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Our early childhood approach is about supporting you and your child's needs.

There are many different types of supports available, starting with providing you with information, connections to mainstream and community services, and receiving support from early childhood professionals. These could include early childhood teachers, educators, or allied health professionals.

You can also get support and advice from our early childhood partners.

Your child doesn't need a diagnosis to get these supports. We call these supports [early connections](#).

Our early childhood partners will connect you to the services that best meet the needs of your child. For some children younger than 6 with developmental concerns, this may include connection to early supports.

For some children younger than 6 with developmental delay or younger than 9 with a disability, it may help to apply to the NDIS.

If your child meets the eligibility requirements and becomes a participant, our early childhood partners will help you and your child with your NDIS plan.

Our early childhood approach also includes community capacity building. This means we work with community and mainstream services, like childcare, to increase their awareness and ability to support children with delays in their development or with disability.

We focus on this because early childhood education and the opportunity to interact with other children is a critical factor in child development and wellbeing.

What do we mean by early connections?

Early connections are for children younger than 9 and their families. It's all about giving quick access to supports that meet your child's needs.

Early connections can help you support your child's development regardless of whether they're eligible for the NDIS.

Your early childhood partner will talk with you about the different ways you and your child can receive early connections.

This might include:

- understanding the goals you have for your child

- connecting you with activities in your local community such as playgroups and parent support groups
- connecting you with mainstream services including health services such as a child health nurse, community health, and education settings such as childcare or preschool
- connections to practical information to help you understand your child's development and their needs
- connections with other families for peer support
- connections to early supports, to build capacity in you and your child to promote everyday learning, if your child is younger than 6 and has developmental concerns
- help to apply to the NDIS, if you want to on your child's behalf.

An [early childhood partner](#) provides these early connections with the funding we give them. They complement what is already available in your local area through [mainstream services](#) such as health and education.

Early connections are available to you without the need for a diagnosis or confirmed developmental delay.

Learn more about [early connections](#).

Example

Noah is 3 and lives with his parents, Leanne and John, and his sister. He goes to childcare 3 days a week. Leanne and John are concerned about Noah's speech and his emotional regulation. The childcare centre also reports that Noah is regularly yelling and hitting out at other children.

During a recent visit, their paediatrician noted some delays in Noah's language and communication skills. These delays could be affecting his behaviour. She suggested that Leanne and John contact an early childhood partner in their local area for support.

Leanne, John, and Noah meet with an early childhood partner at their home. The early childhood partner reviews the paediatrician report and observes Noah. The early childhood partner discusses Leanne and John's developmental concerns and their goals for Noah's development.

Leanne explains they would like Noah's speech to improve, so people can better understand him. They would also like support to help Noah with his behaviour and emotional regulation at home and at childcare.

The early childhood partner observes Noah during his everyday routines and activities at home and childcare to get a clear understanding of Noah's interactions with others and the support he needs. The early childhood partner identifies Noah has developmental concerns. Noah and his family are offered a short period of early supports.

The early childhood partner helps Noah's family and childcare staff apply strategies in the home and childcare centre to improve Noah's language, communication skills and emotional regulation. After a few months, Noah's communication skills and behaviour are better. Leanne and John also start going to a parent support group at a local community centre and have developed friendships with other parents in the support group.

Towards the end of the period of early supports, childcare staff report Noah's interactions with other children have improved. He takes part more positively in the childcare program. Noah's family and childcare staff feel more confident to support his ongoing learning and development.

The early childhood partner repeats their observations and confirms with the family that noticeable progress was made. Noah and his family no longer require early supports; however, Leanne and John know they can connect back with the early childhood partner if needed.

The program of early support delivered by the early childhood partner and their connection to the parent support group has supported Noah and his family, without Noah needing access to the NDIS as a participant.

What happens if my child becomes an NDIS participant

Children who have met the eligibility requirements and become a participant will then receive a plan that sets out their NDIS supports. NDIS supports are the services, items, and equipment the NDIS can fund.

You can read more about NDIS plans in [Our Guidelines - Creating your plan](#) and [Our Guidelines - Your plan](#).

We'll regularly check-in to understand your child's progress. This will also include talking about transitions that will happen throughout your child's early years. Whether that is to either:

- leave the NDIS and maintain connections with mainstream and community services
- continue receiving supports through a local area coordinator or planner when your child turns 9.

Example

6-month-old Kim was diagnosed with Down syndrome in the week following her birth. Kim spent the first few months of her life in hospital with health complications associated with her disability.

During this time her paediatrician and hospital's allied health team helped with feeding supports. After talking with Kim's parents, the paediatrician refers Kim to an early childhood partner. The referral includes a copy of Kim's diagnosis and discharge reports from the hospital allied health team.

Kim's parents, Chau, and Steve, meet with the early childhood partner and explain they feel overwhelmed by Kim's diagnosis. They report the hospital physiotherapist showed them how to support Kim during tummy time on the floor.

As she has progressed since then, they would like more ideas. Due to Kim's time in hospital, Chau and Steve missed the parents' groups run by the child health centre. They want Kim to interact with other children but are unsure where to take her.

Through the early childhood partner, Chau and Steve connect to a local parent support group, library story time sessions and playgroups. The early childhood partner also helps Chau and Steve apply to the NDIS, ensuring all supporting evidence, such as diagnosis and hospital discharge reports, is included in their application.

Kim's access to the NDIS is approved as she meets early intervention requirements. An NDIS plan is then developed for Kim and her family. The early childhood partner helps Chau and Steve understand how to use the funding in Kim's plan to buy NDIS supports. They show Chau and Steve further information on [Working with providers](#) from the NDIS website.

Kim's early childhood partner checks in with Chau and Steve to see how Kim's plan is going. Chau and Steve are feeling better equipped to support Kim.