

Early connections

This factsheet explains:

- what early connections are
- how to get early connections
- how early connections work
- types of early connections, including early supports.

What are early connections?

The NDIS can support children younger than 9 and their families, even if your child isn't an NDIS participant. If your child has a disability, or you have concerns about your child's development, we can connect you to information and supports to build your skills and capacity. We call this early connections.

Your child doesn't need a diagnosis to receive early connections.

If your child is 9 or older, we can provide community connections instead. Read more about [community connections](#) on the NDIS website.

Early connections can include:

- receiving practical information about your child's development
- support to find mainstream and community services near you
- connections to families with similar experiences
- early supports for children younger than 6 with developmental concerns
- information and support to apply to the NDIS for your child.

There are different ways we can support you through early connections. You can choose one type of support, or a combination of supports. The choice is yours.

You don't need to be eligible for the NDIS to receive early connections. And you don't need to have received early connections to apply to the NDIS.

Early connections give you quick access to supports that can:

- meet your child's needs
- support your child's development
- help you and other people to support your child
- support your child to participate in daily life.

For more information, you can read [Our Guideline – Early connections](#). You can also learn more about our [early childhood approach](#) on the NDIS website.

How do you get early connections?

If you have concerns about your child's development, we recommend talking to your GP, child health nurse, health services, or early childhood educator. They can help you decide if early connections are right for you and refer you to an early childhood partner.

You can also contact the NDIS or an early childhood partner directly:

- visit the [office location](#) page on the NDIS website
- call us on 1800 800 110, or
- email enquiries@ndis.gov.au.

How do early connections work?

Early connections are delivered by [early childhood partners](#). They have experience and expertise in working with young children with developmental concerns, developmental delay or disability, and their families.

Your early childhood partner will work with you to gather information about your child. They can gather information from:

- your referral to the early childhood partner
- talking to you and your child's current support networks
- observing your child play and connect with others
- reports from doctors, therapists or educators
- assessment tools.

Your early childhood partner will use this information to make recommendations about the best types of supports.

Early connections is personalised to your family and child's needs and situation. You could receive early connections for a very short time, or for several months.

Types of early connections

Connections to information relevant to you

Your early childhood partner can help you find practical information about your situation. This could include practical advice about typical child development topics, like communication, behaviour and play. Or they might discuss helpful strategies you can include in your daily routine.

Connections to mainstream and community supports

[Mainstream supports](#) are the supports you can get from other government-funded services, like health, education and family support services.

[Community supports](#) are services available through community organisations, like playgroups, or social groups, not-for-profit organisations, or local councils.

Community and mainstream supports can be used by all Australians, including people with disability.

Your early childhood partner can suggest mainstream and community supports near you. They can explain what these supports are responsible for, and what reasonable adjustments you can ask for to make them accessible.

Connections to other families for peer support

Your early childhood partner can help connect you to families in your community who have similar situations or experiences. This could be one-on-one or in groups.

Peer support can help you learn from other families' experiences, share practical information and build your support networks.

Early supports

If your child is younger than 6 with developmental concerns, your early childhood partner might recommend early supports. Early supports is a type of [early connections](#). Your child doesn't need to be an NDIS participant to receive early supports, and there is no cost to families.

Early supports are short-term supports – usually 3 to 6 months, and up to 12 months.

Early supports:

- are focused on helping you support your child's development
- help your child participate in daily activities in their community
- are specific to the needs of your child and your family
- work together with your child's mainstream and community supports to build your child's capacity
- promote learning in everyday settings, like your home and your child's daycare or preschool.

If your early childhood partner recommends early supports, they'll work with you to:

- develop goals that are important to your child and family
- pursue the goals you set
- build on your child's strengths
- build on the capability of the important people in your child's life, including your community and mainstream supports
- provide strategies to support your child's inclusion and participation
- identify who in your child's life will provide the supports
- determine where the supports will happen
- understand when early supports are likely to end
- plan for what happens after early supports.

This information is documented in an early supports plan. We can also update this plan if we need to. For example, if your goals for your child change while you're receiving early supports, we can add new goals in the plan.

We'll give you a copy of the early supports plan. You may decide to share your child's early support plan with other important people in your child's life.

Learn more about [early supports](#) on the NDIS website.

Support to apply to the NDIS

While you are being supported with early connections, you may decide to apply to the NDIS on behalf of your child. Your early childhood partner can support you to apply.

If you apply to the NDIS and your child becomes a participant, they'll have an NDIS plan. Like an early supports plan, an NDIS plan will include goals and a record of their community and mainstream supports.

Learn more about [creating your plan](#).

Your early childhood partner will help you understand if your child is likely to be eligible for the NDIS. They'll explain what information and evidence you'll need to give us when you apply. Find out more about [applying to the NDIS](#) on the NDIS website.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

ndis.gov.au

Telephone 1800 800 110

Webchat ndis.gov.au

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For First Nations Connect

Telephone: 1800 411 640

For people who need help with English

TIS: 131 450

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing

TTY: 1800 555 677

Voice relay: 1800 555 727

National Relay Service: accesshub.gov.au

DA0849 Early connections factsheet – June 2024