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Early childhood approach

Quick summary

The NDIS nationally consistent early childhood approach is about giving your child the best possible start in life. It's for children younger than 6 with delays in their development, or younger than 9 with disability.

Early childhood intervention is an important part of the early childhood approach. This is the support provided for families of children younger than 9, with delays in their development or disability. It helps families to support their child to build the skills they need to take part in everyday life and improve long term outcomes. Early childhood intervention is described in the [National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention](#) (the Framework).

The early childhood approach helps children and their families get the right early childhood intervention at the right time. Your child doesn't need a diagnosis to get support. This can include support through [early connections](#) and depending on your child's needs, it might also include becoming an NDIS participant.

We call early childhood intervention provided by early childhood partners 'Early Supports'. Early Supports are short term supports for children with [developmental concerns](#), and their families. Your child doesn't need to be an NDIS participant to get Early Supports.

We call early childhood intervention funded in a NDIS plan for participants younger than 9 'early childhood intervention supports'. To learn more, go to [NDIS supports](#).

When we say 'you', we mean anyone responsible for the care of a child. You may be a parent, carer, or legal representative.

When we say 'child', we mean children younger than 9.

When we say 'we', or 'our', we mean the NDIA or an early childhood partner.

What's on this page?

This page covers:

- [What is the early childhood approach?](#)
- [Early childhood intervention](#)
- [Who supports children and families through the early childhood approach?](#)
- [Who can access our early childhood approach?](#)
- [How do we work with young children and their families?](#)
- [What do we mean by NDIS supports?](#)
- [What information helps us understand the NDIS supports your child needs?](#)
- [How do we decide early childhood intervention supports?](#)
- [What are evidence-based early childhood intervention supports?](#)
- [Who can provide NDIS early childhood intervention supports?](#)
- [How do early childhood intervention professionals support you and your child?](#)
- [How do you use your child's NDIS plan?](#)
- [Will the early childhood intervention supports in my child's NDIS plan reduce over time?](#)
- [Will my child's eligibility for the NDIS change over time?](#)
- [What if you don't agree with a decision we make?](#)

You might also be interested in:

- [Early connections](#)
- [Applying to the NDIS](#)
- [Therapy supports](#)
- [Leaving the NDIS](#)

Early Years Strategy

The vision for all Australian children as set out in the national [Early Years Strategy 2024-2034](#) is that all children in Australia thrive in their early years. We know that giving children the right opportunities to thrive and develop in their early years impacts their development and wellbeing in later life. This is especially important for children with delays in their development or disability. The NDIS early childhood approach supports the national Early Years Strategy.

What is the early childhood approach?

The early childhood approach is the way we support children younger than 9 with delays in their development or disability, and their family. This guideline has been developed to support you to understand the early childhood approach.

The early childhood approach is informed by the principles in the [Framework](#).

The principles in the Framework tell us that early childhood intervention supports and services should be:

- rights based
- relationships based
- ecologically based
- strengths based and outcomes focused
- evidence informed

- child and family centred
- culturally safe and diversity affirming
- focused on supporting participation, teamwork and community
- delivered in everyday settings.

These principles help guide us during all interactions we have with you. The early childhood approach is all about making sure children:

- get the right support as early as possible so they can thrive
- are supported to learn and develop as they go about their everyday activities such as when they are at home, at childcare, or the playground
- are included in everyday activities in their home and community
- and their family get the support they need for their wellbeing.

Early childhood intervention

A focus of the NDIS early childhood approach is early childhood intervention.

Early childhood intervention is all about your child getting support early to develop the skills they need to take part in everyday activities and participate in everyday life. It focuses on supporting you and other adults in your child's life, like educators and grandparents, to feel confident to help your child's development. This means working with you to develop strategies you can use as your child goes about their daily life, like when you are at home, or in the community. Getting early childhood intervention when a child is young improves long term outcomes and usually means a child needs less support later.

The [Framework](#) should be used by NDIS early childhood intervention professionals when they deliver supports to children and families. There are [resources for families and carers](#) within the Framework that can help you understand and use its principles.

Early childhood intervention can be funded in different ways. For example, through a community health centre, the early childhood partner or as an NDIS support.

Who supports children and families through the early childhood approach?

[Early childhood partners](#) are local organisations we fund in many areas of Australia. They have teams of professionals with experience and clinical expertise in working with young children with delays in their development or disability. Early childhood partners focus on giving you support, and connecting you to the right support, based on what your child and family need. This includes supporting families of NDIS participants to implement their child's NDIS plan.

You can search for an [early childhood partner](#) near you. You can also find information about [connecting with an early childhood partner](#) in your area.

We also help you get the support your child needs if they are a participant of the NDIS. This includes working with you to develop your child's NDIS plan and making changes to their plan if required during plan reassessments.

NDIS providers deliver NDIS early childhood intervention supports for you and your child, if your child is an NDIS participant. There are NDIS providers who provide other supports that you can access depending on your child's individual needs and funding in their NDIS plan.

What if there are no early childhood partners in your area?

If you live in an area that doesn't have an early childhood partner, and you have concerns about your child's development or disability, you should first speak with your doctor, child health nurse, early childhood educator or other health professional.

The NDIS can also help you make early connections. You can [contact the NDIA](#) or call 1800 800 110.

Who can access our early childhood approach?

If your child is younger than 9 and you have concerns about their development, or they have a disability, contact an [early childhood partner or NDIA](#). Usually, you would have already discussed this with your doctor, child health nurse, or other treating professional. Your child doesn't need a diagnosis from a medical professional to get support through the early childhood approach.

How do we work with young children and their families?

There are many different ways the early childhood approach can support you and your child.

We'll work with you to learn about your child's needs and help you to get the right support and early childhood intervention so you can best support your child.

This might include things like:

- giving you information about, and referrals to, other services that can help support your child and family. For example, support groups where you can meet other people with similar experiences
- working with you to increase your confidence and skills to support your child to develop their skills to do everyday activities
- supporting you to increase your child's inclusion and participation in mainstream and community settings, like playgroup, childcare or preschool
- working with you and your child to develop an NDIS plan which supports your child and your family, if your child is eligible to receive NDIS funding.

Early connections

This support is based on your child and family's individual needs and it can include a connection to:

- **Mainstream and community services** – this can include childcare, preschool, playgroups, schools, health services, community health centres and family support services.
- **Practical information that's relevant to your child's development** – this can include practical advice on typical child development topics, and helpful strategies you can include in your child's daily routine.
- **Other families for peer support** – this can include local support networks to meet other people with similar experiences to share stories and build your confidence.
- **Early supports** – is a program of early childhood intervention for children younger than 6 with [developmental concerns](#). This is provided by an early childhood partner, is goal focused, and designed to help you and your child build capacity in your everyday settings. Early supports follows the best practice principles outlined in the [Framework](#). This program will usually be 3 to 6 months, or up to a maximum of 12 months, where required.

Support from early connections may be all that you and your child needs through the early childhood approach. When you finish early connections your child and family can keep getting support from community and mainstream services.

If there is evidence that your child has an impairment that is or is likely to be permanent, or is younger than 6 and has developmental delay, they may be eligible for the NDIS. You may decide to apply to the NDIS on behalf of your child. Early childhood partners or NDIA staff can help you to apply.

Learn more about [early connections](#).

Applying to the NDIS

Many children can be supported without needing to apply to the NDIS. Some children may need NDIS funded supports in addition to receiving community and mainstream supports. If your child needs NDIS funded supports, you will need to apply for them to become an NDIS participant.

To be eligible for the NDIS, your child will need to meet the [eligibility requirements](#). They will first need to meet the age and residence requirements. They'll then need to meet the requirements for disability or early intervention.

Learn more about [applying to the NDIS](#).

Creating your child's plan

If your child is eligible for the NDIS, they'll become an NDIS participant. We will work with you to create your child's NDIS plan. This will include your community and mainstream supports. It will also include the goals you have for your child and funding for NDIS supports.

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

What do we mean by NDIS supports?

[NDIS supports](#) are the services, items, and equipment that can be funded by the NDIS. Participants are only able to use their NDIS funds for items listed as NDIS supports. There is also a list of things NDIS funds cannot be used for. In some circumstances, participants may be able to ask for an NDIS support to be replaced with certain non-NDIS supports. These are called replacement supports.

The NDIS supports lists are:

- [Supports that are NDIS supports](#).
- [Supports that are not NDIS supports](#).
- [Replacement supports list](#).

If your child is an NDIS participant, their NDIS plan will include **early intervention supports for early childhood**. We call this **early childhood intervention supports**.

Early childhood intervention supports are **evidence-based** supports to help you support your child to build the skills they need to take part in everyday life.

Your child's plan may include other NDIS supports if they meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#). This will depend on a child's individual needs and could be NDIS supports like [assistive technology and consumables](#), [behaviour support](#), or [disability related health supports](#).

What information helps us understand the NDIS supports your child needs?

At different stages we'll work with you to gather information to help us understand your child's support needs.

This includes:

- [information from parents, carers and family members](#)
- [assessments or information from your early childhood partner](#)
- [reports from professionals](#).

Information from parents, carers and family

Families know their child best and are responsible for their care and development, so we want to learn from you. We want to find out about your child's everyday activities, and to understand what they do at home, in the community, and at childcare or school. This helps us work out what's going well for your child, any concerns you have about your child's development and consider the support your child and your family might need.

The goals you have for your child are an important part of a child's NDIS plan.