Strengthening Parent Support Program

Practice Framework

September 2024

noah's ark

Association for Children with a Disability

VICTORIA State Government

OFFICIAL

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and extend our appreciation to the Traditional Owners of Country and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past and present and honour the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that this was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We commit to building a culturally strong future for children and families through the work we do.

Thank-you

Thank you to the Strengthening Parent Support Program (SPSP) service providers including the highly experienced Coordinators and managers who shared their experience and insights to inform the development of this Practice Framework:

- Anglicare Victoria
- Gateways Support Services Inc
- Inspired Carers Incorporated
- MacKillop Family Services Limited
- Melbourne City Mission
- MOIRA Limited
- MPOWER Inc
- Noah's Ark Inc
- Pinarc Disability Support Inc
- Rights Information and Advocacy Centre Inc.
- Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited.

Thank-you to the parents whose experiences have made a valuable contribution to this work and members of the management, experts advisory, and reading groups who provided invaluable input towards the development of this framework. Coordinators generously shared some of their resources and manuals to help strengthen the guide. You have all helped bring this framework to life.

Together you have made a significant contribution towards increasing the effectiveness of the SPSP and supporting Coordinators in their role.

Thank-you to Noah’s Ark Inc., the Association for Children with Disability and the Victorian Government for working in partnership in the development of this SPSP Practice Framework.

I hope this framework supports SPSP Coordinators to provide high-quality programs. The skills and qualities of the Coordinators have been shown to contribute enormously to the success of peer support programs. In developing this framework, the contributing Coordinators demonstrated many of these attributes and have shown enormous commitment, knowledge, experience, and professional expertise. I wish them all well in their ongoing roles.

And for those Coordinators who are new to the program – enjoy! I have learned from many of the current SPSP Coordinators that this is a highly stimulating and rewarding role and one that provides great opportunities to make a difference in the lives of families.

Dr Kerry Bull (PhD)
Early Childhood & Early Intervention Consultant

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Abbreviations

ACD	Association for Children with Disability
DFFH	Department of Families Fairness and Housing (Victoria)
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
MCH	Maternal Child Health
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
SPSP	Strengthening Parent Support Program

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Introduction

The Strengthening Parent Support Program (SPSP) is funded by the Victorian Government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) for parents and carers[1] of children from birth to 18 years who have a disability or developmental delay.

Qualified SPSP Coordinators facilitate peer support groups, delivery of education/information sessions and provide individualised support to parents to develop parenting skills and confidence and respond positively to parenting challenges.

This Practice Framework complements the DFFH SPSP operational guidelines by providing an evidence-based model, values, principles, and practice guidance on key areas of the program.

There is an accompanying 'Supplementary Information' document that outlines the best available evidence on peer support groups and describes the experience of parents and professionals with the SPSP. Together, this provided the necessary information to develop this Framework.

The Practice Framework was supported by the Victorian Government.

How to use this Framework

This Framework aims to support SPSP Coordinators in implementing the SPSP in line with the best available evidence.

The Framework is in two sections:

> **PART ONE:** outlines the overarching model, including the values and practice principles of the SPSP.
>
> **PART TWO:** provides practical guidance for SPSP Coordinators and includes descriptions of the elements required to deliver a high-quality program. Further information is provided through practice guidance and links to relevant resources and professional learning opportunities.

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[1] The term 'parent' or 'parents' will now be used to refer to both parents and carers.

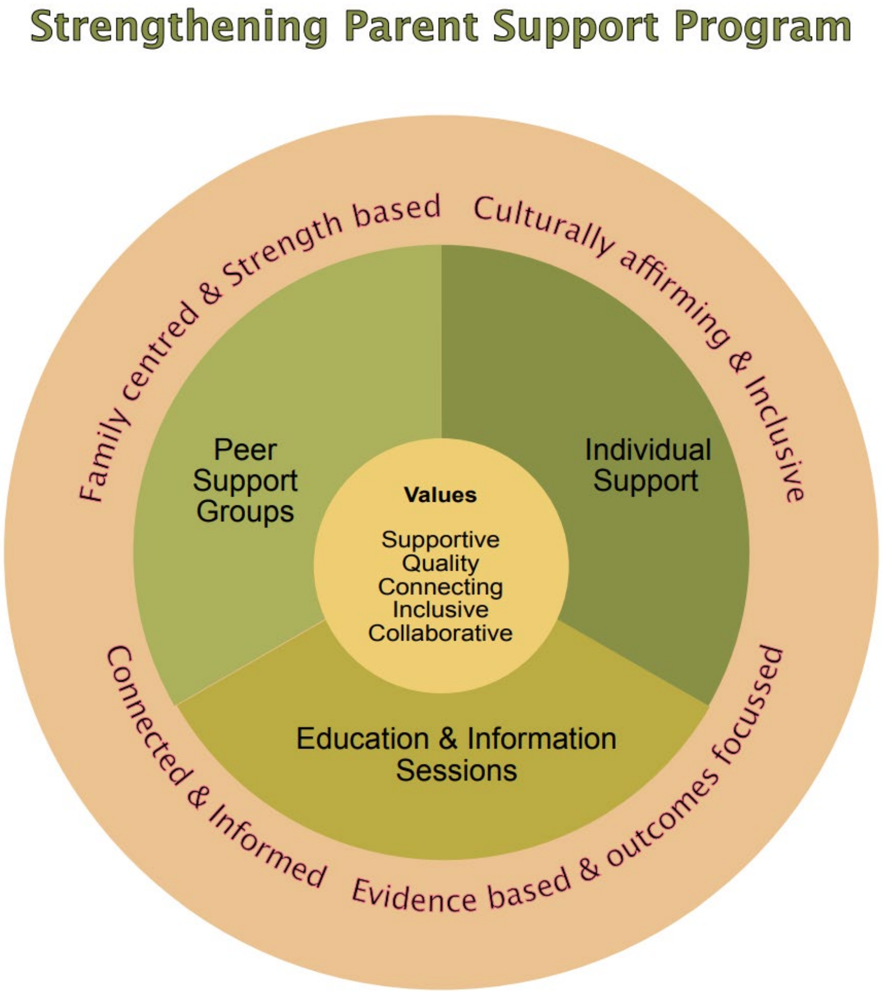
PART ONE

1. The SPSP Practice Model

In the SPSP Model:

- **Five values** underpin the program and are embedded throughout this framework.
- **Four principles** inform the practice and are described in the following section.
- **Three program elements** are integral to implementation and are discussed in Part Two of this Framework.

Figure 1. SPSP Model



2. Four Practice Principles

2.1 We provide a family centred and strength-based program.

The use of family centred practices is recognised as best practice in child and family services with studies showing a relationship to positive parent, child and family outcomes (Dempsey & Keen 2008; Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby 2007; King et al. 2004; Smith, & Coleman, 2020)[2]. The way SPSP Coordinators interact with and involve families is essential to the success of the SPSP.

> *"The core principles of family-centred practice are enacted by relationships and interactions that are characterised as being culturally sensitive, inclusive and reciprocal, recognising and respecting one another's knowledge and expertise, and allowing for informed family choice. There is a sharing of unbiased and complete information by practitioners, and parental involvement is meaningful, individualised, flexible, coordinated and responsive"* (Rouse, 2012).

A **family centred approach** has two complementary practices:

- Relationship building

For example: active listening, empathy, respect, genuineness, commitment, trust, sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural beliefs and practices.

- Competency enhancing

For example: involving parents in making informed choices, promoting new skills and abilities, and active involvement in utilising resources and supports. (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Espe-Scerwindt, 2008; Keilty, 2017; Mas, Dunst, Hamby et al., 2020; Sukkar, Dunst, & Kirkby, 2016).

To be effective, a family-centred approach needs to incorporate both relationship building *and* competency enhancing practices. SPSP Coordinators also need to enable families to be actively involved in the decision-making process and be provided with opportunities to discuss options that suit their individual needs, culture, and circumstances (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Rouse, 2012). Family centred practices rest on promoting confidence and affirming the competence of parents to support their child's learning, development, and wellbeing, and ability to live a good life.

A **strengths-based approach** requires SPSP Coordinators to acknowledge that *all* people have inherent strengths and resources that can be built upon. Families, with the necessary supports and resources, can enhance their children's learning, development, and wellbeing. With this understanding, the SPSP model focuses on promoting confidence and affirming the competence of children, families, professionals, and the community by understanding their existing resources, skills, and knowledge to promote

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[2] A full list of references can be found in the accompanying 'Supplementary Information' document.

further development (Catalino & Meyer, 2015; McCashen, 2005; Sheldon & Rush, 2014; Trivette & Banerjee, 2015).

> *"A belief and an approach that every individual, group, organisation and community has strengths allows us to focus on identifying, mobilizing, and honouring the resources, assets, wisdom, and knowledge that every person, family, group, or community has."* (Pulla, 2012)

SPSP Coordinators identify with families their strengths and resource needs and support them to build upon these, whilst also allowing parents to express their doubts or fears about their parenting role and ask for help when they need it. This approach can build on:

- parent competence (having knowledge and skills), and
- confidence (feeling able to use their knowledge and skills).

Promoting confidence and affirming competence is the primary focus of the SPSP program and is underpinned by an understanding that parents are the constant and most influential people in their child's life. Therefore, they have valuable opportunities to support their child's development, learning and family wellbeing (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Mas, Dunst, Hamby et al., 2020; Trivette & Banerjee, 2015).

2.2 We have a culturally affirming and inclusive approach.

Providing welcoming environments and responding to family priorities, values, and culture to enable parents to participate and feel a sense of belonging is central to the SPSP model. Supporting equity and diversity focuses on the needs of *all* children and families and their right to be included and participate in child, family, and community life.

> *"Inclusion looks different to everybody because we're all different. Inclusion means that everybody can contribute and participate in society as their authentic self without having to change who they are…inclusion means that we don't look at a person based on the risk factors which exist. We look at a person based on the value they provide and the right they have to be their authentic self autonomously."* (Summer Farrelly, a 15 year old disability advocate, Australian Government, 2023b)

High-quality inclusive and culturally affirming services such as the SPSP and other child and family services create opportunities for all children and families to access, participate and experience positive outcomes. However, children and families of cultural and linguistic diversity, peoples from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, as well as children with a developmental disability and their families continue to experience barriers in accessing high-quality services and there are inadequate supports to enable their meaningful participation (Australian Government, 2023b; DiGiacomo, et al., 2013; SNAICC, 2012; Parliament of Victoria, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; WHO, 2012).

Family participation might also be compromised due to characteristics such as age, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or other identities. Many people in our community experience multi-layered characteristics that are often described as ‘intersectionality’. Intersectionality typically refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person’s identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination, oppression, and marginalisation. For example, this may be experienced by people with disability based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, LGBTIQA+ status, or other identities. When these characteristics combine, people can find it harder to participate and get the help they need due to systemic barriers (Victorian Government, 2023).

High-quality culturally affirming and inclusive services require professionals to address these barriers to participation. In relation to the SPSP this includes professionals reflecting on their own parenting values, beliefs, and practices, and seeking to understand other ways of being a parent and raising a family (C4C, 2017; ECA & ECIA, 2012, Keilty, 2017; Park, Horn, & Kurth, 2021; Parliament of Victoria, 2020; SNAICC, 2012; SNAICC & ECA, 2019). In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, this also involves understanding the importance of “cultural safety as an outcome that respects, supports and empowers the cultural rights, identity, values, beliefs and expectations of First Nations peoples while providing quality services that meet their needs.” (Australian Government, 2023b)

> *“First Nations peoples’ understanding of disability does not easily align with Western concepts of disability, particularly the tendency to focus on individual impairment over collective wellbeing. Many First Nations people with disability prefer a cultural model centred on inclusion. This recognises that inclusive participation in culture and community has a positive impact on social health and wellbeing, and moderates the harm of inequalities experienced in daily life”. (Australian Government, 2023b, p159)*

The recent Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability heard people with disability and their families’ vision of an inclusive Australia:
- To be safe and have your human rights respected
- To have disability treated as part of human diversity
- To live, learn, work, play, create and engage in inclusive communities
- To be empowered to have choices and independence
- To belong and be respected, valued and able to contribute
- To be culturally safe (Australian Government, 2023b).

The report also outlined critical aspects of an inclusive society, highlighting the importance of listening to the voices, and recognising the leadership, of people with disability.

Professional understanding of trauma-informed practices also supports people to feel included and have a sense of belonging. Trauma-informed approaches relate to trauma that may be experienced by children with disability, or parents participating in the SPSP. Trauma-informed care requires SPSP Coordinators to be focussed on relationship development, be sensitive and respectful; understand the impact trauma may have on children, parents and the family; understand the support they can provide within their scope of practice; and know the referral pathways available to families. Appropriate professional development and responsive supervision and support is also necessary (AIFS, 2016; Bateman et al., 2013; SNAIIC, 2010; Victorian Government, 2022).

2.3 We stay connected to, and informed by, families and the community.

Building a culture of positive relationships is central to the success of the SPSP model. These relationships include:

- parent-to-parent connections, support, and friendships in peer support groups
- mutually trusting and respectful parent-professional relationships
- team relationships between SPSP Coordinators and parent leaders of support groups
- cooperation and collaborations between SPSP Coordinators and professionals in the community.

They can be conceptualised as parallel processes whereby relationships influence other relationships (Moore, 2006). For example, the way cooperation and collaboration are developed between services influences the team relationships between SPSP Coordinators and parent leaders of support groups, which in turn influences mutually trusting and respectful parent-professional relationships, which in turn supports parent-to-parent connections and friendships – and so on. This suggests that respectful and responsive relationships are critical at every level and support child, family and community outcomes identified in the SPSP model.

The quality and reliability of relationships, or partnerships as they are sometimes called, between parents and professionals are critical to support engagement and improve child and family outcomes.

> *"The onus is upon professionals and services to design and deliver services that will engage and retain families experiencing vulnerabilities more effectively and ensure greater use of services. Strong supportive relationships with professionals can help parents overcome barriers to participation."* (CCCH, 2021)

Strong supportive relationships that build connections begin with an understanding that families know their circumstances and child best, and this knowledge and wisdom can be complemented by the expertise that can be offered by professionals. When this premise is acknowledged, then professionals can begin to develop partnerships that respond to the families individual priorities, culture, circumstances, and values by building on their strengths (CCCH, 2021; Dunst & Espe-Sherwindt, 2016; Kennedy, 2017; NSCDC, 2004; Trute, 2013). Building positive partnerships and connections can be supported by empowering parents to make informed decisions about their child and family by sharing evidence-based information.

Information is one of the fundamental needs for parents of children with disabilities. However, parents of children with disabilities report significant barriers to finding the information they need (Guralnick, 2019; Hussain, & Tait, 2015). They can also be overwhelmed by information overload and find it helpful to have it presented in a variety of ways and at different times. Parents have been found to require information about their child's disability, available services, general child development and parenting, and strategies to use with their child (Jung, 2010).

The most frequently used source of information about parenting for Victorian parents is informal (e.g., family, other parents, friends, and neighbours), followed by online information (Parenting Research Centre, 2022). However, the report indicates that trusted professionals are an important source of advice and information about parenting. The report indicates that parents of children with complex needs show a similar pattern of information use as other parents but are more likely to have sought parenting information from a health professional and more likely to report having attended a parenting group.

Supporting parental choice and decision-making capabilities are recognised as a key role for service providers working with families of children with disabilities (Moore, Forster & Bull, 2019). The SPSP Coordinator can provide information about evidence-based support and reputable services to help parents make informed decisions. However, it's important that the information they share is within their scope of practice. There are boundaries to the types of information that SPSP Coordinators can provide to families. For example, it is outside their scope of practice to provide opinions, or advice on legal, financial, medical issues, or family violence or drug and alcohol support. However, it is critical that SPSP Coordinators know where families can go to get advice on these issues (Alexander & Forster, 2012).

The SPSP Coordinator and parent leaders of peer support groups also have a role in encouraging parents to share information and their success stories with the knowledge that parents value learning from each other (Sartore et al. 2021; Shilling et al. 2013).

2.4 We are committed to an evidence-based and outcomes focused approach.

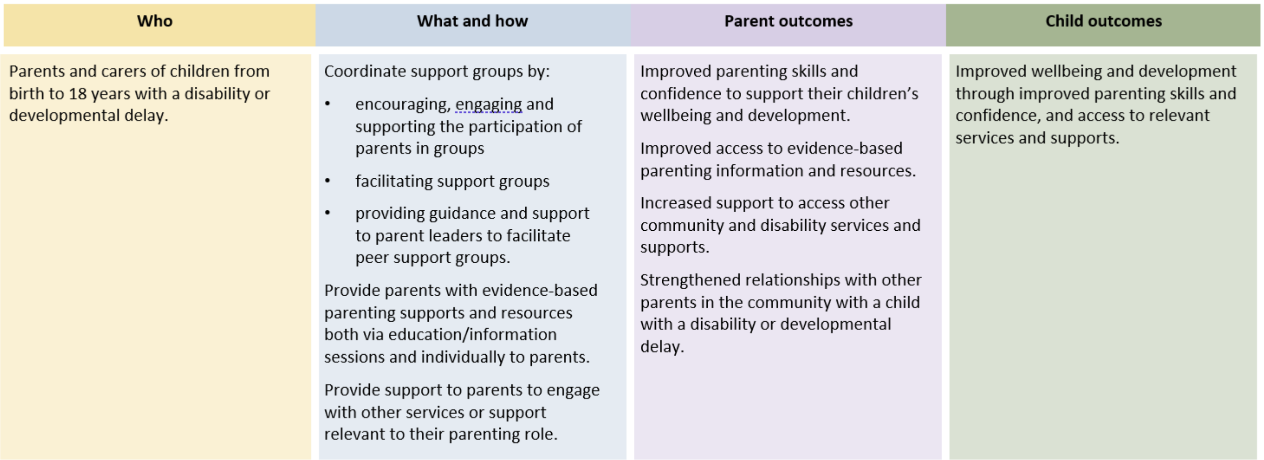
Utilising evidence-based practices and keeping a focus on outcomes is critical to providing a high-quality SPSP. A definition of evidence-based practice that is helpful for SPSP Coordinators reflects a commitment to valuing the wisdom and expertise of both parents and professionals, as well as research evidence (Buysse, Wesley, Snyder & Winton, 2006).

Three components of evidence-based decision making include professional knowledge and expertise, best available research, and family wisdom and values.

Having clearly articulated outcomes provides SPSP Coordinators with guidance about what they're working towards, assists them in providing effective services and supports and allows them to measure whether the program they're delivering is having the desired impact.

For the SPSP to be effective, it is essential that there is a shared understanding about what they are trying to achieve, or what the desired outcomes are. A program logic of the SPSP clearly articulates the outcomes of the SPSP.

Table 1. Program Logic



Who	What and how	Parent outcomes	Child outcomes
Parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years with a disability or developmental delay.	Coordinate support groups by: • encouraging, engaging and supporting the participation of parents in groups • facilitating support groups • providing guidance and support to parent leaders to facilitate peer support groups. Provide parents with evidence-based parenting supports and resources both via education/information sessions and individually to parents. Provide support to parents to engage with other services or support relevant to their parenting role.	Improved parenting skills and confidence to support their children's wellbeing and development. Improved access to evidence-based parenting information and resources. Increased support to access other community and disability services and supports. Strengthened relationships with other parents in the community with a child with a disability or developmental delay.	Improved wellbeing and development through improved parenting skills and confidence, and access to relevant services and supports.

The outcome areas of the SPSP reflect an ecological approach: child, family, and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This conceptual framework is based on an understanding that all children influence, and are affected by, the environments that surround them. To improve child outcomes, all influencing factors need to be addressed through this multi-level approach with an understanding that the factors closest to the child (e.g., immediate family) will have the strongest influence on their learning, development, and wellbeing. The ecological model underpinning the outcomes, and indeed the entire model, acknowledges children within a social, environmental, political, and economic context.

Part Two

1. Commencing in the SPSP

This section is primarily for new SPSP Coordinators to understand more about the importance of parenting supports, and in building relationships, developing priorities, and promoting the SPSP in the community.

1.1 Understanding the importance of parenting supports

Research tells us that parents are the single most important influence on a child's learning, development, and wellbeing. (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Moore et al., 2012; Morris et al, 2017). Therefore, working with parents is often the most effective way to help children thrive (PRC, 2022, 2023). Working with parents is sometimes referred to as parenting support. Parenting support "focuses upon the nature and quality of parent-child interactions and relationships. It takes the form of information, advice and skills development" to improve child and family outcomes (PRC, 2023).

All parents can benefit from information, advice, and skills development, but for families of children with disabilities there may be additional support needs as they are reported to experience higher levels of stress and poorer mental health, physical health, and quality of life than parents of typically developing children (Biswas, Moghaddam, & Tickle, 2015; Guralnick, 2019, Staunton, Kehoe, & Sharkey, 2023). Parents of children with complex needs have been reported to find parenting more demanding and frustrating than other parents and they are more concerned about aspects of their child's behaviour (PRC, 2022). Parents with a child with disabilities may also be at increased risk of isolation (Currie & Szabo, 2020; Sartore et al. 2013). This appears to have been exacerbated during COVID-19 restrictions (Dickinson & Yates, 2020).

A recent Australian study, conducted to support implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy (2023), found that of the parents/carers of children with disabilities surveyed:
- 58% would like more connection with other families with children like theirs but don't know where to find this
- 66% have someone they can talk to when they have questions about their child's needs
- 60% have someone to workshop problems and solutions with
- 48% say that they often can't get help when they need it
- 31% don't have anyone they can confide in
- 29% have no one to lean on in times of trouble. (ARACY, 2022).

Receiving informal support (e.g., family, friends, neighbours) and formal supports and services (e.g., school, maternal child health) have been found to help family quality of life (Bhopti, Brown & Lentin, 2020; Isa et al., 2016), relieve stress (Dervishaliaj, 2013;

Staunton, Kehoe, & Sharkey, 2023) and decrease feelings of isolation (Bray et al., 2017). The SPSP is one of the formal supports available to families of children with disabilities (0-18 years).

1.2 Building relationships

The SPSP works well when there is an active and responsive approach to engagement with families, peers, and other service providers. Starting in the role is all about building relationships. Here's some ways to think about developing them.

- Organisation

Organisations funded to deliver the SPSP will induct SPSP Coordinators to the role and provide ongoing support and supervision. Supervision provides an opportunity to discuss what's needed to provide a high-quality program, the responsibilities of the role, and how to build on current knowledge, skills and confidence through professional learning and development activities.

- Colleagues

There is a network of SPSP Coordinators across Victoria who have considerable experience, knowledge, practice wisdom and resources. DFFH funds the ACD to coordinate the network of SPSP Coordinators, with four meetings each year to:

- promote evidence-based parenting programs and strategies
- share information, knowledge and resources to support families in their parenting role including referral pathways
- share good practice approaches
- identify and provide professional development and networking opportunities relevant to the SPSP.

SPSP Coordinators should contact ACD to join the network. For information on the current SPSP Coordinators, see: [Strengthening Parent Support Coordinators - Association for Children with Disability (acd.org.au)]()

TIP!

This is a rewarding and at times demanding role. Talk with your line manager, ACD or the other SPSP Coordinators about wellbeing and self-care. It's important!

- Parent Leaders of Peer Support Groups

SPSP Coordinators introduce themselves to the peer-leaders of existing parent-led peer support groups. SPSP Coordinators are responsible for providing parent-leaders with support and supervision so it's important to develop a positive relationship with them from the very beginning. Of course, they are a rich source of information too and typically have great community connections. SPSP Coordinators can learn about their group and ask to join in with one as soon as possible. This provides a great opportunity to hear from parents about their needs and interests, which will help with planning in the future.

- Parents

SPSP Coordinators hear from parents when they contact them for individual support or meet them in existing peer support groups. Get out and meet parents at places like MyTime and DFFH funded Supported Playgroups.

Listen to parents needs by asking questions such as:
- What supports are you currently involved in?
- What else might support you in your parenting role?
- Would you like to know more about what's available?
- Would you like me to tell you a bit about the SPSP?
- Are you interested in meeting with other families with similar experiences?
- Are there any barriers to coming to a peer support group?
- Would you like to come along to a peer support group to see what it's like?
- What else would you like to know about support and resources to assist you in your parenting role?

- Community service providers

The SPSP sits within a broader child and family service system in the community. It's crucial for SPSP Coordinators to get to know people in these services to build their knowledge of supports and services, referral pathways and sources of information to receive and/or share with families. These include services such as ECEC, Schools, NDIS Partners, MCHN, local DFFH Supported Playgroup providers, and Regional Parenting Services. There's often a local child and family services directory that can help with contact details.

As well as services in the community, there will be statewide and national programs to find out about (See Appendix 6).

TIP!

Go to as many groups as possible for the first few months. This will give you an opportunity to build relationships and understand which groups require more of your support or presence and which groups are more self-sufficient.

1.3 Developing priorities

Being a SPSP Coordinator is an exciting, fun, stimulating, creative and very important role. It is part of a dynamic child, family and community service system in the area. But sometimes the role can also be challenging and demanding. Coordinators need to prioritise the competing demands of facilitating peer support groups, arranging education sessions, and providing individual support for families as well as liaising with other service providers, attending meetings, and participating in professional development.

SPSP Coordinators should:
- ensure they understand the performance expectations in the DFFH SPSP operational guidelines including targets and reporting
- remember available supports such as fellow SPSP Coordinators, the Community Education Facilitator at ACD and the organisational line manager
- prioritise the quarterly network meeting with the other Coordinators.

1.4 Promoting the program

Peer support groups, information and education sessions and individual support with families are all opportunities to let parents know about the program. Coordinators should talk with parents about other aspects of the SPSP and develop promotional materials that include:
- the purpose of the SPSP
- what the SPSP can offer families
- the intended outcomes or benefits of participating
- how parents can contact the SPSP Coordinator.

Ensure that information is:
- accessible and easy to read
- non-threatening and jargon free
- visually attractive
- provided in a variety of formats (e.g., leaflets, email, website)
- available in community languages (Mitchell & Sloper, 2000).

There’s no need to reinvent the wheel. Other SPSP Coordinators have already developed some fabulous flyers. See examples in Appendix 3 & 4.

Think about:

- distributing information about the program regularly and widely, including at places where parents regularly spend their time (e.g., school, ECEC, GP clinic, neighbourhood house)
- distributing flyers through specialist services (e.g., NDIS partners, assessment clinics)
- using the SPSP email list of professional contacts to spread the word.

Ensure there is acknowledgement of the Victorian Government's funding for the SPSP consistent with the [Acknowledgement and publicity guidelines for Victorian Government]() funding support in published or printed materials, speeches, or other forms of presentations.

TIP!
Developing relationships with parents by listening to their needs, interests and hopes is a great starting point.

New SPSP Coordinators should spend some time getting out into the community to introduce themselves and the SPSP. It can be helpful to have the brochures to share, but also a 'script' in order to clearly communicate the Coordinator's role and the purpose and intended outcomes of the SPSP. This is an important way to develop clear referral pathways with local service providers.

Most SPSP Coordinators keep in touch with the parent community, share information and resources and encourage social interaction, through:

- Email: typically used to communicate with the broader parent community with a focus on the provision of information.
- Social media: requires regular monitoring by the SPSP coordinator to ensure appropriate use and consideration of specific conduct rules (e.g., using neurodiverse language, confidentiality…).
- Online communication channels: used within a peer support group to keep regular communication with parents.
- Website: used to share SPSP information on the organisation's website.

TIP!
Develop a one-minute 'elevator pitch' that describes the SPSP.

TIP!
Be familiar with your organisation's social media policy remembering that content you post is publicly accessible and will represent your organisation.

TIP!
Ask a parent to look at your flyer for feedback before you finalise it.

2. Implementing the SPSP

There are three elements of the SPSP:

- Peer support groups,
- Education and information sessions, and
- Individual support.

For each element, this section describes:

- *Why this is important*: background reading that comes from the current literature.
- *What works well*: practical information about good practice.

2.1 Peer support groups

> *"Coordinators establish, facilitate and maintain peer support groups which are a core component of the SPSP. Planning peer support groups should reflect local priorities and the needs of parents…Peer support groups can be delivered in person or online where a parent's geographical location or individual circumstances make it difficult to attend in person."* (DFFH, 2024).

Why is this important?

The SPSP sits within a broad range of child and community services, including other peer supports groups such as MyTime, Pathways for Carers, and PlayConnect, and evidence-based parenting programs such as TRIPLE P Stepping Stones, and Tuning into Kids. The SPSP provides parenting supports for parents of children 0-18 years with a disability through professional Coordinator and parent led groups. Having this range of support is important given the recent report from ARACY for the Department of Social Services, that found that parents preferred a variety of peer support models and that these preferences might change over time (ARACY, 2022). That is, there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to meeting families' peer support needs.

Most of the literature related to peer support comes from decades of research and practice in the mental health sector (Repper & Carter, 2011). In the disability literature, peer support groups have been found to play an important role in providing parents of children with disabilities social connections, emotional support, evidence-based information, and current knowledge about how to navigate the service system (ARACY, 2022; PRC, 2023). Parents can help each other as peers. SPSP Coordinators can also play a role in enabling this support to work towards improved parent self-efficacy, increased parent well-being, confidence in navigating the service system, increased engagement with the community, and knowledge about evidence-based parenting information.

The benefits of peer support are reported to include decreased feelings of isolation, and increased coping skills, social interaction, physical and psychological health and families' capacity and skill development (Ireys et al. 2001; Dew et al., 2019; Law et al. 2002; Henderson et al. 2014; Orima Research 2013, Sartore et al. 2021). The Parenting Research Centre reports that parents of children with disability experience improved wellbeing, increased empowerment, more coping thoughts and have decreased isolation, depression, guilt, and loneliness when they are supported with peer-led interventions (PRC, 2016). A more recent report found that the benefits of peer support are not tied to specific programs or delivery modes, but are linked to "opportunities for emotional support, insider insights and information, system navigation and social connection" (ARACY, 2022).

Whilst peer support interventions have been shown to have potential benefits for families, the evidence is still emerging. The modest evidence base indicates that families strongly value peer support programs and the emotional support they provide, however further studies are required to build on the evidence for effectiveness (Provvidenza, & Kingsnorth, 2015, Sartore, 2021).

TIP!

Not all peer support groups will look the same, so remember to be responsive to the parents' individual needs that will support them in their parenting role.

What works well?

a. Starting a group

The design of peer support groups should be responsive to local priorities and the needs of families. These include groups that are:

- disability specific (e.g., Autism, ADHD, Down Syndrome)
- age specific (e.g., parents of young preschool children)
- culturally specific (e.g., Vietnamese, Chinese)
- based on location (e.g., families living in a rural township)
- face to face, online or hybrid
- activity based (e.g., walking, book group, cooking, art, self-care, board games)
- at places where parents usually gather (e.g., park, café, neighborhood centre, school)
- offered at suitable times to encourage the participation of fathers and working parents (outside business hours).

TIP!

You only need two or three parents to start a group.

The venue might change as the group needs change over time or if the group is activity based, but venues are critical to success. They should be accessible, inclusive, welcoming, and wherever possible in 'natural environments' where parents usually spend time like the park or café. When considering accessibility of the venue, Coordinators should think about proximity to public transport, car parking, ease of access for wheelchairs and prams and safety if children are attending. They need to be a safe and uplifting space for families that fosters mutual support and meets the neurodiverse needs of parents.

Side by side

'Our group wanted to have some fun. Sometimes we have a speaker and invite everyone from our community. But for our regular group we do different things each month – pottery, weaving, cooking. Sometimes I think we talk about the really important things because we're side-by-side doing fun things together.
It breaks the heaviness.'

Walk and Talk

'I talked with parents about what they wanted the group to be doing the following year. They just wanted to get out together, so we started a walking group.
They walk and talk and then end up at a café. The parents seem to leave with more of a spring in their step.'

Coordinators can ask parents if they are interested in peer support groups and find what suits their needs by asking questions such as:

- How can the group support you in your parenting role? (e.g., learning about services, meeting other parents...)
- What would you like to do in a group? (e.g., activities, speakers, informal time ...)
- What suits you best? (e.g., group for parents of younger children, specific disability, culturally based, peer led, day/evening, online/face to face...)
- Would you like to come one week to try it out?
- What else would you like to know?

Getting a group going

Parents from a regional town called the SPSP Coordinator for individual support and she talked with them about their interest in getting a small peer support group started. They were keen and thought there might be other parents at the local school too. The SPSP Coordinator visited the township and talked with the Maternal Child Health Nurse, school inclusion leader, kindergarten teachers and the coordinator at the neighbourhood house. The MCHN was able to refer another parent to the SPSP Coordinator.

The first meeting was held at the school where the SPSP Coordinator facilitated a discussion about what they'd like from the group, and what they'd like to do together. They wanted time to just have a coffee and talk, maybe some guest speakers and some fun things to do. They decided on a range of activities and planned to meet monthly with the SPSP Coordinator but decided to go to the playground together the following week to keep in touch. They also developed some groups rules about confidentiality and welcoming newcomers.

When the SPSP Coordinator checked in with them at the end of the group, they all expressed their relief at finding other parents "who just get it". Twelve months later the group has grown and one of the mothers is taking on more of a leadership role.

The importance of the first interaction with parents can't be underestimated. It should be seen as an opportunity to build quick rapport and put them at ease, knowing that for some parents their previous experience with services may not have been one of trust and respect. Some of the ways to develop trusting and respectful relationships include:

- be warm and genuine and practice communication skills (e.g., active listening…)
- create a welcoming and safe environment, free from criticism and judgement
- explain that sensitive information is treated with confidentiality
- ask permission to share information with others
- support peer interactions by introducing parents to each other
- support parent engagement by incorporating shared interests into the program
- learn from parents and peer leaders about their strengths and interests
- seek feedback and respond to it
- celebrate success.

Peer support groups should be uplifting, informative, inclusive, and welcoming. The members of the group should be encouraged to be respectful, non-judgmental, and supportive. A set of guidelines or 'rules' that parents agree upon to ensure the group is a welcoming and 'safe space' is recommended. When these guidelines work well, they are developed *with* parents, rather than *for* them.

Guidelines that are developed with families reflect a partnership approach, with a focus on how parents want to relate together. Group guidelines are sometimes referred to as 'Working Together Agreements'. When they work well, all parents are very familiar with their guideline, and will refer to it to keep the group on track. Here's some ideas about developing a group guideline with parents to help build group culture. There are also examples in Appendix 2.

Developing a group guideline

Developing a peer support group guideline involves explicitly exploring the values that are vital to the group's function and agreeing on how you will all enact those values. These might include the overarching values of the SPSP such as such as 'supportive', 'inclusive', 'collaborative' and actions such as maintaining confidentiality, or helping each other out.

- Facilitate discussion/s in a way that provides everyone with the chance to talk about what they think should be included in the agreement.
- Promote thinking, talking, and listening: *"Think back to a time when you were in a group/team and it felt really good - Why was it good to be part of it?"*, or *"How do you want us all to be together at our peer support group?"*
- Make sure you talk through everyone's ideas before deciding together what will be included in the guideline.
- Once the group has created a guideline, keep it alive by:
  - ensuring it's 'owned' and valued by parents
  - having it visible (e.g., poster)
  - reviewing and adapting it to ensure it is still relevant
  - using the guideline as a starting point for introducing new families to the peer support group
  - considering how the guideline is reflected in the behaviour and actions of all members.

Adapted from Platforms Guidelines (CCCH, 2019).

b. Facilitating the group

Facilitating the group in a way that reflects the SPSP practice principles ensures parents will participate and actively encourage others to come. Consider:

- building a positive and uplifting group culture
- focusing on relationship building and building self-efficacy
- providing a culturally safe and neuro-affirming environment that is responsive to each family's cultural background, socioeconomic circumstances, and family preferences.
- addressing barriers to parent participation
- reflecting on personal biases
- building on existing family, community and cultural strengths and expertise to develop child and family capacity, confidence, and pride (SNAICC, 2019)
- participating in professional learning (group facilitation, cultural safety, trauma informed, neuro diversity).

Building group culture by fostering mutual support and developing strong relationships requires Coordinators to practice effective communication and interpersonal strategies such as:

- being attuned and engaged
- being mutually respectful, open, honest, transparent, and non-judgmental
- demonstrating trust
- sharing unbiased information
- understanding and managing one's own feelings
- seeking and acknowledging others' perspectives
- acknowledging and building on each other's strengths (Davis & Day, 2010; CCCH, 2019).

TIP!

Think about your communication skills.
What are you good at?
What could you do more of?
What could you do differently?

Effective communication skills and the group guidelines discussed above will support facilitation of an effective group and help manage group dynamics. Also consider:

- asking less engaged parents how they would like to contribute
- talking with parents 1:1 where appropriate about giving everyone a chance to talk and contribute (refer to the group guidelines)
- celebrating success and making it explicit when everyone has contributed equally
- encouraging all parents to give regular feedback
- staying within the boundaries of the role or scope of practice
- referring parents to other services if they are needing more than the peer support group can and should offer
- participating in group facilitation training (e.g. through Carers Victoria).

TIP!

Visit other SPSP peer support groups to learn from parents and the Coordinator about their approach.

c. Supporting parent led peer support groups

As part of the SPSP, peer support groups can be facilitated by a parent leader with guidance and support from the SPSP Coordinator. This could arise when parents want to start a new group or when the SPSP Coordinator actively supports a parent with suitable skills and capacity to take on the leadership role of an existing group. It's important to build close relationships with peer leaders and acknowledge the skills, knowledge and lived experience peer leaders bring to their role. Many peer leaders also have strong community networks that can complement the program.

TIP!
Talk with the other SPSP Coordinators about the supports they provide to peer leaders. Some have developed written guidelines about their roles and responsibilities.

Peer led peer support groups work well when the SPSP Coordinator develops respectful relationships with parent leaders and provides support through:

- a position description that includes expectations and boundaries of the role (sample at Appendix 4)
- relevant policies and procedures required by the organisation (e.g., confidentiality, incidents, health & safety, complaints, WWCC or police check)
- support with SPSP data collection and reporting (e.g., recording attendance …)
- parenting resources and information that can be shared with families
- assistance with promotion of the group
- attending the group at times to connect with parents
- coordinating speakers and venues as required
- regular ‘check-ins’ for support and encouragement and availability for ‘debrief’ where needed
- mentoring, coaching, and modelling as appropriate (e.g., managing group dynamics, effective communication, knowing boundaries…)
- group meetings (online or face-to-face) for parent leaders to build relationships, share what they’re doing and discuss solutions to problems.

TIP!
Bring the parent leaders together to discuss issues, share ideas, build their leadership skills and develop their own peer community.

A career pathway
‘Libby joined our group when she had two preschoolers with developmental delay. She fitted in beautifully – sharing ideas, welcoming newcomers, and listening to others. We talked about her interest in taking a peer leadership role with the group. We took it slowly and I provided support along the way. Three years later, with her children now at school, Libby has just accepted a paid role as a support group leader in another program.
A new career pathway for her!’

Supporting peer support groups
‘The peer support group has been going for years, where parents come together each month facilitated by a parent leader. They speak in their first language and celebrate cultural events like Moon festival and Chinese New Year.
It’s a fun group. Very supportive of each other and welcoming of new parents.
My role is to provide background support like helping with speakers and resources.’

2.2 Information & education sessions

Coordinators organise and/or deliver topic-based education/information sessions to support parents in their parenting role. An education/information session is a one-off meeting for a specific purpose (whether in person or online)." (DFFH, 2024) "

Why is this important?

Information is one of the fundamental needs for parents of children with disabilities and their informational needs change over time (Guralnick, 2019). Many parents seek more than basic information, wanting deeper knowledge and understanding of issues that are important to them. Parent education plays an important role in providing opportunities for parents to learn to build their competence (having knowledge and skills) and confidence (feeling able to use their knowledge and skills). Promoting confidence and affirming competence is a necessary focus of the SPSP program and begins with an understanding that parents are the constant and most influential people in their child's life.

There is some evidence that group education sessions for parents with a child with disabilities can be effective in addressing identified needs. For example, after participating in the two-part Stepping Stones Triple P seminars, parents reported significant reductions in the number of child behaviour problems, less frequent use of dysfunctional parenting styles and fewer conflicts over child-rearing (Sofronoff, Jahnel, & Sanders, 2011).

SPSP Coordinators have a role in identifying with parents their needs and areas of interest for education sessions. Coordinators should also offer sessions outside usual business hours to encourage the participation of fathers and working parents. Research recognises the contribution of fathers to positively influence their children's health, wellbeing and educational outcomes.

What works well?

a. Evidence-based

Consider:
- ensuring that information provided is evidence-based, whether delivered by the SPSP Coordinator or use of external speaker/resources
- focusing on building parents' capacity and confidence to make informed decisions
- ensuring that information provided is sensitive to the family's needs, interests, preferences and culture

TIP!

Record information and education sessions if you have the presenter's permission to share with parents who can't attend.

- developing meaningful feedback mechanisms to understand the impact of the session and respond to family needs.

Evidence-based parenting programs to support parents of a child with a disability or developmental delay include Triple P Stepping Stones. This is based on Triple P's positive parenting strategies and helps parents with strategies and skills to respond to behaviours and developmental issues common in children with disability and to teach their child new skills. This promotes a close relationship between parents and their child and assists parents to cope with stress.

b. Adult learning principles

When arranging sessions, keep adult learning principles in mind. For example:

- Adults are typically internally motivated and self-directed. Therefore, they should have the opportunity to have a say about what they want to learn and how they will go about learning.
- Adults typically bring their life experience, knowledge, and wisdom to new learning. Therefore, their current knowledge should be respected and built upon.
- Adults are typically goal oriented and practical. Therefore, learning should be related to their daily life (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Knowles, 1996).

c. Topics of interest

It's important to find out what topics parents are interested in. Some examples are:

- Understanding a specific disability or developmental delay
- Understanding development and responding to behaviour
- Transition to primary and secondary school
- Inclusion & participation at ECEC and school
- Talking about their child's disability
- Supporting siblings of children with disability
- Family routines
- Trusts, wills, & estates
- Sexual health
- Transition plans to move into adulthood
- Respite options
- NDIS and Centrelink supports
- Wellbeing and self-care.

TIP!

Education sessions can also include wellbeing and self-care sessions for parents (e.g., Mindfulness, managing mental health, or navigating emotions like guilt, stress and anxiety).

TIP!

Plan topic-based discussions based on common parenting challenges. The Raising Children's Network has a range of evidence-based content that Coordinators can present (Appendix 5).

2.3 Individual support

"Coordinators meet with parents individually to provide parenting support." (DFFH, 2024)

Why is this important?

SPSP Coordinators may provide individual support to parents to provide parenting supports to build their skills and competence, provide information, resources and referrals to other services, and when a parent or family is experiencing a crisis.

Parents may be seeking information resources and/or services or they may be experiencing a crisis with their child or in their family that is impacting on their usual ability to manage their many competing demands. Access to information and resources are fundamental and enduring needs for parents of children with disabilities. Parents require information about their child's disability, available services, general child development and parenting, and strategies to use with their child (Jung, 2010) as their needs change over time (Guralnick, 2019).

SPSP Coordinators can play an important role supporting parents who are experiencing interpersonal conflict or stress. It's important that parents are provided with information and/or referred to other appropriate services if these issues are raised with the SPSP Coordinator. Additonal stressors on family life can have a cumulative effect and undermine the confidence of parents (Guralnick, 2019). The provision of family centred and strength based individual support offers the opportunity to build parental capacity.

Managing the first contact: a pathway in – a Coordinator's perspective

'The first contact to the SPSP is usually a phone call or email from a parent or a referral from a health professional or community service. I usually:

- Develop quick rapport by hearing a bit about them and asking how I can help
- Tell them a bit about the SPSP and ask if they would like to register
- Complete the SPSP Family Record form together over the phone to help me learn more about them and their family.
- Ask open-ended questions like "How's school going?", "How's things going with the NDIS?", "How are you looking after yourself?" That allows me to make further suggestions about how the SPSP can help and make appropriate referrals to other services.
- I always follow up with an email giving them more information about the SPSP and details about other relevant services.
- Sometimes I don't hear from them again. Sometimes they join a peer support group or come to an upcoming education session. Other times, they contact me again 6 months later. That's all okay! '

What works well?

Individual support may involve:
- providing evidence-based information and parenting support on a range of parenting-related topics
- referring families to appropriate services
- building the capacity of families to navigate the service system with regards to disability, education and child and family services.

TIP!
Develop a template email that includes information about the program, how to sign up, and contact information so you can use this for first contacts and tailor as required.

a. Engaging families in professional relationships

The relationship that Coordinators establish with families is crucial to achieving positive outcomes. Listening to families' concerns with respect and compassion and responding with accurate and empathic understanding are all critical to the development of this relationship.

Families experiencing grief or those in crisis may need additional time to be able to express their emotions before they want to engage in groups.

This component of the role also requires SPSP Coordinators to have access to regular support and supervision from their line manager to continue to develop skills and have appropriate support for their own wellbeing.

b. Information & resources

As indicated earlier in the Framework, the provision of evidence-based information and resources is central. It's important to develop relationships with key stakeholders and refer parents to services in response to their requests or when they raise issues that are out of the SPSP Coordinator's scope of practice.

Reputable state-wide or national organisations are listed in Appendix 6. Some services that SPSP Coordinators often refer to include:
- AMAZE
- Association for Children with Disability
- Carer Gateway
- Carers Victoria
- Children and Young People with Disability Australia
- Parentline
- Raising Children Network – Raising children with disability
- Triple P – Positive Parenting Program (Triple P Online and Fear-Less Triple P Online)

c. Building capacity

Through individual support, SPSP Coordinators can support parents to build parental capacity. This requires practitioners to have good knowledge, skills, and confidence in family-centred and strength-based practices. These have been discussed in section two of this framework, but in brief, include:

- Relationship building skills & qualities: active listening, empathy, respect, genuineness, commitment, trust, sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural beliefs and practices.
- Competency enhancing skills & qualities: involving parents in making informed choices, promoting new skills and abilities, and active involvement in utilising resources and supports. (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Espe-Scerwindt, 2008; Keilty, 2017; Mas, Dunst, Hamby et al., 2020; Sukkar, Dunst, & Kirkby, 2016).

To build on capacity building skills with parents, SPSP Coordinators could focus on some of the practices outlined in the Reflective Practice Tool in Section 4 of this framework.

3. Measuring outcomes

It's important to know the impact the SPSP has on achieving the program outcomes outlined in the program logic (see page 12). This will support SPSP Coordinators in understanding the impact of the SPSP and inform future planning.

SPSP Coordinators are required to report quarterly to DFFH, as set out in the DFFH SPSP operational guidelines. The data collected can also help Coordinators reflect on service delivery related to the desired outcomes of the program.

There are several ways to embed quality improvement strategies into the program. In this Practice Framework we will concentrate on just three approaches.

a. Measuring impact

The use of a validated parenting efficacy survey (Me as a Parent – Short Form) (Matthews, Millward, Hayes & Wade, 2022) can assess the impact of SPSP for families who receive individualised support and participate in Coordinator-led peer support groups.

The survey assesses parent perceptions of their parenting efficacy. Higher levels of parenting self-efficacy are associated with positive parent-child relationships, child development outcomes and parental mental health.

For further information, see the DFFH SPSP operational guidelines.

b. Reflection

TIP!
Choose one or two practices from the Reflective Practice Tool to focus on and reflect at the end of each week to identify changes in practice.

Evidence-based decision making requires Coordinators to have strategies for reflecting on the program and practice. The Reflective Practice Tool (see page 30) is designed to help Coordinators reflect on practices that research has shown to be effective in supporting positive child, family and community outcomes, and to help translate that research into practice.

Coordinators can use it for self-reflection, or during supervision with their line manager. Talking together about whether there are some professional development activities that would support practice development can be beneficial.

c. Feedback

SPSP Coordinators should endeavour to deliver the program in line with best practice and continually seek feedback. to improve practice.
Some of the ways to seek and respond to feedback include:

- introduce the idea of seeking feedback from parents so they feel comfortable about sharing their thoughts and feelings honestly
- practice asking for feedback in a range of ways
- welcome and encourage any answers – positive or negative
- be genuinely curious
- seek feedback about what's going well and what could be done differently
- refine the program according to family feedback, priorities, values, and culture
- seek input from 'guests' or 'speakers' about their experience at the group
- review the group guidelines developed with parents
- embed ways to monitor and improve the program using an action research or cycle of improvement approach
- capture feedback through surveys
- develop a culture of continuous learning and reflection by making sure everyone involved feels safe and their contributions are valued, and responded to.

Ask questions like:

- What else could we do to ensure education sessions support you in your parenting role?
- How is the peer support group supporting you in your parenting role?
- Have I given you the information that was most important to you today?
- Thanks for giving me that feedback. What about we talk about this in our group next week and see what we can change?

TIP!
Hold a focus group with parents to seek their feedback and ideas about how they would like the peer support groups to be run in the future.

4. Reflecting on practice

This Reflective Practice Tool has been developed so SPSP Coordinators can see what good practice in the SPSP looks like. It is designed to increase Coordinators' use of these recommended practices, with the SPSP values at the forefront and has been designed in line with the four SPSP practice principles. Coordinators can use it themselves to reflect on their use of the practices, or during supervision with their line manager. It is recommended that Coordinators choose a few practices to focus on and monitor how their practice is changing.

Coordinators can include notes in the reflections section about surprises, blind spots, strengths, and challenges, as well as examples of *what* they do and *how* they do it. Coordinators can note what they want to work on in the future.

Coordinators can use this tool rating as a guide for their responses:

1. I'm beginning to learn about this.
2. I have reasonable knowledge, skills, and confidence about this.
3. I'm doing this really well.

Family centred & Strength based				
The practice looks like	1.	2.	3.	Reflections
Respecting parents as the most important and influential people in their child's life and their right to make decisions about their children.				
Interacting with parents with warmth, positivity, and respect.				
Using interpersonal skills that build trust and rapport and establish a partnership with parents (e.g., clear, concise, jargon-free language, active listening…) across all backgrounds and identities.				
Responding sensitively to the parent's concerns, priorities, changing life circumstances and the child's strengths and needs.				
Supporting parents to mobilise informal and formal supports that match their needs.				
Providing information, resources, and emotional support where needed to enhance their parenting role.				
Assuming all parents have strengths and competencies and building on these to address their needs.				

Celebrating family competence and success and supporting parents only as much as they need and want.				
Facilitating opportunities for parents to learn from each other.				
Culturally Affirming & Inclusive				
The practice looks like				
Supporting parents to feel safe and a sense of belonging (including where children attend with parent).				
Ensuring the program is welcoming and culturally sensitive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander parents.				
Introducing adaptations to activities, materials, environments, and practices, where appropriate, to support parent participation.				
Facilitating opportunities for parents to share information about their interests, concerns, values, culture, and circumstances.				
Collaboratively tailoring the program in flexible ways that are responsive to each family’s structure, sexuality, age, culture, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic characteristics, neuro-diversity or other identity.				
Recognising the Coordinator’s own parenting values, beliefs, and practices, and seeking to understand the diverse ways of being a parent.				
Learning about and valuing the many expectations, commitments, activities, and pressures in a family’s life.				
Building a culture of positive relationships in peer support groups and encouraging parents to support each other.				
Building relationships with colleagues in child and family services to support warm referrals where appropriate.				
Connected and informed				
The practice looks like				
Contributing to an environment where everyone is treated with trust and respect and feels comfortable to share ideas, ask questions, and solve problems together.				
Providing parents with information about services and supports so they can make informed decisions (including how the Coordinator might support them through warm referral where appropriate).				

Providing information for parents to navigate the service system and to confidently access child and family services.				
Facilitating opportunities for parents to share information with each other.				
Providing parents with evidence-based information about their parenting role in a way that the family can use to make informed decisions.				
Referring families to resources and services to help them meet the needs of their child, their family, and themselves.				
Building on peer leaders skills and knowledge so they feel confident and competent in their role.				
Providing parents with reputable resources and information on child learning, development and wellbeing.				
Evidence based and outcomes focused				
The practice looks like				
Updating the Coordinator's knowledge, skills, and strategies by keeping abreast of current evidence.				
Incorporating intentional reflection into the Coordinator's daily work.				
Working within the Coordinator's professional scope of practice.				
Seeking feedback about parent participation in the SPSP and using the information to inform future work together.				
Listening to parents and believing in what they say regarding their desired outcomes/ priorities/needs.				
Seeking and providing honest, respectful, and supportive feedback.				
Contributing to a culture that values collaborative decision making.				
Sharing information with parents about desired outcomes of the SPSP.				
Seeking out and participating in a variety of professional development activities to increase the Coordinator's knowledge and strengthen their practice.				

(ECIA, 2012; DEC; 2014; DET, 2016; ECA, 2016; ECA & ECIA, 2012; ECTA, 2018; Bull, 2021; SNAICC & ECA, 2019; ECPC CDC, 2019; Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments

5. Appendices

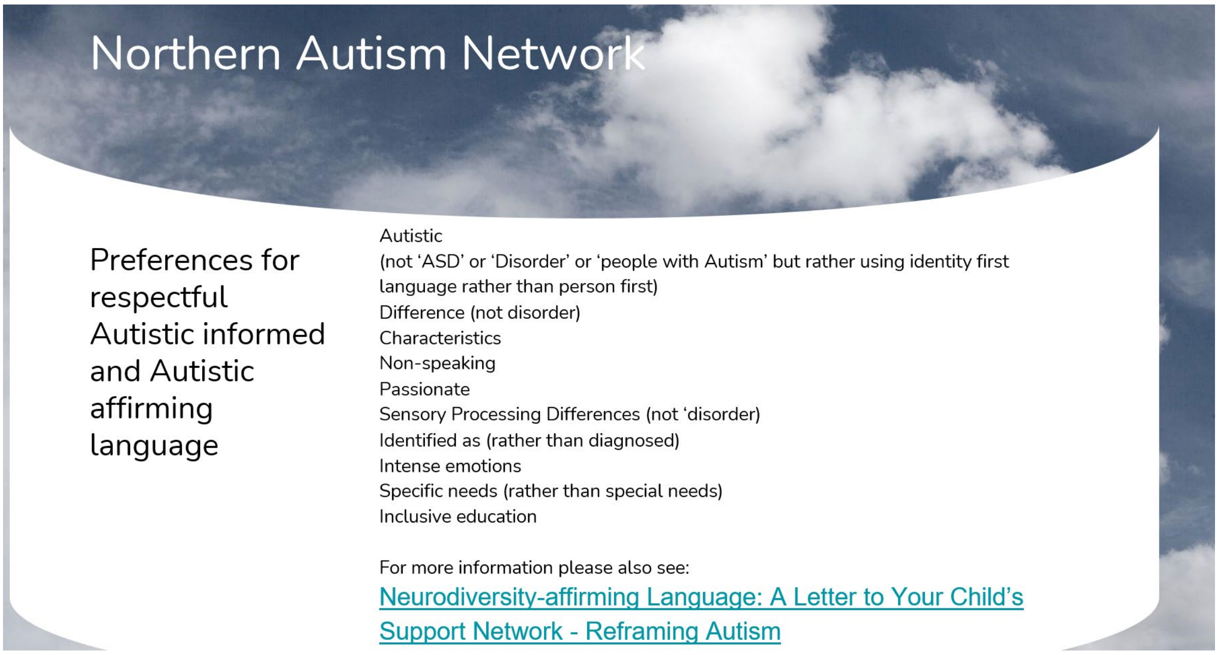
Appendix 1. Examples of peer support group agreements

OUR PARENT GROUP AGREEMENT
OCTOBER 2023

At our parent group we will:

- Welcome new parents
- Be kind and supportive
- All play a part in making sure everyone has a chance to talk
- Not talk about families outside the group – be confidential
- Share ideas about what works well
- Share ideas about how we can make the group a great place to come
- Have fund together

An example shared by the Northern Autism Network that focusses on encouraging all parents to use neuro-affirming language.



Northern Autism Network

Preferences for respectful Autistic informed and Autistic affirming language

Autistic
(not ‘ASD’ or ‘Disorder’ or ‘people with Autism’ but rather using identity first language rather than person first)
Difference (not disorder)
Characteristics
Non-speaking
Passionate
Sensory Processing Differences (not ‘disorder)
Identified as (rather than diagnosed)
Intense emotions
Specific needs (rather than special needs)
Inclusive education

For more information please also see:
Neurodiversity-affirming Language: A Letter to Your Child’s Support Network - Reframing Autism

Appendix 2. Example of Peer Support Group flyer

Ballarat Autism Parent Connection Group

The Ballarat Autism Parent Connection Group is a friendly, relaxed group of parents and carers who come together, once a month during school terms.

This is a great opportunity to share your knowledge and experience and to gain new information about local services and events. Guest speakers often attend. New members warmly welcomed.

Meeting dates for 2023:

Feb	20	Aug	21
Mar	20	Oct	16
May	15	Nov	20
Jun	19	Dec	11
Jul	17		

Dates:
Once a month on a Monday

Times:
10.00 am – 12.00 pm

Venue:
Robin Hood Hotel
33 Peel Street Nth, Ballarat

How Much Does it Cost?
Free

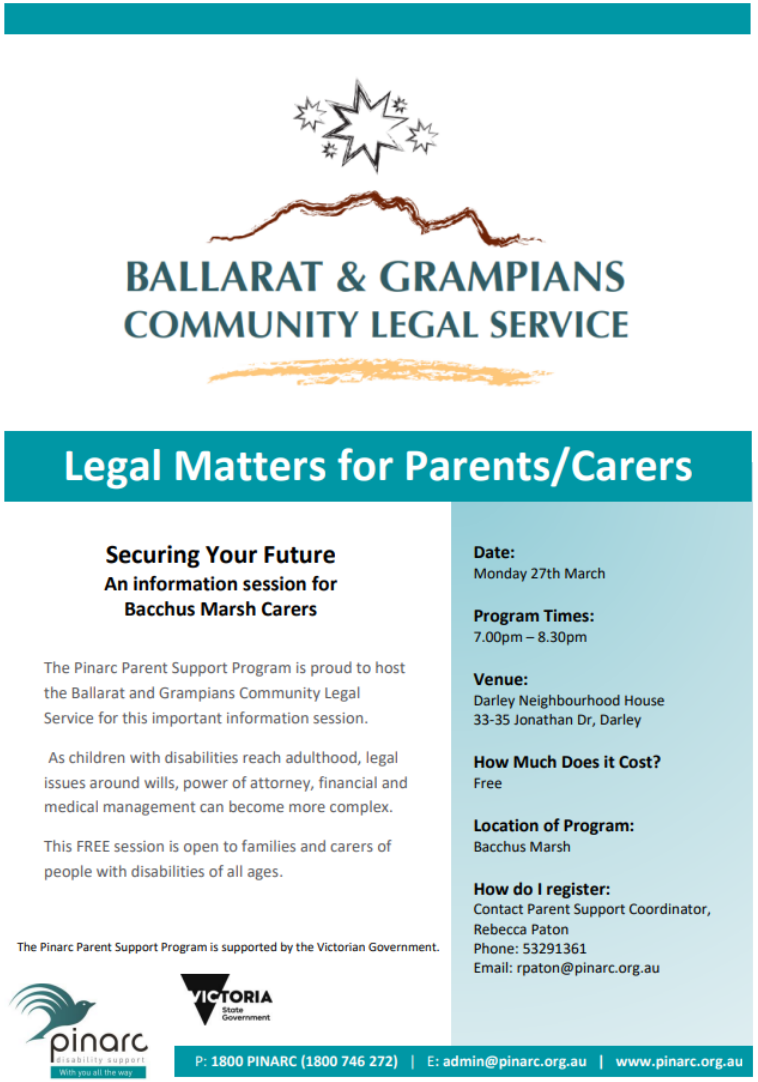
How do I register:
Contact Rebecca Paton,
Parent Support Program Coordinator
Phone: 5329 1361
Email: rpaton@pinarc.org.au

The Pinarc Parent Support Program is supported by the Victorian Government.

pinarc disability support
With you all the way

VICTORIA State Government

P: 1800 PINARC (1800 746 272) | E: admin@pinarc.org.au | www.pinarc.org.au



BALLARAT & GRAMPIANS
COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE

Legal Matters for Parents/Carers

Securing Your Future

An information session for Bacchus Marsh Carers

The Pinarc Parent Support Program is proud to host the Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service for this important information session.

As children with disabilities reach adulthood, legal issues around wills, power of attorney, financial and medical management can become more complex.

This FREE session is open to families and carers of people with disabilities of all ages.

Date:
Monday 27th March

Program Times:
7.00pm – 8.30pm

Venue:
Darley Neighbourhood House
33-35 Jonathan Dr, Darley

How Much Does it Cost?
Free

Location of Program:
Bacchus Marsh

How do I register:
Contact Parent Support Coordinator,
Rebecca Paton
Phone: 53291361
Email: rpaton@pinarc.org.au

The Pinarc Parent Support Program is supported by the Victorian Government.

pinarc disability support
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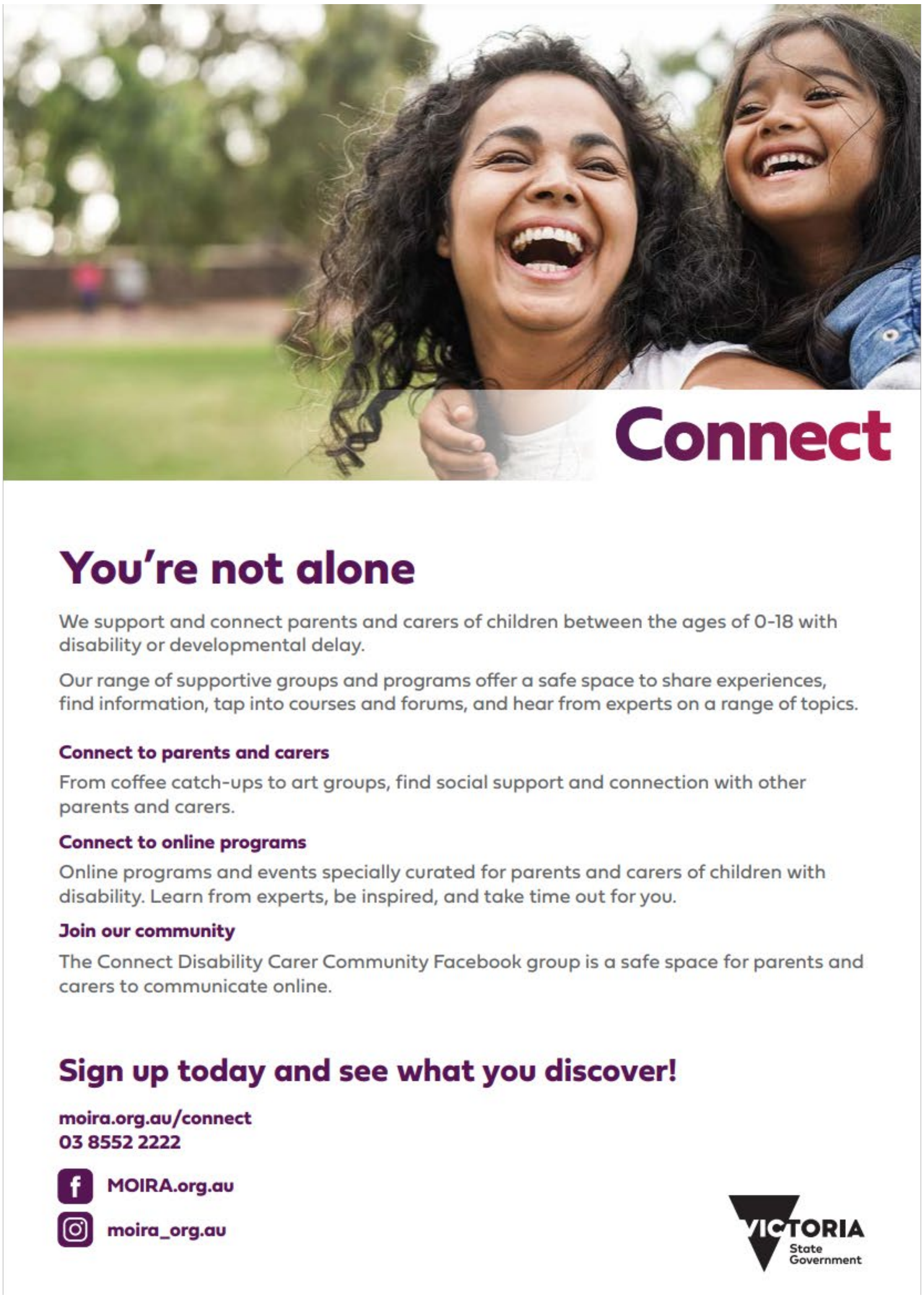

Connect

You're not alone

We support and connect parents and carers of children between the ages of 0-18 with disability or developmental delay.

Our range of supportive groups and programs offer a safe space to share experiences, find information, tap into courses and forums, and hear from experts on a range of topics.

Connect to parents and carers

From coffee catch-ups to art groups, find social support and connection with other parents and carers.

Connect to online programs

Online programs and events specially curated for parents and carers of children with disability. Learn from experts, be inspired, and take time out for you.

Join our community

The Connect Disability Carer Community Facebook group is a safe space for parents and carers to communicate online.

Sign up today and see what you discover!

moira.org.au/connect
03 8552 2222

MOIRA.org.au

moira_org.au

VICTORIA
State
Government

Appendix 4. Sample Parent Leader Position Description

Position title:
Strengthening Parent Support Program (SPSP) Parent Leader for Peer Support Groups

Position summary:
Parent leaders facilitate SPSP peer support groups for parents and carers of a child with a disability or developmental delay.

Parent leaders are supported by the SPSP Coordinator.

Peer support groups provide opportunities for parents to meet on a regular basis:

- for mutual support and to develop social connections and networks
- to find out about available local support services and evidence-based parenting information
- to share strategies and advice
- to strengthen parenting skills and confidence.

Parent Leaders have a knowledge and/or understanding of:

- child and family support and services
- peer support
- group dynamics
- boundaries of their role.

Parent Leaders have the skills – ability to:

- liaise with the SPSP Coordinator about:
    - parents requiring additional support or referrals
    - evidence-based information that can be provided to parents
- communicate respectfully and effectively with parents
- respond in a timely and appropriate way to group dynamics

Appendix 5. Professional development links

BeYou
A broad range of training and information for parents and professionals on issues related to mental health, cultural diversity, resilience, trauma and inclusion.

Berry Street Trauma Informed Practice
Training on issues related to parent-child interactions, wellbeing, strength based & trauma informed practice.

Carers Victoria facilitator training
On line two-part program about facilitating carer support groups.

Centre for Community Child Health - Family Partnership Training
Training on the skills involved in engaging and helping families.

Early Childhood Australia eLearning modules
A broad range of online training designed for early childhood educators but applicable to professionals working in child and family services.

Emerging Minds: Working with First Nations Families & Children
This course is designed for non-Indigenous practitioners to develop the skills and understanding to build genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Department of Education & Training: Collaborative practice principles eLearning
Designed for educators, but applicable for other professionals working in child and family services, this online module discusses Family Centred-Practice and Partnerships with Professionals.

Early Childhood Foundation- Trauma responsive practice with families
This workshop provides foundational knowledge of the neurobiological impact of trauma and specifically explores the intergenerational and transgenerational trauma experience within families.

Early Childhood Intervention Australia – Vic/Tas Family Voices Podcasts
A series of podcasts featuring casual conversations with families of children with disability and/or developmental delay and the professionals they work alongside.

Lifeline - Accidental Counsellor Training
This course aims to provide participants with skills in active listening, calming and effective gentle questioning so they can safely and effectively support people who are in distress or experiencing a crisis.

Mental Health Foundation Education
Training that aims to increase mental health literacy and empower individuals to take care of their mental health, foster resilience, decrease stigma, and increase mental health awareness in the community.

Parenting Research Centre
A broad range of resources and reports that aim to help children thrive by driving new and better ways to support families in their parenting.

Raising Children Network – Raising children with disability
Provides information to help parents with the day-to-day decisions of raising children and to help them look after their own needs. This includes information relevant to children with a disability or developmental delay including family relationships and communication, health, services and support, and play and learning.

SNAICC
Training and resources that aim to develop an understanding of the importance of culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Triple P – Positive Parenting Program
Helps parents develop skills, strategies and confidence to parent children positively. It supports parents to build and maintain positive and nurturing relationships with their children and develop skills for raising resilient, competent and confident children.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Cultural safety training that aims to increase understanding, acceptance, and respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural identities, cultural ways, and our ongoing connection to culture, Community and Country.

Appendix 6. Key organisations – State and federal

Association of Children with a Disability (ACD)
Amaze
Better Health Channel
Carer Gateway
Carers Victoria
Cerebral Palsy Network (CPN)
Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)
Continence Victoria
Department of Families, Fairness & Housing
Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU)
Disability Gateway
Down Syndrome Vic (DSV)
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
ICAN Network
National Disability Insurance Scheme/Agency (NDIS/NDIA)
Orange Door
Raising Children's Network
Rights Information & Advocacy Centre (RIAC)
Siblings Australia
Very Special Kids (VSK)
Victorian Advocacy League For Individuals with Disability (VALID)
Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS)
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
Syndromes Without A Name

SPSP Practice Framework