



Department of Communities Understanding the NDIS

Early Childhood Approach and Early Connections

[ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au) | July 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country on which we meet today, and their continuing connection to land, sea, and community. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I would like to extend that acknowledgement and respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

How do we work with young children and their families?

Our early childhood approach is how we support children younger than 9 and their families.

The early childhood approach helps children younger than 6 with developmental delay or children younger than 9 with disability and their families, to access the right support when they need it.

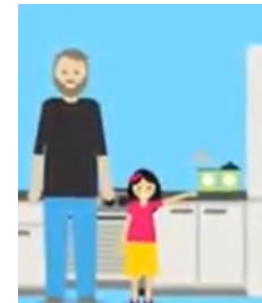
Children younger than 6 do not need a diagnosis to get support through the early childhood approach where there are concerns about their development.



Early childhood intervention

Early childhood intervention is all about giving supports to children with delays in their development or with a disability to enable the child to have the best possible start in life. Through early childhood intervention, infants and young children as well as their families, can get specialised supports and services. These services aim to promote the:

- child's development
- family and child's wellbeing
- the child's community participation.



What is an early childhood partner?

Early childhood partners are an important part of the early childhood approach.

Early childhood partners are local organisations we fund to help deliver the early childhood approach.

Our early childhood partners include teams of professionals with experience and clinical expertise in working with young children with development delay or disability and their families.

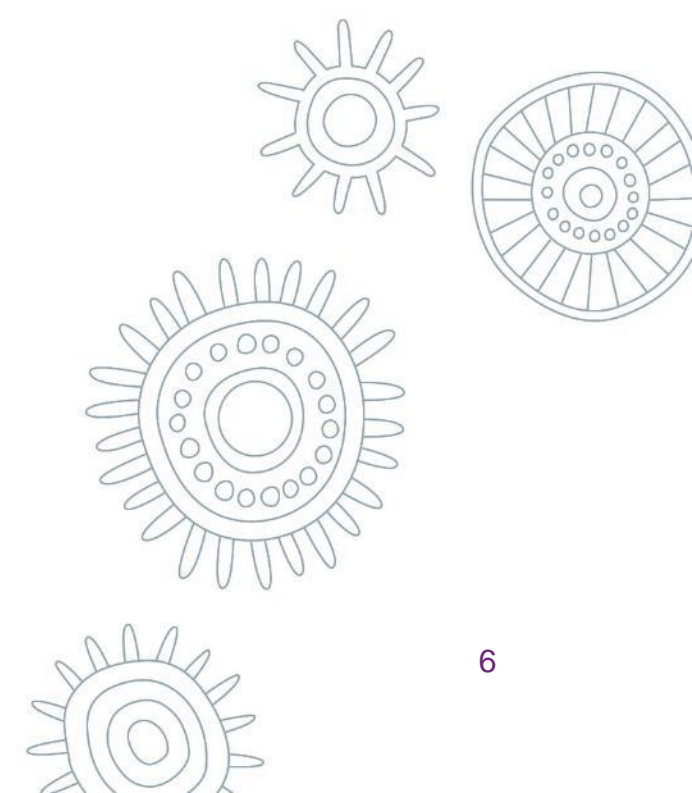


What happens if there are no early childhood partners in your area?

In some areas, we don't have early childhood partners to deliver our early childhood approach.

Where partners are not available, families can speak with their doctor, child health nurse, early childhood educator or other health professional.

They can also contact the NDIA online at [Contact Us](#), visit their nearest NDIA office or call 1800 800 110.



Local Community Connectors

- WA Pilot Project in remote and non-partnered areas across WA
- All people aged 0-64 years old with disability
- Support with:
 - Community Connections
 - Applying to the NDIS
 - Using your NDIS Plan



Local Community Connectors

Remote

Halls Creek

Fitzroy Crossing

Derby

Marra Worra Worra

Broome

Karratha

Non-Partnered

Geraldton

Kalgoorlie

Esperance



Getting started

If a family or carer has concerns about their child's development their first point of contact is usually a:

- doctor
- child health nurse
- early childhood educator
- other health professional.

They are a good first point of contact if families or carers have concerns about their child's development and can refer them to an early childhood partner.

Developmental concerns

When we talk about developmental concerns, we mean delays in a child's development that don't fully meet the NDIS definition of developmental delay.

These delays may impact the everyday activities the child can do when compared with children of the same age.

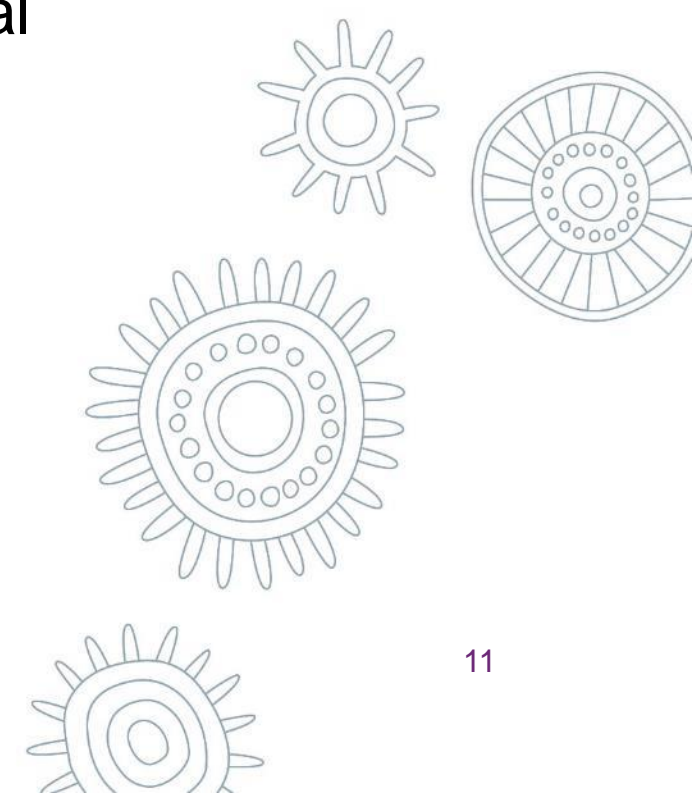
Children younger than 6 with developmental concerns may be best supported by an early childhood partner rather than applying to the NDIS.



Developmental delay 1/2

The NDIS may consider that a child has a developmental delay when the child:

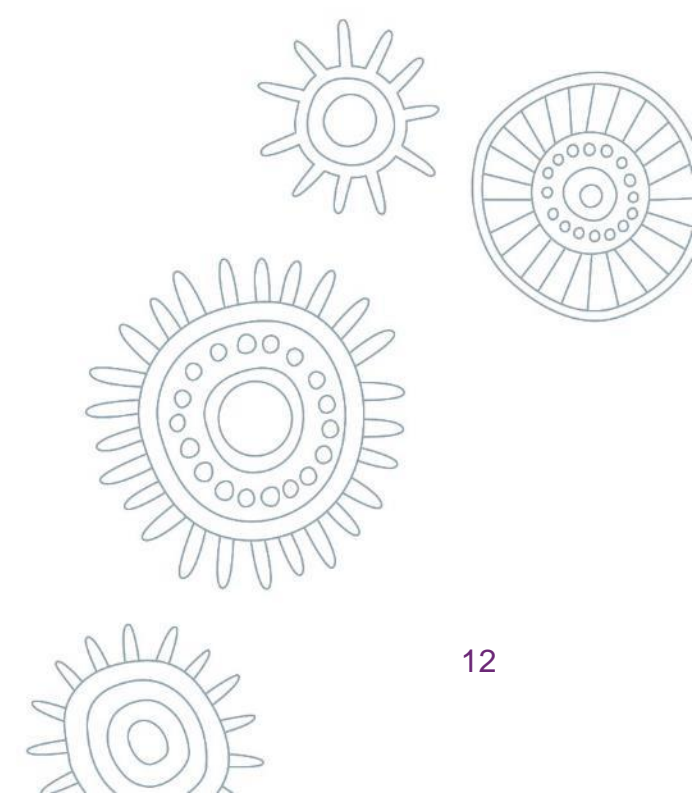
- is younger than 6 years of age **and**
- has a delay that results in substantial reduction in functional capacity. **and**
- requires support for more than 12 months from a team of professionals who work collaboratively.



Substantial reduction in functional capacity 1/21/2

When we talk about substantial reduction in functional capacity, the NDIS may consider that a child has a developmental delay when they have a substantial reduction in functional capacity in one or more of the following areas of major life activity

- Self care
- Receptive and expressive language
- Cognitive development
- Motor development



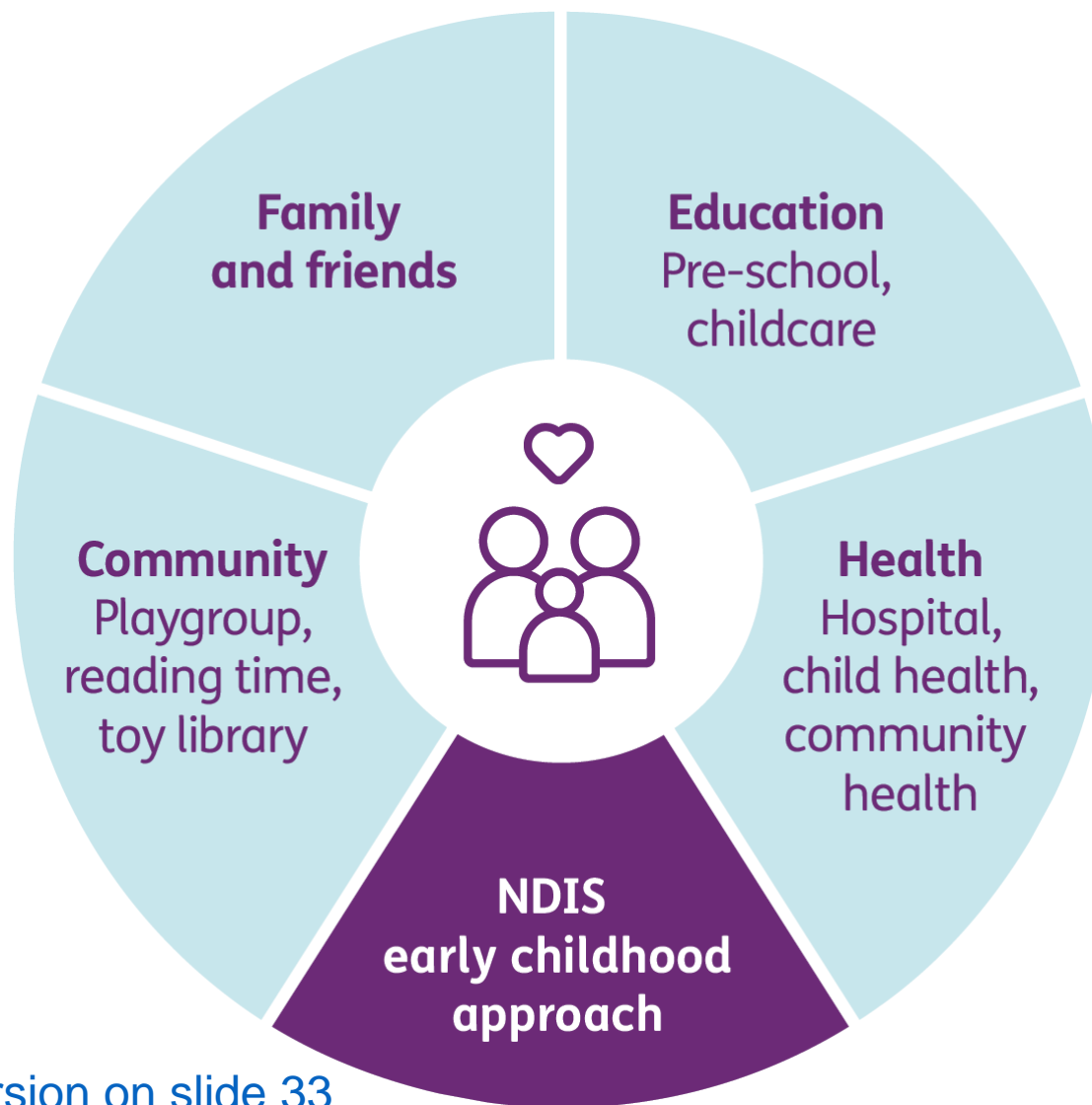
Disability

When we talk about a child with a disability, we mean that they have an impairment that's likely to be permanent. The impairment could be intellectual, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical.

You can find out more about the disabilities for which a child might become a participant of the NDIS for in our Operational Guideline – [Applying to the NDIS](#)



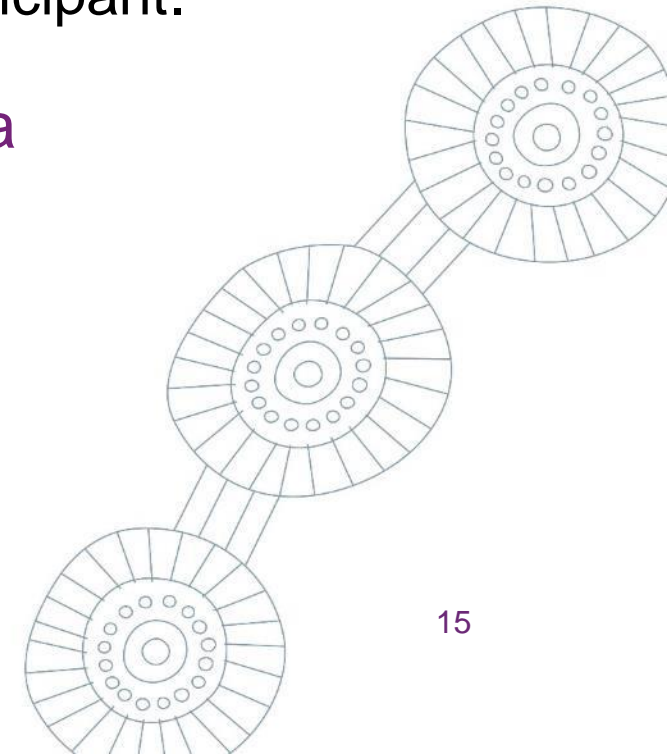
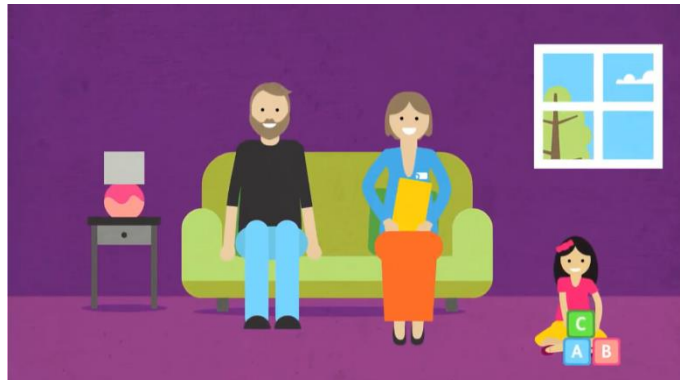
The early childhood approach/2



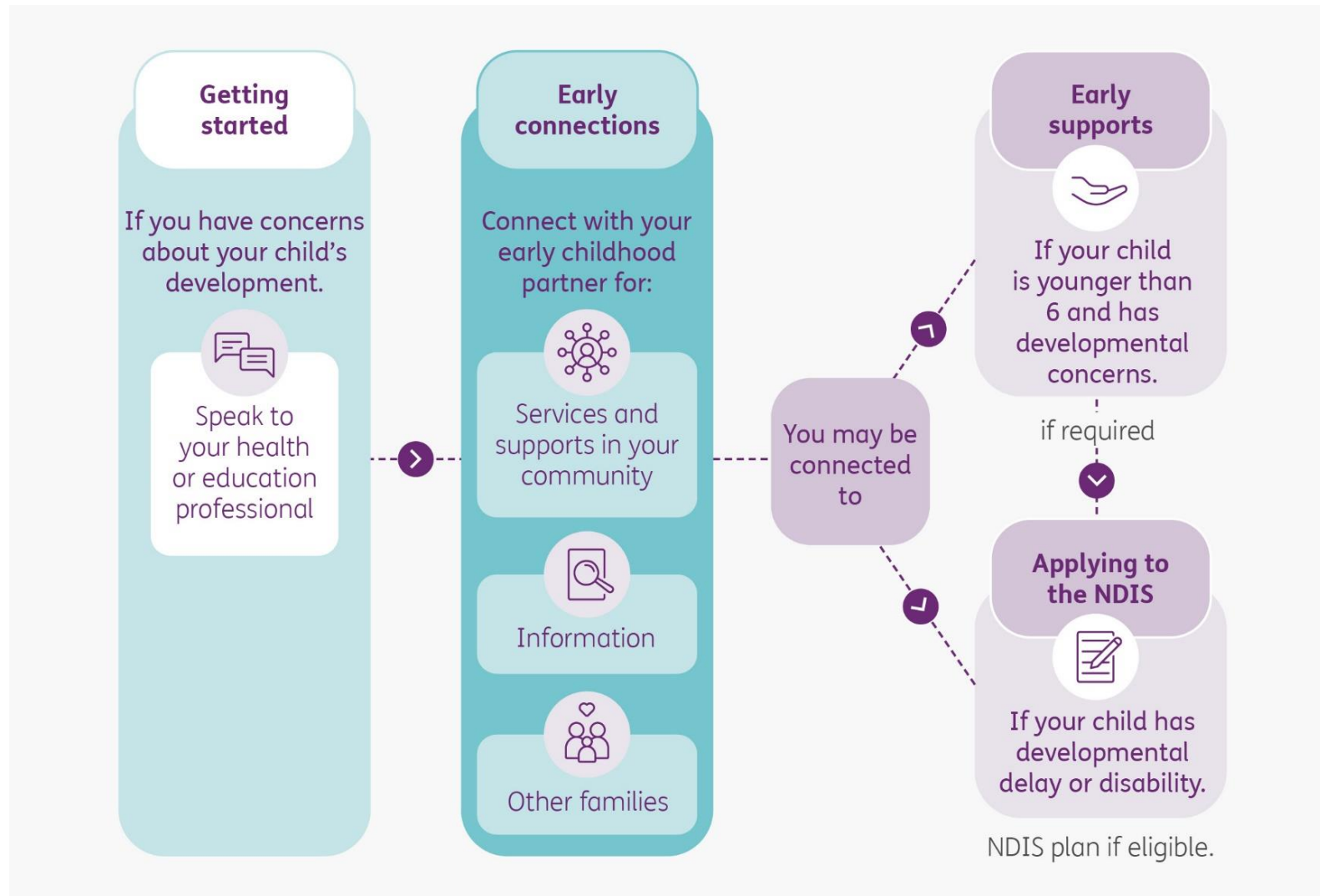
What do we mean by early connections?

Early connections are for children younger than 9 who have delays in their development or disability.

- Early connections can help families support their child's development regardless of whether the child is eligible to become a NDIS participant.
- Early connections are available to families living in Australia regardless of their citizenship or visa status.



Early connections part 2

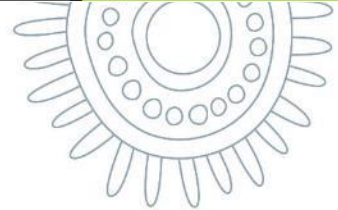


What is the aim of early connections?

- Early connections aim to build on families, carers and children's strengths.
- Through the rights supports and services, early connections can help families support their children to develop the skills they need to take part in everyday activities.
- Supports and services are different for every child because they're based on individual needs.
- Early childhood partners apply best-practice principles to early childhood intervention when delivering early connections, in line with the National Guidelines on Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention.

How do you get early connections?

We fund early childhood partners to deliver the early childhood approach, which includes early connections.



What happens next?

Once a parent or carer has made initial contact, or a referral has been made, an early childhood partner will contact the parent or carer to discuss what to do next.

- Using observations and assessments, early childhood partners learn about a child's development and find out how the child does everyday things.
- Early childhood partners apply their knowledge and skills to make recommendations about the supports the child and family might need.



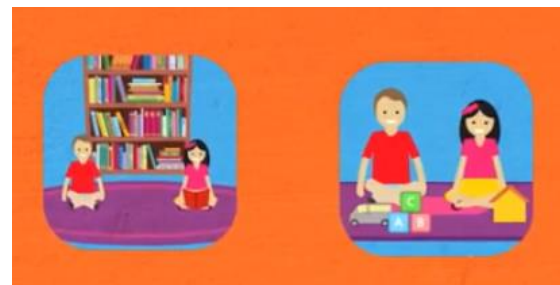
Ways early childhood partners collect information

- Information from parents or carers.
- Reports about the child.
- Using assessment tools.
- Observations.



What types of early connections are available?

- Connections with mainstream and community supports.
- Connections to practical information that is relevant to the child's development.
- Connections with other families.
- Connections with early supports.
- Connections to apply to the NDIS.



Connections with mainstream and community services

- Early childhood education and care services such as childcare or preschool
- Schools
- Health services, such as a paediatrician or child health nurses
- Community health services such as dietetics or child mental health services
- Family support services such as parenting support groups and counselling services.

Connections to practical information

Early childhood partners can give parents and carers practical information that's relevant to their child's situation.

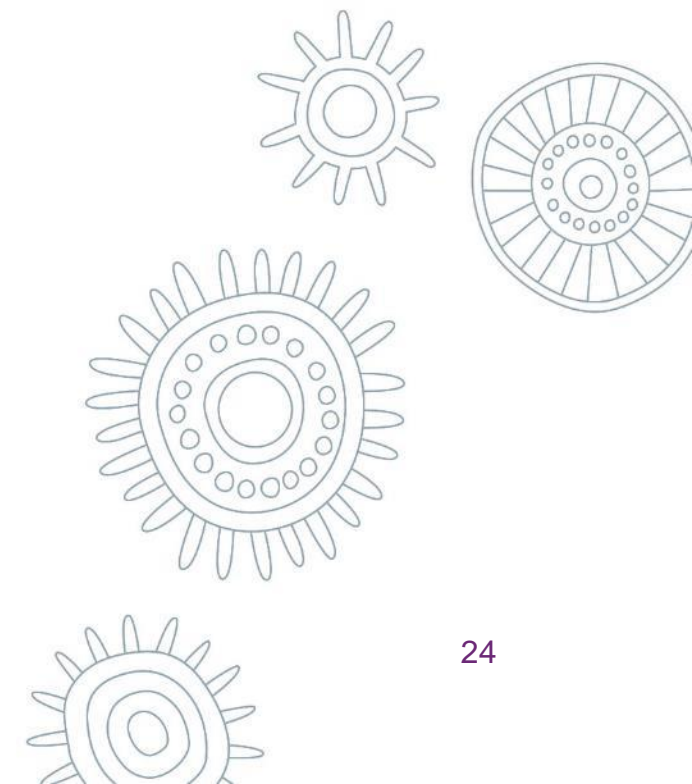
Typical child development topics include:

- best practice in early childhood intervention
- play
- communication
- behaviour.



Connections with other families for peer support

- Early childhood partners may connect a family with local support networks and services so they can meet other people with similar experiences or situations.
- Peer support can help families to learn from one another and share experiences.



Connections with early supports 1/2

An early childhood partner may recommend early supports if a child is younger than 6 and has [developmental concerns](#).

- Early supports is designed to build capacity of parents, carers and children to promote everyday learning in the home and other environments such as childcare.
- An early childhood partner will work with parents and carers to plan and deliver supports that will address their child's specific needs using a goal focussed approach.
- Early supports is time limited, usually 3 to 6 months, or up to a maximum of 12 months where required.



What is provided in early supports?

Early supports can be provided in individual or group settings and may include:

- Parent workshops.
- Building the capacity of mainstream services such as childcare.
- Strategies to help a child build their skills in everyday routines.
- Support to help parents and carers use strategies in their everyday routines.
- Support to parents and carers and mainstream services so they can best help a child through transitions.

Connection to apply to the NDIS

- The early childhood partner can support a parent or carer to gather the information and evidence to apply to the NDIS. This includes evidence of a child's functional capacity.
- Information gathered from early connections may be used to help create a child's NDIS plan if they become an NDIS participant.



What happens after early connections?

- Support from early connections could be short or for several months.
- Early connections aim to increase a family's capacity and confidence to support their child's needs.
- After a child moves on from early connections, a parent or carer can reconnect with an early childhood partner at any time in the future as long as their child is younger than 9.



Case Study – 3-year-old Khalid

- Khalid attends his local preschool.
- Khalid's mother is concerned about Khalid's speech. She also finds it difficult to manage his behaviour at home.
- Khalid sometimes has trouble understanding what his preschool teachers are asking him to do. He finds it hard to share toys with other children or transition to new activities at preschool.
- Fatima seeks advice from her GP who refers her to an early childhood partner.
- The early childhood partner meets with Fatima and Khalid at home. They discuss Fatima's concerns, and the early childhood partner observes and assesses Khalid playing. They also observe Khalid at preschool and notice that his behaviour stems from frustration and not knowing what is expected of him.

Case Study – 3-year-old Khalid 2/2

- The early childhood partner recommends Khalid receives early supports to address the developmental concerns.
- These early supports are provided by the early childhood partner at Khalid's home and preschool.
- Fatima and Khalid also attend an 8-week social skills group run by their early childhood partner.
- After a couple of months, Khalid's speech, behaviour and understanding of instructions continue to improve.
- Khalid and Fatima no longer require early supports. Fatima knows she can connect back with the early childhood partner if she needs to.

Case study – 3 year old Noah 1/3

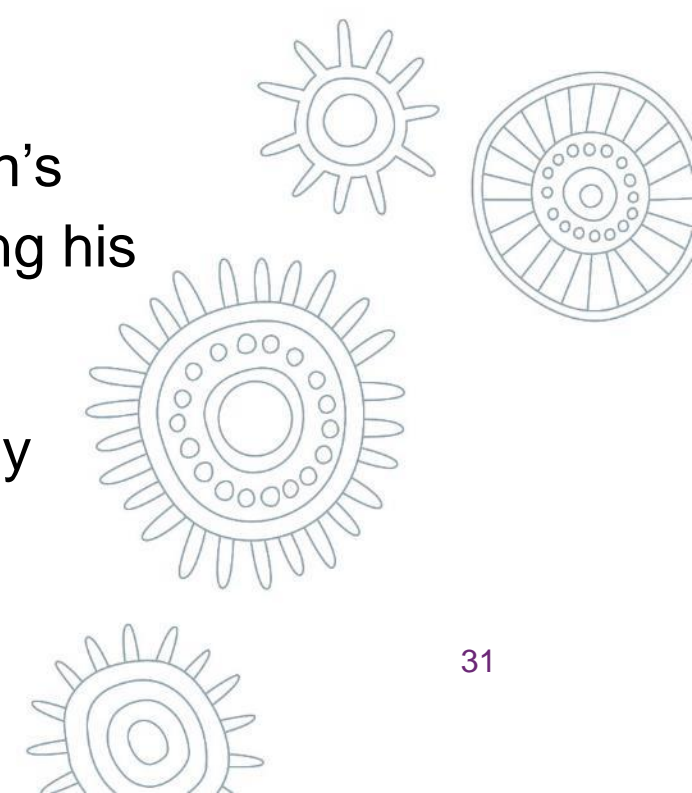
Noah attends childcare 3 days a week.

His parents, Leanne and John are concerned about Noah's speech and his emotional regulation.

The childcare centre report that Noah is regularly yelling and hitting 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.

The paediatrician suggested that Leanne and John contact an early childhood partner in their local area for support.



Case study – 3 year old Noah 2/3

Leanne, John and Noah meet with an early childhood partner where Noah's parents discuss their concerns and goals for Noah.

The early childhood partner observes Noah's everyday routines and activities at home and at preschool. This helps the early childhood partner get a clear understanding of Noah's interactions with others and the type of support he requires.

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

The early childhood partner works with Noah's parents and the childcare staff to apply strategies to improve Noah's language, communication skills and emotional regulation.

Case study – 3 year old Noah 3/3

After a few months, Noah's communication skills and behaviour at home and preschool have improved. This is also confirmed by the early childhood partner following repeat assessment and observations. Noah is now taking part more positively in the childcare program and his family and childcare staff feel more confident to support Noah's ongoing learning and development.

Leanne and John start going to a parent support group at a local community centre and have developed friendships with other parents in the support group.

The early childhood partner confirms Noah does not require more early intervention, Leanne and John know they can connect back with their early childhood partner if needed.

Progress, transition and changes

We will regularly check in to understand the participant's progress and eligibility. This will also include talking about transitions that will happen throughout the participant's early years.

Over time the participant will either:

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



Case Study - 3-year-old Georgia

Three-year-old Georgia and her parents were referred to an early childhood partner by a paediatrician

Georgia has significant communication, physical and social developmental delays. Georgia's family have tried various strategies

Georgia and her family met with an early childhood partner in their home where she can be observed in her natural environment and complete a screening test

Case Study - 3-year-old Georgia

The early childhood partner supported the parents to complete an Access Request Form, which was submitted to the NDIS.

Georgia became a NDIS participant. The early childhood partner supported Georgia's parents, providing them with a list of local providers who could deliver the supports funded in her NDIS plan.

Case Study – 6 month old Kim 1/22

Kim was diagnosed with Down Syndrome in the week following her birth.

She spent the first few months of her life in hospital with health complications associated with her disability. During this time her paediatrician and hospital 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.



Case Study – 6 month old Kim 2/3

Kim's parents, Chau and Steve meet with the early childhood partner and report feeling 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, Kim's parents 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 assists Chau and Steve to request access to the NDIS on behalf of Kim. All supporting evidence, including diagnosis and hospital discharge reports are included in the access request.

Case Study – 6 month old Kim 3/3

Kim's access to the Scheme is approved as she meets early intervention requirements evidenced through the diagnosis and hospital reports.

The early childhood partner works with Chau and Steve to develop an NDIS plan for Kim.

Following approval of the NDIS plan by an NDIS Delegate, the early childhood partner provides information and support for Chau and Steve to use the supports in the plan and find service providers of their choice.

Kim's early childhood partner checks in with Chau and Steve to see how Kim's plan is going. Chau and Steve report they, and Kim have regular appointments with their chosen early intervention provider. They are feeling better equipped to support Kim.

Feedback Survey




[Click survey link](#)

Helpful resources

- [Our Guidelines- Early childhood approach](#)
- [Our Guidelines- Early connections](#)
- [Our Guidelines- Applying to the NDIS](#)
- [Factsheet- Help for your child younger than 9](#)
- [Find your local early childhood partner](#)

National Disability Insurance Agency

 1800 800 110

 [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au)

 enquiries@ndis.gov.au

 Find us on Facebook/NDISAus


 Follow us on Twitter @NDIS

For people with hearing or speech loss

 TTY: 1800 555 677

 Voice Relay: 1800 555 727

For people who need help with English

 TIS: 131 450