisor if you're unsure which cloth or product to use — different jobs use different tools.
- Always check that cleaning materials are stored safely and out of children's reach.

🌟 Why it matters:

Clean spaces:

- Prevent the spread of germs and illness,
- Keep children safe and happy,
- Show families that the centre is well-managed and professional.

By helping with hygiene and cleaning, you show you care — not just about appearances, but about children's health and wellbeing.

📝 Activity: Create a 'Hygiene Hero' checklist with at least 3 things you will do every day.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR FIRST DAY

Plan ahead! Pack your uniform, name badge, lunch, and water. Know your start time. Smile, be polite, and turn off your phone and mobile devices.

Your first day of placement is a big step — and first impressions matter. With a bit of preparation, you'll arrive feeling confident, organised, and ready to make a great start.

📄 Before the day:

- Confirm your placement details – double-check the date, time, and address.
- Know who to report to when you arrive — usually the Centre Director or your supervising educator.

- Plan your transport – make sure you can get there on time, whether it's by bus, car, or walking.

🎽 What to wear:

- Polo shirt, freshly washed and ironed.
- Black pants or shorts – comfortable, tidy, and practical for working with children.
- Closed-in shoes – safe, clean, and suitable for both indoor and outdoor work.
- Name badge – worn clearly every day.
- Sun-safe hat for outdoor play – broad-brimmed or bucket style preferred.

🎒 What to bring:

- A water bottle – staying hydrated helps you focus.
- A healthy packed lunch – no nuts, lollies, or energy drinks.
- Notebook and pen – for jotting down tasks, reminders, or feedback.
- Any forms or paperwork required by your school or RTO.
- A small backpack or bag to keep your belongings tidy and out of the way.

⏰ On the day:

- Arrive 10–15 minutes early – it shows you're reliable and prepared.
- Greet staff politely and introduce yourself:
  "Hi, I'm [Your Name], I'm starting my traineeship placement today."
- Ask where to store your things and be ready to start helping.
- Be observant, friendly, and respectful — watch how the staff work and learn from them.

😊 Your mindset matters:

- You don't need to know everything — just be willing to learn.
- Smile, make eye contact, and ask questions if you're unsure.
- Take notes and reflect on what you see – everything is part of your learning.

A successful first day begins with being organised, open-minded, and enthusiastic. You're not just showing up — you're stepping into a professional environment where people will be watching how you listen, act, and grow. Start strong and you'll set yourself up for success.

📝 Activity: Write your own first-day checklist:

- I will wear: _____
- I will bring: _____
- I will say: _____

By taking the time to understand what it means to be a trainee in early childhood education, you've already shown that you're serious, thoughtful, and ready to take the next step. This is more than just a test — it's your first move toward a rewarding, meaningful career working with young children.

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