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## Family and child support services

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### Summary

- Victoria's maternal and child health services support your family with parenting help and by monitoring the health and development of your baby or toddler.
  - Throughout Victoria there are pregnancy and early childhood services specifically designed for Aboriginal families.
  - Child FIRST and family services provide support and assistance to children, young people and their families in cases where there are concerns about their wellbeing.
  - VICSEG is a Victorian community organisation that offers a range of family mentoring programs for culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians.
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Raising children and being part of a family is not always easy. There are up and downs, uncertainties and, sometimes, unwelcome surprises. To help families negotiate the tough times there are a number of government parenting services and supports. Sometimes families just need help to talk issues through.

### Family and early parenting support

Being a parent can be an exciting and rewarding experience, but creating a safe and nurturing environment for your children can be a challenge. A range of parenting advice and family support services are available to help parents in their role of raising kids:

- early parenting centres
- regional parenting services
- Child FIRST and family services
- the Cradle to Kinder program
- family intervention services
- maternal and child health services
- specific support for Aboriginal families.
- Community-based organisations throughout Victoria provide these family supports and are funded by the Victorian Government.

### Early parenting services

Early parenting services offer support to parents from pregnancy to when their child is four years old. They can help with common difficulties such as feeding and sleeping problems (sometimes called 'sleep school').

A range of specialist support, counselling, education and advice services are provided through the following early parenting centres in Melbourne:

- Mercy Health O'Connell Family Centre, located in Canterbury
- Queen Elizabeth Centre, located in Noble Park
- Tweddle Child and Family Health Service, located in Footscray.

These services are focused on:

- building parenting capacity and skills
- enhancing the parent-child relationship
- strengthening a family's link with their community.

They do this through:

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- day stay services – an intensive day program providing early parenting support
- residential services – a centre-based intensive parenting program in which parents stay at the centre for five days to build their parenting skills
- home-based services – services where skilled staff visit your home to provide one-on-one parenting skills and education
- group services – group-based programs attended by parents and children, which are designed to improve parent–child relationships and interaction.

Early parenting centres also offer a range of other education, programs and parenting advice, including podcasts.

Early parenting centre services are free and for vulnerable families who are assessed as needing additional intensive parenting support to build their skills and confidence in caring for their infant or toddler. Visit your local maternal and child health service or local doctor for a referral.

### **Regional parenting services**

Regional parenting services are provided in socially and economically disadvantaged areas of Victoria. They offer group education, information and intervention programs to parents, giving you and your family the chance to take part in relevant, local parenting programs that can help you negotiate the major transition points in the lives of your child and your family.

There is a parenting service located in each of the Department of Health & Human Services regions across Victoria.

### **Cradle to Kinder program**

The **Cradle to Kinder** program is an intensive pregnancy and postnatal support service. Cradle to Kinder provides longer term, intensive family and early parenting support for vulnerable young mums up to 25 years of age and their families, beginning in pregnancy and until their child reaches four years of age. There are specific Cradle to Kinder programs for Aboriginal families.

Cradle to Kinder builds the capacity of parents to not only provide for their children's health, safety and development but to build their own self-reliance and sustainability through access to education, vocational training and employment.

Referrals are accepted from a broad range of service providers including:

- maternity services
- local doctors
- community health services
- Aboriginal community-controlled organisations
- maternal and child health services
- housing services
- youth services
- disability services
- early parenting and family services
- child protection services.

### **Family intervention services**

Family intervention services aim to reduce parental depression, anxiety and stress and reduce conflict in relationships between parents. They do this by working with parents to increase the effectiveness of their parenting and by working with children to increase their social abilities using a combination of counselling, skill development and education services that are both individual and group-based.

Family intervention services are designed for families with children under 10 years old who are experiencing parenting difficulties, often because their children are displaying disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviours.

Family intervention services can be contacted via the following three agencies:

<b>Barwon-South Western</b> Warrnambool City Council Call (03) 5564 7800	<b>Hume</b> Upper Hume Community Health Service Call 1800 880 660	<b>Northern Metropolitan</b> Victorian Parenting Centre Call (03) 9639 4111
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### **Maternal and child health service**

Victoria's maternal and child health (MCH) service supports your family with parenting help and by monitoring the health and development of your baby or toddler. The service can also give you referrals to other professionals and link you with other families in your local community.

The MCH service offers:

- 10 appointments at key ages and stages for you and your child where you are encouraged to talk about your concerns and your parenting experiences
- information and advice about improving your child's health, growth and development
- an opportunity to meet other parents and to link with community groups in your area.

The MCH service also runs a 24-hour telephone line staffed by qualified MCH nurses. The nurses provide information, support and guidance regarding child health, nutrition, breastfeeding, maternal and family health and parenting. Call **13 22 29** anytime of the day or night to speak with a maternal and child health nurse.

### **Support for Aboriginal families**

Aboriginal families are welcome at all early childhood services and kindergarten programs, where Aboriginal culture will be valued and respected. However, there are also family and parenting services specifically designed for Aboriginal families.

The **Koori Maternity Service** offers culturally appropriate support during pregnancy and child birth. Under the program, you will be cared for by an Aboriginal maternity health worker and a midwife during pregnancy and for the weeks after you give birth. Your Aboriginal health worker can then link you to other service providers if needed.

This program is a partnership between the **Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation** (VACCHO) and Victorian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations throughout Victoria.

For more information, visit the Department of Health & Human Services **Aboriginal maternity services page**.

The In Home Support program follows on from the Koorie Maternity Service by working with you in a culturally respectful way to improve your child's health, development, learning and wellbeing up until your child is three years old. There are currently six Aboriginal organisations delivering the In Home Support Program in Bairnsdale, Fitzroy, Geelong, Mildura, Shepparton and Swan Hill.

The Home Based Learning Program builds on the work of the In Home Support Program by helping your family in the next stage of your child's development – up to five years old. There are currently two Home Based Learning Programs based in Mildura and Swan Hill.

For more information visit the **Department of Education and Training** website.

In addition, the Victorian Government provides a range of specific services to support Aboriginal children living away from their parents.

### **Child FIRST and family services**

The Department of Health & Human Services funds the Child FIRST and family services to provide support and

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assistance to vulnerable children, young people and their families in cases where there are concerns about the wellbeing of the child or young person (0–17 years, including an unborn child), or their family.

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) have been established at 24 sites across Victoria to provide an entry point into family services or other support services for vulnerable children and families. A referral to Child FIRST may be the best way of connecting vulnerable children, young people and their families to the services they need to protect and promote a healthy development.

Anyone with a concern for a child or family can **make a referral to Child FIRST**.

### Services for young people

When things are not going well at home, or if personal issues are getting on top of you, teenagers can call headspace (**1800 650 890**) for advice and support. The headspace counsellors are specially trained to deal with family issues from a young person's perspective.

If you would prefer to go online, the **ReachOut** website provides practical information, tools and support to young people to manage everything from everyday troubles to really tough times.

### Services for culturally and linguistically diverse children and families

Cultural or language issues can put up a barrier, whether real or imagined, between culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians and some service providers.

VICSEG is a Victorian community organisation that offers a range of family mentoring programs for culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians. VICSEG can help empower you and your family to navigate the child and family service systems and to access supports, facilities and resources for parents and children. The programs support families to confidently participate in child and family services and to take part in activities to support your child's

development and your understanding of parenting in Australia. For more information visit the **VICSEG** website.

For Victorians wanting to access mainstream family support services but who are not confident with English, you can access interpreter services either in person, over the phone or via videoconferencing. Simply tell your service provider that you would like an interpreter, specifying the dialect you speak (if relevant) and if you have a preference for a male or female interpreter.

### Helplines and telephone counselling services for children and families

The Australian and Victorian governments fund a number of telephone helplines for families who need support or advice.

#### Australia-wide

Service	Description	Contact	Hours
headspace	A telephone helpline and online service for teenagers and young people aged 12–25 who are worried about their mental health. Qualified youth mental health professionals can help with issues such as depression, bullying and isolation. Support is also available to concerned parents or carers.	<b>1800 650 890</b>	9am – 1am, 7 days a week

Service	Description	Contact	Hours
Family Relationship Advice Line	A helpline providing information and advice for anyone experiencing or affected by family relationship or separation issues.	<b><u>1800 050 321</u></b>	Mon – Fri: 8am – 8pm Sat: 10am – 4pm
MensLine Australia	A mens helpline providing telephone counselling and a referral service for men who need advice on a large range of issues including relationship support and parenting skills and for those at risk of committing suicide.	<b><u>1300 78 99 78</u></b>	24 hours

### Victoria

Service	Description	Contact	Hours
Maternal and Child Health Line	A parenting helpline providing information, support and guidance about child health, nutrition, breastfeeding, maternal and family health and parenting for Victorian families with children from birth to school age.	<b><u>13 22 29</u></b>	24 hours
Men's Referral Service	A domestic abuse telephone helpline for men who want help to stop their abusive or violent behaviour towards their family members. Women can also call the helpline for information to help for their male partner, husband, relative or friend.	<b><u>1300 766 491</u></b>	Mon – Fri: 9am – 9pm
Parentline	A helpline providing parenting help, in the form of general information and advice for all parents and their children in Victoria.	<b><u>13 22 89</u></b>	8am – midnight, 7 days a week

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Counsellor

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Department of Health and Human Services

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