



Getting help

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/getting-help>

What does it mean to seek help?

Children can experience all kinds of difficulties as they grow and develop. Sometimes, families may need extra help and support to deal with the kinds of things that they are experiencing. Help-seeking can be described as communicating a problem to obtain support, advice or help. People may have different ideas about finding help; for some, it may include making phone calls, for others it may be talking to health professionals. However people might go about it, communication is an important part of getting help. Sometimes, however, parents or carers might find it hard to seek help and support when their child is experiencing difficulties. This may mean that some people do not ask for help from friends, family or services even though they may benefit from it.

Seeking help does not always mean seeing a professional, a close and trusted friend can be a great source of support for some families.

Why is seeking help important?

Seeking help involves talking about a child's mental health difficulties with health professionals or other relevant support services, such as general practitioners (GPs), to access support and advice. It is important to seek help as it facilitates the improvement of children's mental health while supporting families and early childhood service staff who spend most time with the child.

When children are experiencing mental health difficulties, the earlier families can access help and support, the better. Problems that are not addressed can get bigger and harder to manage and can continue to affect children as they grow up.

Seeking help benefits children, families and early childhood staff. Seeking help provides families and early childhood staff with the confidence to work towards a common goal, for example families and staff working together as a team to find the right service for a child's difficulties. It also helps families to share their difficulties with friends, staff or health professionals and discover the options available to them. Seeking help may create a greater awareness among family members and help them to understand the difficulties children are experiencing. Seeking help benefits children by providing them with the best support possible to help them deal with their difficulties.

Seeking help reduces the risk of children experiencing mental health difficulties, by building resilience and the ability to cope. Staff can understand more about families and find out what they could be doing to support the help-seeking process at the service. Children's experiences at the early childhood service will also be affected by the level of support provided to them and their families. For example, a child may feel more confident to talk about their struggles in the playground if they have been building their confidence in other areas.

How to seek help

There are several important steps that families can follow to make it easier for them to seek help and to make sure that they get the best support possible for their child. There may also be other things that families can do in between each step to make things easier, like making a list of questions to ask the early childhood staff or a doctor, for example. Early childhood staff can contribute significantly to this process by giving families high-quality resources and information, and encouragement and reassurance when needed.

- Work out what you think the problem is.
- Talk to a trusted friend or support person you already know.
- Decide whether you need extra support or help.
- Talk to people who may know where you can go to seek help (eg an early childhood service, the family doctor or high-quality websites).
- Follow up any suggestions or referrals.

Parents and carers might find they go backwards and forwards through these steps while seeking help. This is part of the process of finding suitable support when needed.

Common challenges associated with seeking help

Sometimes families don't feel confident, or think that they know enough about their child's difficulties to seek help for them. When this happens families will try to carry on with life on their own, which may make it harder for them to cope on a daily basis.

There can be many reasons why people find it hard to seek help. Some of the main reasons include:

- A lack of knowledge about children's mental health difficulties. This might mean that people believe difficulties will get better by themselves or that parents or carers do not recognise their child's difficulties.
- Worries or concerns about how mental health problems are viewed within the community. This might mean parents and carers feel reluctant to seek help or are worried about the recommendations that might be made. Families might also feel they should be strong enough to support their child through difficulties on their own.
- Disappointment with previous help might make parents and carers reluctant to try again.
- Family and environmental influences. This can include the cost of help, both in time and money, lack of support and other family stresses.

The following things can help to overcome these barriers:

- Seeking informal support from family or friends.
- Learning more about children's mental health. For example, finding out about the difficulties children can experience and the things that protect them from developing these can give families the confidence to seek help when they need to (for more information on protective factors for children's mental health refer to [Component 4: Helping children experiencing mental health difficulties](#)).
- Networking with other people or families that might be in a similar situation (eg meeting other families).
- Finding out if the early childhood service knows of any helpful resources in the community (eg health professionals, parenting services).

[Seeking help for children's mental health difficulties](#) can sometimes feel like a difficult task. However you

Getting help

do not have to manage it alone. [Families can work together with early childhood services and schools](#) to ensure that the best supports are put in place to support children. [Working together supports mental health and wellbeing](#) in children. Families can also support themselves by [making connections](#) and building social support. [Getting information about parenting](#) may also help parents and carers feel more confident to best support their child.

If your problem is urgent

Please call [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14.

See also:

[Medicare rebates for mental health services](#)

[Getting help: Suggestions for families, schools and early childhood services](#)

[Getting help: Further resources](#)

