

COVID changed drop-off and pick ups. But parents can still have a strong relationship with their child's educators

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One of the most obvious changes COVID has made to early childhood education in Australia has been around drop-offs and pick-ups.

Pre-pandemic, parents would come into centers and help their [child](#) settle in every day. During this time, they could see where their child spent their day and chat informally to educators.

But COVID has seen this stop or become sporadic. It is now common for parents to just drop their children off at the front door or gate, as centers and preschools/kindergartens try and control the spread of the virus. Understandably, this can leave families [feeling disconnected](#) from their child's early learning and their educators.

We are researchers in early childhood education. Here's why is it important for parents to have strong relationships with their child's teachers—and how can you keep them going in the pandemic.

Our research

During lockdowns in 2020, we did [a study](#) with a group of 40 kindergarten (preschool) teachers and student teachers in metropolitan Melbourne.

We wanted to know how their work changed during the pandemic.

The results are published in a newly released [book](#) about [early education](#) and childcare around the world during COVID.

Why is the relationship between parents and educators so important?

Some parents may think they just need to drop their children off and

pick them up each day. But in reality, the closer and more communicative their relationship is with their child's [teacher](#), the better.

Research has shown strong relationships support [children's academic learning](#), including early literacy and numeracy knowledge.

Other [studies show](#) stronger family-teacher relationships and communication enhances children's persistence, levels of attention, motivation, and emotional regulation.

When families are involved in what children are learning in their center, this shows them how to continue this learning at home. In turn, if families share what they are doing at home, teachers can continue this learning in the classroom. This supports [shared involvement](#) in children's learning and development.

What changed during COVID?

More than two years of the pandemic has seen center closures and parents banned from classrooms. This has made it much more difficult for parents and teachers to interact.

Teachers in our study talked about moving online to communicate with parents, using [digital platforms](#), such as Storypark, Kinderloop and Playground. These allow teachers to upload photos and messages about the day and children's well-being and development. Like other professionals, Zoom has also been used to meet children and parents outside the classroom.

These methods really helped teachers and families stay connected but they were no replacement for in-person interactions. The long breaks from centers increased the challenges around making children comfortable at their center or preschool.

What did this mean for drop-offs?

The changes brought by COVID made it more difficult to keep to routines and unsettled some children. However, as our study found, other children benefited from more independence at drop-offs.

As one teacher noted:

"Some children haven't quite gotten into the routine of things so in the morning, they might have a little bit of a cry [...] you can tell they're a bit confused and they're still getting used to things."

Another interviewee added:

"Kids are obviously finding it hard to come back [...] Some [kids](#) are quite upset or the other direction [in terms of behaviour], they're just bouncing off the walls."

However, once children got used to coming back to in-person learning, not having parents do drop-offs in the classrooms had some unintended benefits. As one teacher told us:

"I've missed the parents, but I tell you what, the children are much more settled."

Another teacher noted, when the children come into the classroom, "they're more independent" for example, they take responsibility for their own belongings.

In fact, the new opportunities for increasing children's independence led to some teachers deciding to continue the practice of families farewelling [children](#) at the gate.

How can you build a relationship with your child's educator?

Early childhood educators are passionate about your child's learning and want to work with you. They know [strong relationships](#) with [parents](#) are a key part of their jobs.

Here are some ways you can facilitate a good [relationship](#):

- if you have to drop your child at the gate, ensure you communicate clearly that you are leaving and what the pick-up arrangement will be later today. For example: "I'm going now, and Nana will pick you up after lunch"
- ask your child's educator open-ended questions about your child's day, such as "What was the highlight of Archie's day?" or "What is something Millie learned today?"
- tell your child's educator what you did over the weekend or during family holidays, to help them engage with your child about home life
- share information about cultural events celebrated in your family
- if you are using digital sharing platforms, instead of just "liking" a post, share something similar or relevant that happens at home.

A sector under pressure

In 2022, there remains significant disruption and uncertainty around [early childhood education](#), due to ongoing staff and child illnesses.

There are also staff shortages which are causing centers to close for days at a time.

These pressures have exacerbated existing challenges, with high numbers

of staff leaving the workforce and others experiencing [workload pressures](#).

Building relationships with your child's educators and center has never been more important. If you support them, they can better support your child's learning.

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