



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

How peer support can help

Supporting families with young children with disability and developmental concerns

An Easy Read report



How to use this report



The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) wrote this Easy Read report.

When you see the word 'we', it means DSS.



A company called *Whereto* Research Based Consulting (*Whereto*) did some research for us.

They also wrote a report.



This Easy Read report is a summary of that report.

This means it only includes the most important ideas.



We wrote this report in an easy to read way.

We use pictures to explain some ideas.

Bold
Not bold

We wrote some important words in **bold**.

This means the letters are thicker and darker.



We explain what these words mean.

There is a list of these words on page 29.



You can ask for help to read this report.
A friend, family member or support person
may be able to help you.



You can also find more information about this report
on our website.

www.dss.gov.au/EarlyChildhoodTargetedActionPlan



We recognise First Nations peoples as the
traditional owners of our land – Australia.

First Nations peoples are also known as
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

They were the first people to live on and use the:



- land



- waters.

What's in this report?

What is this research about?	5
What research did Where <i>to</i> do?	7
How peer support can help parents and carers	10
Different types of peer support	12
How well peer support works now	15
Who needs more help to find and use peer support?	17
What we learnt from Where <i>to</i> 's research	20
How can we make peer support work well?	23
Peer support to suit what people need	25
What can we do?	27
Word list	29

What is this research about?



We asked a company called *Wherefo* to do some research about **peer support** for us.



Peer support is when people use their shared experiences to:

- feel connected
- help each other.



We want to know how peer support works for families with young children with:

- disability
- **developmental concerns.**



Children with developmental concerns might not develop at the same pace as other children of the same age.

And they might need some extra help to do everyday things.



This research supports Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031.

This is a plan to support people with disability in all areas of their life.

We call it the Strategy.



The Strategy focuses on different areas.

One of those is supporting children with disability early in their lives.



As part of this, we wanted to find out more about peer support.

And how peer support can work well for all parents and carers.

What research did *Whereto* do?

Whereto looked at **data**.

Data includes:



- facts
- information
- records.



Whereto talked to parents and carers one-on-one.



They also talked to parents and carers together about their ideas.



Whereto also ran an online survey.

323 parents and carers took part in the survey.



Wheretalked to professionals.

For example, people who work for:



- early childhood organisations



- disability organisations.



This also includes research experts.

On the following pages we explain:



- what *Wherefo* found out



- how we can help make peer support better.

How peer support can help parents and carers



Wherefo found that peer support can be good for families with children with disability and developmental concerns.



They also found that more services use peer support than before.



These services use peer support to make sure families have someone to talk to.

And peer support can also help families feel less stressed.



Wherefo found that parents and carers who use peer support feel like part of the community.



And they feel more **confident** to support their child as they:

- grow
- develop.



When you are confident, you:

- believe in yourself
- know what you can do
- can try new things.



Peer support can also help families:

- learn new skills
- find information
- find and use services.

Different types of peer support



Where *to* learnt about 3 types of peer support.



There is one-on-one peer support.

This includes:

- a phone number to call
- support to find services.

There is group peer support.

This includes:



- groups to learn information and skills
- parent groups
- supported playgroups
- activities and events.



There is also online peer support.

This includes:

- websites and apps
- online groups, like Facebook.



Wheretofound that all 3 types of peer support can help parents and carers in the same way.



But every parent or carer needs different things.

This is why we need all 3 types.



They all offer:

- emotional support
- social support.

They also share:



- information and experiences



- how to find and use services.

How well peer support works now



Where to find out there are a lot of peer support programs now.



But they don't always work well together.

And they don't always work well with early childhood services.



Many parents and carers don't know about peer support.

And they don't know how peer support can help them.



Many parents and carers also don't know how to find peer support.

Or don't want to use it.



Parents and carers often think about their own needs last.



It is important that parents and carers learn about peer support from people they trust.

For example, a local organisation.

Who needs more help to find and use peer support?



At the moment, peer support works well for some people.



But it doesn't work well for everyone.

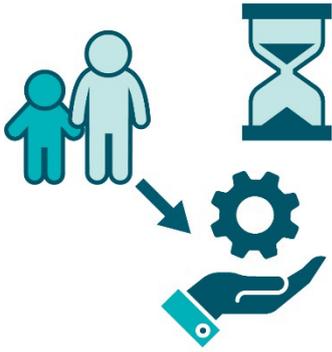


It can be hard for parents and carers to find peer support when they feel:

- lonely
- like they have no help.



It can also be harder for different groups of parents and carers.



For example, families who are:

- waiting to use services
- just starting to use services.

This includes supports from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

It's also harder for families who don't know:



- how the NDIS can support them



- their child has a disability or developmental concern.



It can also be hard for men who are fathers or carers.

And it can be hard to find and use peer support for:



- First Nations parents and carers



- **culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)** parents and carers.

CALD people:



- come from different backgrounds



- might speak languages other than English.



People who live far away from cities and towns also find it hard to take part in peer support.

What we learnt from *Whereto's* research



We learnt a lot from *Whereto's* research.



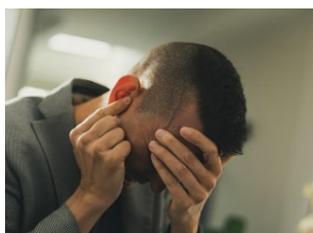
Parents and carers might need different kinds of support.

They might need help to find and use peer support.



We should make it easy for parents and carers to:

- know about peer support before they need it
- find out about peer support from other services.



Parents and carers can be very upset when they first find out their child has a:

- disability
- developmental concern.



Peer support can help them focus on the future.

Peer support can also help them:



- understand how early childhood services work
- find and use these services.

Many parents and carers start using peer support to:



- get information



- build their skills.



They don't start using peer support to talk to people about their experience.

But when they do they find it's important to share experiences with other people.



Peer support can be a safe place for parents and carers to feel welcome.

How can we make peer support work well?



Wherefo found that we can't just offer one type of peer support.



People in the same communities might want different types of peer support.



For example, some First Nations peoples said they wanted peer support from their community.



But other First Nations peoples said it was important to get peer support that is close to where they live.



We must work closely with the community to find out how they want peer support to work.



And we should work with:

- local communities
- local organisations.



It's also important to keep collecting data about how peer support works.



We need one way to do this across Australia.

Peer support to suit what people need

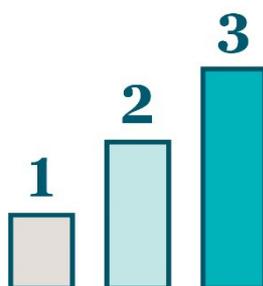


Not all families need more peer support.

But some families need a lot of peer support.



We want to help parents and carers find and use peer support that works for them.



Where to suggested 3 different levels of support.



Level 1 is for all parents and carers with children with disability and developmental concerns.



Level 2 is for the parents and carers who don't have people who support them.

They might need more support to find and use peer support.



Level 3 is for parents and carers who have bigger **barriers** to using peer support.

They might need peer support services that work with other services in their community.



A barrier is something that stops you from doing something you:

- need to do
- want to do.

What can we do?



Where to suggested different ways we can make peer support work well for all families.



We can make sure professionals who support families:

- know about peer support
- can help families find and use peer support.



We can offer peer support when families aren't getting the right support from other services.

For example, while they are waiting to start using services.



We can make sure there is good peer support across Australia, not just in some areas.



We can also make sure peer support services work with other services in their community.



And we can share more information about peer support.

For example, we could share information through TV and radio.

Word list



Barriers

A barrier is something that stops you from doing something you:

- need to do
- want to do.

Confident

When you are confident, you:

- believe in yourself
- know what you can do
- can try new things.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

CALD people:



- come from different backgrounds
- might speak languages other than English.

Data



Data includes:

- facts
- information
- records.

Developmental concerns



Children with developmental concerns might not develop at the same pace as other children of the same age.

And they might need some extra help to do everyday things.

Peer support



Peer support is when people use their shared experiences to:

- feel connected
- help each other.



This Easy Read document was created by the Information Access Group using stock photography and custom images. The images may not be reused without permission. For any enquiries about the images, please visit www.informationaccessgroup.com.

Quote job number 5065.