

**Fabian, H. (2003) Starting School for Children from Dysfunctional Families.
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Abstract

The start of school needs to be managed in a way that creates a stress-free bridge from early childhood services to school, because initial success at school leads to a virtuous cycle of achievement. While it is important that the transition to school is based on best practice, it is not a standardised process, as children have experienced a diversity of contextual and socio-cultural influences before they begin school. With the current drive for inclusion from the UK government, this paper aims to explore the issues of managing the start of school for those children in dysfunctional families. It has, as its focus, a case study. This methodology tells the story of the way in which a Family Centre with children from multi-problem families manages the process of preparing and supporting children and their parents through the transition to school. The main findings highlight issues such as the stigma that follows these children because they are seen as a 'problem'; the adult communication networks that become broken when children transfer to school because there is no meeting place at school for families; and the subliminal messages that children receive from their parents due to their own recollections about school and their fears that they are about to lose their 'babies'. The paper also explores some positive spin-offs that come about through preparing for school – aspects such as 'stay and play' and parenting groups that not only progress skills and academic ability but also give children and parents respect and self-esteem.

key words: Transitions, multi-problem families, self-esteem, change.