

First STEPS

Supporting Transitions into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Programs Study

UUQ Ethical Approval Number: 2023/HE001878



Dear Parent/Guardian,

Do you currently have a child aged 12-36 months who is starting an early childhood education and care (ECEC) program (e.g. Long Day Care, Childcare, Daycare) for the first time?

Are you interested in participating in a study aimed at better understanding the experiences of families transitioning into early childhood education and care services?

You and your child are invited to participate in the Supporting Transitions into ECEC Programs Study (**First STEPS**). **First STEPS** aims to better understand how to support the health and wellbeing of children and families across their first big life transition – entry to ECEC.

First STEPS is led by researchers at The University of Queensland. Thank you for taking the time to read this information booklet to learn more about the **First STEPS** study and your family's participation.

Is your child 12-36 months old?
Are they about to start attending an early childhood education and care (ECEC) program?



Why are we doing this research and what is it about?

Starting an early childhood education and care (ECEC) program is a big first step in the lives of young children and their families. For many children this represents the first time they are attending a group program without a family member or friend.

How families and services can best work together to support children across the transition into ECEC is currently not well understood.

First STEPS is focused on understanding the experiences of children, families and services as children transition into their first ECEC program. The findings of this study will be used to inform the development of resources for families, educators, and policy makers to support positive transitions for the many children entering ECEC programs each year.

Who are the Researchers?

First STEPS is being run by researchers at The University of Queensland (UQ), Queensland Brain Institute and is led by Associate Professor Sally Staton.

PhD student George Normore will be using the data as part of his studies on early life transitions. This project includes collaborators from the University of Western Ontario – Canada, and the University of Melbourne. This project is funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council.

What if I'm not sure when my child will transition into their ECEC service?

You may still be eligible to participate in **First STEPS**. Please complete the application form via the link or QR code at the end of this booklet and a member of the research team will contact you to discuss further.



What will your family need to do?

If you choose to participate in the First STEPS study, we will invite your family to participate in activities across your child's transition into their ECEC program.

These activities will provide information about your family's experiences during this time, including measurements of your family's wellbeing, sleep patterns, feelings and behaviour.

These activities will occur at three time-points: 6 weeks prior to your child starting at their ECEC service, during the first two weeks your child is attending their ECEC service, and 6 weeks after starting at their ECEC service.

Your family's wellbeing is important to us. All activities are appropriate for children and families, and you will be provided with information and support to complete these activities.

Activities at your child's ECEC service will be conducted and supported by experienced and qualified researchers, who have extensive research experience with young children. All researchers hold a Working with Children 'Blue Card'.

Your child's participation will involve:

Family sleep patterns

We will ask you, your child and any other parents/guardians in your family to wear an actigraph. An actigraph is a small watch-like device (see pictures below) that is placed on the wrist and helps us understand your family's sleep, wake, and activity patterns.

We will ask you, your child, and any other parents/guardians in your family to wear the actigraph continuously for two weeks at each time-point. The actigraph is durable and waterproof and comes with child and adult-sized bands to ensure comfort. Actigraphs do not have GPS capabilities.

You will receive these actigraphs in the mail every six weeks along with instructions for fitting and returning the device to researchers via provided prepaid envelopes. Actigraphs are regularly used in clinical and research-based sleep studies with small children, including newborns. Older children often report enjoying wearing them.



Saliva sampling – children only

Saliva samples are used to help us to understand your child's emotional response to starting ECEC. Saliva sampling is a simple procedure in which a soft swab is placed under your child's tongue for 1-2 minutes.

You will be asked to collect saliva samples at home in the morning, afternoon, and evening. We will also support educators to collect one saliva sample from your child in the afternoon at their ECEC service when they begin attending.

Saliva samples will be collected from your child on 2 days at each timepoint during their transition to ECEC, totaling 6 sampling days. You will receive instructions for completing and returning the samples to the research team via provided prepaid envelopes. The research team will prompt you with text message reminders to let you know when the samples need to be collected and returned.

Observations at ECEC

To understand your child's experiences at their ECEC service, we will also conduct observations at your child's ECEC service. These observations will occur across two visits during your child's first two weeks and two visits six weeks after your child starts at their ECEC service. Researchers will take notes during these observations, but not interact with your child other than to collect saliva samples (if necessary).

The research team has considerable experience undertaking observation in ECEC and will ensure minimal interruption to the child or other children in the room.

If an ECEC centre decides to withdraw

If your child's ECEC service withdraws from the study, we will not collect any subsequent data from the service but will still collect the home component of the data from your family.





What you will need to do

In addition to collecting the saliva samples, and wearing an actigraph, we will also ask you to complete a two-week diary and survey to tell us about your family's daily activities, health, and wellbeing.

Two-week daily diary

While your family wears their actigraphs, you will be asked to complete daily questions related to your day, including your family's sleep and wellbeing. The daily diary is designed to be brief and will be provided to you as a simple to use booklet.

Online surveys

We will also ask you to complete a survey to better understand your family's experiences starting ECEC, early life and family circumstances, relationships, sleep, health, and well-being. The surveys will be online and sent to you via email (a hard copy can be provided if preferred).

What are the expected benefits?

By participating, you will be contributing to research that aims to enhance knowledge of the experiences of children, families and services as children transition into their first ECEC program. The findings of this study will be used to inform the development of resources for families, educators, and policy makers to promote positive transitions for the many children entering ECEC programs each year.



To thank you for your participation you will receive a \$50 gift voucher at the end of the study.

What are the risks?

There are minimal risks associated with your family's participation in this study.

Possible risks include:

- Your child being unhappy with wearing the actigraph, or with the saliva sampling process.
 - All activities will be conducted by trained researchers and under no circumstances will your child be asked to continue with any activities if they do not wish to.
- In very rare cases, a child may experience skin irritation or discomfort due to the actigraph strap.
 - Actigraphs can be easily removed at any time.
 - If your child experiences skin irritation or discomfort, we ask that you remove the actigraph immediately and contact the research team. Keeping the skin clean and dry underneath the actigraph strap minimizes the risk of this occurring. You will also be provided with a specially designed fabric band to place under the actigraph to ensure the actigraph is comfortable for your child.



- Inconvenience and potential discomfort in completing the surveys and two-week daily diaries.
 - Surveys will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and will occur every six weeks for three months.
 - Diaries will be completed each day for the two weeks that your family wears their actigraphs (watches) and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete each day.
 - All questions are designed to be appropriate for use with families and children, and you will not be required to provide any information you are not comfortable sharing.



How will your confidentiality be protected?

- ✓ **All information and data collected** will remain confidential and your information can only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.
- ✓ **All discussions and publications about the results of the study** will be general in nature and will not identify your ECEC service or individuals, meaning you and your child cannot be identified.
- ✓ **All identifiable information** will be removed (names, address, date of birth, childcare service) and participants will be identified by a unique code only.
- ✓ **All information** will be stored securely as per The University of Queensland's Research Data Management policy.
- ✓ **All electronic records** will be stored on a password-protected computer database only accessible by the research team and all data transfers will be safely encrypted.

Please note that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used in future projects or stored on an open access database for secondary analysis in accordance with research practices.

- ✓ **All data** will be retained securely and indefinitely in accordance with the obligations under the Public Records Act 2002 and associated State policies, retention and disposal schedules, and other official advice issued by the Queensland State Archives' State Archivist.
- ✓ **Non-identifiable data** collected in this project may be used in future projects, shared with collaborators in Canada and other locations, or stored on an open access database for secondary analysis in accordance with research practices.

How will we inform you of the results when the study is finished?

At the end of the study, you will be provided with access to a summary of the results through our study website.

What happens if you agree to participate and then change your mind?

- Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
- You or your child can withdraw from the study at any time without judgement or negative consequences.

- If your child does not wish to participate in activities, we will not collect any data directly from your child at that time. We will however still collect other data from you (e.g., surveys) and your ECEC service (i.e., observations).
- Your decision to participate, or not participate, will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with your child's ECEC service or The University of Queensland.

Where can you get further information?

If you would like more information about the project or if you need to speak to a member of the research team, please contact us via phone **0447 923 587** or email firststeps@uq.edu.au

What happens next?

To take part in the study or to find out more, please visit qbi.uq.edu.au/firststeps

If you have any questions or would like to speak to the **First STEPS** Research Team, please contact us on the details below:

E: firststeps@uq.edu.au

P: 0447 923 587

W: qbi.uq.edu.au/firststeps



More information

Concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of the project

This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of The University of Queensland and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Whilst you are free to discuss your participation in this study with the **First STEPS** research team you may also contact the Ethics Coordinator if you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study.

Contact details are: +61 7 3365 3924 or humanethics@research.uq.edu.au.



Thank you for helping with this important research.

Please keep this booklet for your information.





THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

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