

## Families working together with early childhood services

### Cara's story



Cara started child care when she was three. Although she had visited her new childcare centre and the staff before her first day, she was very nervous and became very upset when it was time for her father, James, to leave for work. Staff member, Sandy, offered some help. With Sandy comforting Cara and getting her involved in drawing, James was able to leave. Two weeks later, Cara was still getting upset at drop-off time. Together, James and Sandy worked out some other ways to help Cara feel better, including bringing her teddy, and a small photo of her father to remind her of home. James would help Cara choose a lullaby to sing to her teddy on the way to child care and Sandy would sing with her when she got there. Soon, Cara did not need this routine as much when she started feeling comfortable with the childcare centre, the children and the staff.

**The child  
experiences the  
world through the  
lens of parenting.**

### Working together supports mental health and wellbeing

Children benefit when the significant people in their lives work together. The common goal is to nurture them and provide opportunities that help them reach their potential. During the early years, children are learning about their surroundings. They look to the adults in their lives to help them explore their world safely. Children learn well when they are given clear and consistent messages about what they can and cannot do. Therefore it is beneficial for parents and carers to work together with early childhood staff. Parents and carers include any people who play a significant parenting role with a child. This could include grandparents, step-parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, aunts, uncles and any other person who fulfils a significant portion of parenting and caregiving for the child. When families and early childhood staff work together with a shared understanding, children's mental health and wellbeing can be supported.

### Making connections

As children grow and learn, they share their joys of new experiences with their parents or carers. This can make parenting a very rewarding experience. However, parenting can also be challenging. Parents and carers may find it helpful to keep in touch with friends and to get to know other families. Parents and carers who have others they can turn to in both good and challenging times are better able to manage the ups and downs of parenting. Early childhood services are a good place to meet other families.

### Getting information about parenting

Sometimes, parents and carers feel they need more information to support their parenting. This can range from general information about how to support children's development to information about how to deal with concerns. Parents and carers who feel supported in their parenting role are in a better position to support their children's mental health and wellbeing.

## What early childhood services might also be doing

Services may be working with and supporting parents and carers in a number of ways by:

- ✦ Getting to know families and what values are important to them
- ✦ Arranging events that allow parents and carers to get together (e.g., breakfasts)
- ✦ Getting to know services in the community that may be useful for families
- ✦ Having conversations with families about their children's needs
- ✦ Obtaining parenting resources for parents and carers to access
- ✦ Encouraging family involvement at the service by informing them about daily activities and how they can help
- ✦ Arranging regular meetings and information sessions, with guest speakers
- ✦ Having an open-door policy where families are welcome throughout the day.

## Parents and carers can work with, and be supported by, early childhood services by:

- ▶ Having frequent face-to-face contact with staff to ask questions and discuss how your child is going at the service.
- ▶ Getting to know staff and other families at the early childhood service.
- ▶ Attending events/functions organised by the service.
- ▶ Reading parenting resources that are offered at the service.
- ▶ Taking the time to talk with other families, and also staff at pick-up and drop-off times.
- ▶ Talking with staff about particular things your child is experiencing at a given time (e.g., What are their needs at the moment? What has been happening at home?).
- ▶ Participating in parenting programs.
- ▶ Spending time at the centre with your child/ren.
- ▶ Find out how to be more involved in the service (e.g., participate in one of the service's committees).



Articles on a range of issues relevant to working in partnerships and parenting are available at:

<http://raisingchildren.net.au> – see 'Grown-Ups' tab

[www.kidscount.com.au](http://www.kidscount.com.au) – see 'Thinking about being a parent' and 'Responding to children'

<http://parentingrc.org.au> – see 'Parenting Programs' tab

This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)  
The team at KidsMatter Early Childhood also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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