

# Building strong families

## What is covered in this fact sheet

- [The needs of families of children and young people with disability](#)
- [Building positive support networks](#)
- [Supporting the whole family](#)
- [Managing routines and demands](#)
- [Inclusive environments and access to services](#)

## The needs of families of children and young people with disability

Families of children and young people with disability face challenges that may seem different or more complex than those faced by other families. Families may feel that their child or young person with disability needs all of their attention and time.

The wellbeing of the family as a whole has a big impact on the wellbeing and development of all children, including children and young people with disability.

Although families of children with disability may face extra challenges, they have the same core needs as all other families. These core needs are always important for families as they grow and develop, regardless of your child or young person's disability and its impact on family life.

## Building positive support networks

Raising children can be demanding, physically and emotionally. Families need to be supported themselves to be able to support their child – you can't pour from an empty cup.

Support comes in many different forms and everyone has different needs. Some examples of support include:

- Health and wellbeing support (your doctor/GP)
- Mental health support (counsellors, psychologists)
- Lived experience support or community groups (CALD community groups, LGBTQIA+ support groups, churches or places of worship)
- Online support (e.g. Facebook groups, forums, group chats, social media networks)
- Support from your friends and family

It is important to have some kind of support around you to help you. Your support network is what makes you feel good, not necessarily what works for others.

You might find it useful to connect with other families of children with disability. You might already have a strong network of your own and not feel like you need any new people around you, which is fine too! Many families do find that meeting and talking to other families who also have a child with disability provides valuable support.

## Supporting the whole family

It can be easy for families to become focused on the needs of their child with disability, but it is important not to neglect the needs of other family members, including your own needs. If there are other children in the family, they will also need attention and time, as well as opportunities to explore their own interests and friends. Family members' and other caregivers' own interests and wellbeing are also important to consider when making plans and thinking about priorities. A child with a disability is better off when the needs of all members of the family are being met.

As well as considering the needs of individual family members, it is important to think about the needs of the family as a whole. What does the family enjoy doing together at home, on weekends, or on holidays? Family activities that everyone enjoys and can join in provide a valuable opportunity for bonding and connection.

## Managing routines and demands

Families thrive when they have routines that work for them, and children thrive when they have consistent routines to support their wellbeing – regular playtime, mealtime, bath time and bedtime routines during the week, and familiar activities at weekends. Children with disability and their families are exactly the same. For some children, predictable routines are important as they can struggle with unpredictable changes in routine.

Families of children with disability often face more demands in caring for their child, plus appointments or other supports. It is important to manage these demands so they don't feel too overwhelming. Services are keen to see children make progress and may ask families to do all sorts of extra activities or exercises that add to the demands on family time. It is up to you to decide what is a reasonable amount of work for you and your family, and service providers should work with you and your needs. For a guide on what to look for in service providers, see CYDA Fact Sheet 4 on family-centred practice.

It is also important that families do not set a pace that they will not be able to continue with. When families first learn about their child's disability, they may throw themselves into efforts to support their child's development. Families need to understand their limits (what they can manage and what is too much to ask) so they can find a pace that works for everyone.

## Inclusive environments and access to services

Having local facilities (such as libraries and swimming pools) that know and accept your child is important for your and your child's wellbeing. If there are barriers to accessing local facilities, families can talk to the staff about how changes can be made.

Services such as early childhood intervention services can play important roles in the lives of children with disability and their families. They can provide emotional and practical support, and help families learn how to meet the needs of the child and family. The earlier this support is available, the better the outcomes for the child and the family.

For more information on what early childhood intervention services can offer and how they work, see the CYDA Fact Sheets on early childhood intervention services and on family-centred practice.

The content in this fact sheet was developed by Dr. Tim Moore, Senior Research Fellow, Murdoch Children's Research Institute and Manager, Research and Policy Team, Centre for Community Child Health.



Disclaimer: CYDA's In Control Our Way resources have been created to support families of children and young people with disability to self-manage their NDIS plans. Information provided is intended as a general guide and may not contain the most recent information and updates. CYDA is not responsible for decisions made by the NDIA or its partners in the community. For the most current information on the NDIS, refer to the NDIS website. These fact sheets are current as of September 2020.

View the full set of In Control Our Way resources at: [cyda.org.au/](https://cyda.org.au/)

