

Your support network

As parents, we all need support

In addition to professionals and services, it is important to think about other types of support that might benefit you and your family - your own personal and family support network.

Three ingredients for a strong support network are:

Information

Having, or knowing how to access, good information

Support

Meeting other parents and sharing knowledge and experiences

Advocacy

Belonging to groups that advocate for improvements to the service system

When you combine all three, you have a powerful information and support network.

In addition to our Association, there is a range of disability-specific support groups and local, regional and state/territory information and advocacy groups.

Explore what these groups have to offer and find out how they might become part of your personal and family support network.



“My main support network is the parents at my child’s school. The conversations we have in the car park are sometimes more helpful than anything else.”

Role of services



“It took me a long time to get used to the idea that it’s okay to ask for help from services.”

It can be difficult to take the first step and ask for help

By creating and funding services to assist our families, society has acknowledged that we deserve access to appropriate support.

You should never feel guilty about asking for assistance from support services. They are there to help you and your family.

Services designed specifically for children with a disability and their families are sometimes referred to as specialist disability services.

There is also a range of other services available to all families which are sometimes called ‘mainstream’, ‘generic’ or ‘universal’ services.

Find out what works for you and your family

Every family has different needs and priorities for the best way services can assist. The range of services available to your family should be flexible and able to be adapted to suit your particular circumstances.

It is reasonable to expect that service providers will work together with you to identify and deliver the support that is most important to you and your family.

Be creative

Sometimes you have to be creative when working with service providers to put together a package of different services to achieve the support your family needs.

There can be long waiting lists for some services, which can be very frustrating. But it is always better to know about a service, and be able to explore options for accessing it in the future, than to not know it’s there.

Working together

Good professionals see themselves as working together with parents

There are many professionals and service providers whose job it is to help your child and family. They will be able to draw on their own particular skills and experience but it is impossible for them to know everything.

It is important to trust your instincts as a parent and to have your say about what you believe is right for your child and family.

Listen

As parents, it is important to encourage good working partnerships with professionals. We need to respect their role and listen to their point of view.

Ask

We also need to be prepared to ask questions or seek further explanations when we don't understand or agree.

Trust your instincts

Sometimes situations can arise which require us to challenge a professional. This is not always easy to do, and some professionals do not react kindly to being challenged.

But if you feel uncomfortable about the advice given by a professional, you should trust your instincts and seek further information or a second opinion.

In many areas of your life as a parent, you will soon discover that you need to become very good at standing up for yourself and your child.

You need to make sure your voice is heard and understood by the people who are making decisions that affect you and your family.



"I've learnt that for my family to get what we need I have to speak up and question things, otherwise we never seem to get anywhere."

The information maze

The service system is complex and confusing



“At first, I was overwhelmed with all the information. Gradually, I learnt to sift through it all and work out what was relevant and what wasn’t.”

Some services are fully funded and administered by the Victorian Government (state). Others are fully funded by the Australian Government (federal). Some receive a combination of state and federal funding.

Most local governments also provide services for families of children with a disability.

There are also community organisations that provide services with the support of government funding.

Finding your way

It can sometimes take a lot of time to find your way ‘through the maze’ to the information you need. Thankfully, this task is made easier with the help of services that specialise in providing information.

Putting it all together

As parents, we need to develop skills, and find the time and energy, to piece together the information most relevant to us and our family.

Often the best results are achieved by seeking information from a range of sources, rather than relying on one professional or service provider.

It takes time to explore all the options, but the effort is usually worth it.

Through the maze

There are some key places to start when working your way through the maze of services and support

Maternal and Child Health Service

Your Maternal and Child Health nurse can give you links to a range of services and support, including playgroups and parent groups.

Centrelink

Most families of children with a disability are eligible for a fortnightly payment from Centrelink called Carer Allowance (Child). Eligibility includes families on all income levels. Applications can be made before a diagnosis is confirmed.

Early Childhood Intervention Services

Early Childhood Intervention Services for families of children with a disability aged 0–6 include a range of non-government and government services.

Child care

The Inclusion Support Program can provide support for children with a disability to attend child care.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services and Preschool Field Officers can provide support for kindergartens to include children with a disability in kindergarten programs.

Local government

All local governments can provide access to a range of services and support for families of children with a disability, including the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.



"We were amazed to discover that our family was eligible for Carer Allowance (Child). It's not much, but that little bit extra it gives us a fortnight really helps."

Parent support



“The Parent Support Worker was great. She listened while I talked, and talked, and talked some more! We sorted through some of the practical things I needed help with and I got off the phone feeling much better about things.”

Sometimes it helps to talk things through with someone who understands things from a parent perspective

Every child is unique and every family is different. No two situations are the same.

Many parents call our Parent Support Workers for information and support each year. Some inquiries have easy answers. Others involve complex issues that may need many conversations and follow-up over a number of weeks.

You might have all the right information but need help understanding what it means for you and your family.

Our Parent Support Workers can:

- Listen to the issues you need help with
- Give you information about services and support available to you and your family
- Help you develop skills in what we call ‘parent advocacy’ and learn how to negotiate and advocate on behalf of your child and family

All of our Parent Support Workers are parents of children with a disability.

In helping you and your family, our Parent Support Workers draw on their own experiences and those of the many other parents who have been involved with our Association over the years.

Please remember that you can ring and speak to our Parent Support Workers about any disability issue.

Parent advocacy

Being an effective advocate is one way to work towards getting the best for your child and family

It isn't easy being an advocate for your child. Sometimes emotions take over.

Advocacy can also be exhausting!

But with persistence and the right support, parent advocacy can help you get what you and your family need.

To be an effective advocate:

- Be clear about what you want
- Find out who is responsible or accountable for the decision and action you seek
- Listen to other people's points of view
- Think about the points that others may raise and how you might respond
- Don't always expect conflict but be prepared with a positive strategy if you do strike conflict
- Be open-minded, others might suggest solutions that you may not have thought of or different ways of doing things that may be just as effective
- Draw on strong emotion if you need to
- Ask a friend or professional to help you with advocacy if you need some support



"I made sure I had a clear plan of what we needed. They seemed to listen more after that."

Phone numbers

Centrelink

13 27 17 (Carer Allowance/Payment)
13 61 50 (Family Payments, Child Care)
13 12 02 (Languages)

Child Care Access Hotline

1800 670 305

Disability Intake and Response

Department of Human Services
1800 783 783

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) Central Intake

Access via Disability Intake and Response
1800 783 783

Kids Help Line

1800 551 800

Lifeline

13 11 14

Maternal and Child Health Line

13 22 29

Medicare

13 20 11

Mensline Australia

1300 789 978

My Time Parent Support Groups

Parenting Research Centre
1800 889 997

National Carer Counselling Program

Carers Victoria
1800 242 636

National Continence Helpline

1800 330 066

National Relay Service

1800 555 660 (Voice) or 1800 555 630 (TTY)

NURSE-ON-CALL

1300 606 024

Parent Line

13 22 89

Parent support and information

Association for Children with a Disability
03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers)

Playgroups

Playgroup Victoria
03 9388 1599 or 1800 171 882

Recreation, sport and the arts

NICAN
1800 806 769

Relationships Australia

1300 364 277

Respite

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre
1800 059 059

Royal Children's Hospital

03 9345 5522

Translating and Interpreting Service

13 14 50

WIRE - Women's Information

1300 134 130

Websites

Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities

www.adec.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

www.acd.org.au

Association of Independent Schools of Victoria

www.ais.vic.edu.au

Australian Association for Families of Children with a Disability

www.aafcd.org.au

Australian Physiotherapy Association

www.physiotherapy.asn.au

Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Carers Victoria

www.carersvic.org.au

Catholic Education Office

www.ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au

Centrelink

www.centrelink.gov.au

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/child

Community Child Care

www.cccinc.org.au

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

www.education.vic.gov.au

Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

www.facsia.gov.au

Department of Human Services, Disability Services Division

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability

Disability Advisory Council of Victoria

www.dac.vic.gov.au

Disability Online

www.disability.vic.gov.au

Early Childhood Intervention Services

www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-intervention

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter)

www.eciavic.org.au

Family Assistance Office

www.familyassist.gov.au

Families Australia

www.familiesaustralia.org.au

Family Relationships Online

www.familyrelationships.gov.au

FKA Multicultural Resource Centre

www.fka.com.au

Websites

Genetic Support Network Victoria

www.gsnv.org.au

Infoxchange Australia

www.infoxchange.net.au

Kids Help Line

www.kidshelp.com.au

Kids Connect (Find a doctor)

www.rch.org.au/kidsconnect

Kindergarten Parents Victoria

www.kpv.org.au

Mensline Australia

www.menslineaus.org.au

My Time Support Groups

www.mytime.net.au

Municipal Association of Victoria

www.mav.asn.au

NICAN

www.nican.com.au

Noah's Ark Inc

www.noahsarkinc.org.au

OT Australia Victoria

(Occupational therapy)

www.otausvic.com.au

Office for Children

www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Office for Disability, Department of Planning and Community Development

www.dpcd.vic.gov.au

Parenting Research Centre

www.parentingrc.org.au

Playgroup Victoria

www.playgroup.org.au

Program for Students with Disabilities

www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/index.htm

Raising Children Network

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Relationships Australia

www.relationships.com.au

Royal Children's Hospital

www.rch.org.au

Siblings (SiBs)

www.sibs.org.au

Speech Pathology Australia

www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association

www.vaeai.org.au

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

www.vahs.org.au

Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG)

www.vicseg.com.au

WIRE - Women's Information

www.wire.org.au

Information updates

If you are not already a member of our Association you might like to consider joining.

Membership is FREE for families for the first 12 months.

Benefits of membership include our member magazine NoticeBoard which includes family stories, news and information about services and changes to government policy.

When you join our Association, you also get free membership to the Australian Association for Families of Children with a Disability (AAFCD), a national organisation that advocates on behalf of families of children with a disability.

We encourage families to join our Association as well as other disability self-help groups. Our aim is to work together on issues that reach across all disabilities.

Service providers, organisations, interested persons and other community supporters are also encouraged to join our Association.

In addition to membership, we also welcome donations. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

You can join or donate online at www.acd.org.au or contact the Association office on 03 9818 2000, 1800 654 013 (rural callers) or by email mail@acd.org.au.

Language interpreters

If you need a language interpreter to access our service, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50.

Tell the operator your preferred language and that you want to speak to the Association for Children with a Disability on 03 9818 2000. This is a free service.





"Our Association draws its strength from parents from all walks of life, across all types of disability and every part of Victoria."



Association for Children with a Disability
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