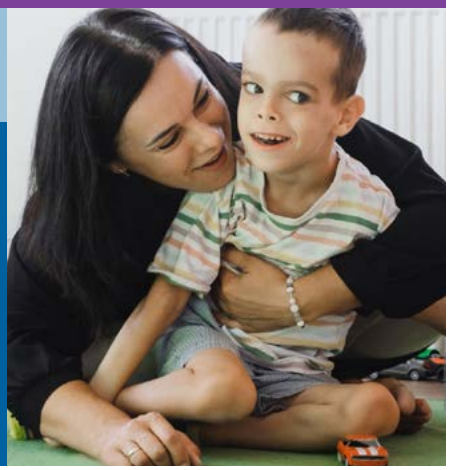
Advocating for children with disability

NDIS fact sheet

Finding a therapist



Most children's NDIS plans include funding for allied health therapists.

Allied health therapists work by helping you to help your child. Therapy should be family focused because you are the most important people in your child's life.

The type of therapy that will benefit your child and family depends upon their needs, but most commonly, children and families get support from:

1. Speech therapists

Speech therapists focus on building your skills as a family to help your child's communication, including speech, understanding what others are saying, and other communication tools such as key word sign or communication boards. Increasing communication skills can help to manage emotions and build social skills. Speech therapists also help you to support your child's reading skills and they can help children who have difficulty swallowing.

2. Occupational therapists (OTs)

They focus on building your skills as a family to support your child to undertake everyday activities. OTs work with families to improve sleep, playing, eating, getting dressed, and toileting. They also support you to improve your child's fine motor skills like drawing and writing. OTs can help families manage sensory issues like sensitivity to noise or light. Increasing these skills can help children manage emotions and build social skills.

3. Physiotherapists

They work to improve physical movement and mobility, supporting families to help their children sit, stand and move. Physiotherapists prescribe wheelchairs and other Assistive Technology, like walkers or supportive seating.

4. Psychologists

Psychologists work with children and families to address emotional and behavioural concerns. They build your skills as a family to support your child to identify and cope with emotions, support positive behaviour, and improve social skills.

5. Key worker or lead therapist

Many children and families work with multiple therapists over time. Having a key worker or lead therapist can make this process much easier for you. A key worker or lead therapist is a therapist who works with your child and family and who also helps organise other therapists as needed.

Funding for these types of allied health therapies is in the Capacity Building section of your child's NDIS plan.

Where to start

Start by talking with your paediatrician and focus on the areas where your child requires the most assistance, such as communication, sleep or support to move. It's good to start with one therapy and gradually add others as needed.

Who provides therapy

- A range of service providers offer therapy for children and families, including:
- Not-for-profit organisations that specialise in early childhood intervention services and have teams of speech therapists, OTs, psychologists, and physiotherapists.
- Private practices with one or two therapists.
- Some providers are registered NDIS service providers. This means they meet set practice standards. You can ask them if they are an NDIS registered service provider. It's also good to ask if they offer a key worker or lead therapist.

Finding the right therapist for your child and family

There is no simple way to find a therapist. It can be challenging, but there are several places to start:

Trusted recommendations
Seek referrals from friends, colleagues, doctors, teachers, or your paediatrician. It's a good idea to ask why they think the therapist is good, or what their child likes and responds to with that particular therapist.

Local community networks and Google search
Use local Facebook parent support groups or use Google search to find therapists in your area who support children with similar needs to your child.

Professional organisations
Organisations such as Speech Pathology Australia have lists of therapists. This can help you find therapists near you.

NDIS Provider Finder
This online search can be tricky to use. Enter your postcode and under registration group, select "early intervention services for early childhood." This brings up a list of registered NDIS service providers who specialise in children, and who offer a range of speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and psychology.

Cost and waitlists

Many therapists have waitlists.

You can ask to go on waitlists while you are applying for the NDIS so that when your child gets a plan you are already moving up the waitlist.

You can be on more than one waitlist at a time.

It is a good idea to ask about how long the waitlist is, and estimated wait time.

Also ask about cost per session and any cancellation fees associated with the therapy services.

What does good therapy look like?

Good therapy requires active participation from both you and your child, and it can involve siblings if appropriate.

It provides practical strategies that can be implemented daily, not just during therapy sessions but at home and where your child spends time, such as kindergarten. The therapy should be enjoyable for your child, making it engaging and motivating. You should feel supported and more confident to support your child's development.

You should be in the room with your child and the allied health therapist. No therapist should be working alone with a pre-school aged child.

If your child is seeing a therapist at kindergarten or school, they should be in line-of-sight of teaching staff.

Good questions to ask

When engaging with a potential therapist, consider asking the following questions:

- Do they provide a key worker or lead therapist who acts as the main point of contact, shares goals, and collaborates on planning?
- What experience and interests does the therapist have? Do they have experience with your child's disability?
- Is there a senior therapist who gives them professional support to make sure they provide good therapy?
- How will they measure and document progress, and let you know about it?
- How do they usually communicate with families? Do they provide follow-up support when needed?
- How does the therapy session work? Being part of the therapy means that you can see what they do and learn strategies to use in different situations with your child.
- Can you choose a specific therapist? What if you don't connect with them?
- Is the therapist nearby? Location matters more than you might think. Will they come to your home, child care, kindergarten or school?

If you have concerns about a provider

There are some warning signs that a service or therapist isn't all it claims to be.

Be cautious of claims that they will cure or fix your child, or make them "normal."

Be wary of complex language that sounds scientific but may not actually have any evidence behind it.

Pay attention to the cost. Be cautious of therapists that try to sell you something or whose costs seem high compared to what they offer. It's helpful to discuss this with people you trust, and compare costs with the therapy plans and session summaries you've received.

If you have concerns about your current NDIS-funded services, it's important to speak up. You can find more information on how to raise concerns or file complaints at https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au

Therapy should be positive for you and your child

Trust your knowledge. You know your child best. While therapists support your child's development, you and your family have a central role in their life.

A therapist should help you feel more confident and provide the support and guidance you need throughout the therapy journey.

Trusting your instincts is a positive step. You have the right to ask questions, change therapists if necessary, and voice concerns when needed.

Useful links

NDIS Provider finder
https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/working-providers/find-registered-provider/provider-finder

Speech Pathology Australia
https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/

Occupational Therapy Australia
https://otaus.com.au/

Australian Psychological Society – Find a psychologist
https://psychology.org.au/

Australian Physiotherapy Association – Find a physio today
https://choose.physio/find-a-physio

Information about National Best Practice Framework in Early Childhood Intervention
https://healthy-trajectories.com.au/eci-framework/resources-for-families-and-others/

Free services for families

- **Support Line**
- **Workshops**
- **Information**
- **Peer support**