Children coming to Australia have a lot to get used to – a new home, school, language, culture and people. Parents can help children adapt to the changes and settle into their new life.

What parents can do
Parents play an important role in guiding and supporting children. They can help them:
> feel loved and safe
> go to school, learn and make friends
> discover places and activities they enjoy
> be involved in the community
> talk about any worries or problems
> get help if they need it.

Some children have experienced hardship or violence, or lost people or places they love. They can feel grief and loss just as adults do, even if they can’t tell you about it.

The good news is that children of all ages usually adapt, learn and do well in Australia.
Making friends and being involved in the community can help children feel accepted and that they belong.

Feeling safe
When children feel safe it is easier for them to cope with change.
Some things that might help are to:
> keep children’s lives as calm as you can
> continue with things they know and enjoy, such as food, stories, songs
> have daily routines such as the same mealtimes, bedtimes
> stay in touch with loved ones overseas, if you can
> explore the local community with your children so they get to know it
> protect young children from knowing too much about adult problems.

Going to school
Going to school is a big part of getting used to Australian life.
Children can:
> go to playgroups, child care and preschools from a young age
> learn English
> start or continue their education
> make friends
> be involved in sports or other activities they enjoy such as music, art, dance. They may like to join a group
> get help if they have a disability or other concern.

Schools are great places for parents to meet other families and share ideas. Parents are welcome to talk with teachers, even if there is no problem.
Stress and trauma
Children of all ages can be affected by events that made them feel unsafe, scared, worried, angry or helpless. It may be war, violence, hardship, losing loved ones or having many big changes in their life.

Signs of stress in children can be:
> wetting the bed
> often feeling upset, worried or sick, having headaches or stomach aches
> becoming very quiet – not wanting to see family or friends
> becoming angry or fighting a lot
> taking more risks. Older children might use alcohol or drugs.

There may be other reasons for these, so try to find out why they are happening.

Children need to experience over and over again:
> feeling loved and safe
> being comforted and soothed
> knowing others understand how they feel.

Getting help
If you are worried about your child, you could talk with doctors, teachers or other services. Multicultural services can often help you find what you need.

Problems with feelings
If children are upset or ‘misbehaving’ try to understand what's causing it.

You could:
> listen patiently
> show you really understand
> help children name their feelings - are they sad, worried, angry?
> ask children what would help them. This builds their confidence and skills
> get any help they need.

If children seem upset, worried or angry, ask if they are OK.

It can help children to have other trusted adults to talk to.
This Parent Easy Guide is one of 9 developed by Parenting SA for families from new and emerging multicultural communities in South Australia. We would like to thank the many services and families that generously contributed their knowledge and expertise to the Guides, especially families and staff members whose photographs appear in them. Parenting SA is a partnership of the Department for Education and the Women's and Children’s Health Network.

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Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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