



Choosing a Provider

Key messages:

- choosing a suitable provider for your child involves asking questions, and communicating about your child's needs and goals
- once you've chosen a provider, it's OK to keep asking questions, and even change providers if your current provider isn't meeting your needs

Finding and selecting a provider to help your child, yourself, and/or your family is an important decision.

Like all health professionals, allied health practitioners differ in training, experience, and personality. The best choice is a therapist who has the skills and expertise to meet your needs and requirements and is a good “fit” – someone you and/or your family member likes and with whom you feel connected.

Importantly, not all therapists have experience working with children with a developmental delay. Although a therapist may possess excellent skills and expertise, it takes several years of experience working with a client group to provide best practice intervention. Additionally, many organisations have effective supervision in place to support effective and evidence-based practices, even for new employees. It's important that you request a provider to demonstrate what they can offer, particularly as it relates to your needs and requirements.

If you live in a rural or remote area, you may have a limited choice of providers, and there can be long waiting lists for providers no matter where you live. It's important not to worry about whether you have selected the “best” provider - once you have made contact, the more information you can provide about your child's needs, the better they will be able to help.

The following information is provided to help you to make an informed decision when choosing a provider.

Some questions you should ask the provider are:



Are you registered?

As with other health professionals, allied health therapists must be registered in Australia with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). You can check a provider's registration at www.ahpra.gov.au. For speech pathologists go to <https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au>.

How much will it cost?

Ask practitioners what their fees are. You can claim these from health funds if you are a member. You will usually have to cover the gap between what you can claim and their charges. For Chronic Disease Management (formerly Enhanced Primary Care or EPC), general practitioners can provide services.

For NDIS participants, it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with the current NDIS price guide for your home state. It outlines the prescribed rates that a provider can charge a participant. It ensures that NDIS pricing is sustainable, balancing the needs of participants while recognising the skills and expertise of experienced health professionals. NDIS does not allow providers to charge higher than the capped rate. Reputable providers with extensive skills and experience in disability will normally charge the prescribed rate, which is the cost used by the NDIA when formalising your plan and associated funding. For more information about accessing NDIS supports, see our NDIS resources [\[include link here\]](#).

Have you had experience working with children with a developmental delay?

Working with children with a delay requires a very high level of skill, experience, and ongoing professional development to keep abreast of best practice intervention. It is therefore important for the therapist to have extensive experience of at least 5-10 years plus working with children with a developmental delay.

Where and how often will you provide therapy intervention?

It may be important for the therapist to visit your child in their home environment as well as places they frequently go. This ensures that any intervention undertaken (e.g., prescription of equipment or home modifications) is customised to your child and how they interact with it within their environment.



How will you set therapy goals with us?

It is important for you and the provider to set goals together. A good provider will always ensure that any intervention undertaken is informed by client goals that meet their needs and requirements.

Do you use interventions that are shown to work?

It is important for an occupational therapist to explain to you what they are going to do and why.

Some additional questions you can ask:

Service provision

These are questions about how service providers can help you, what you can get from the providers, and when you can expect to get the help your child needs. Here are some questions you can ask:

1. How will you work with me to support my child's development?
2. How much flexibility is there? In other words, how much choice will I have about what to use within the service?
3. Where will the service be provided – for example, via video conference, in my home, in a hospital, clinic, community centre, early learning centre or at school? And can I choose?
4. What support can you give my child when they move to kindergarten, childcare or school? For example, will you come to kindergarten, childcare or school meetings if I want you to?
5. How will you support the mainstream or community activities that my child might be involved with – for example, playgroups or sports clubs?
6. What can I do if I'm unhappy with the support you're providing for my child?

Accessibility

These are questions about the practical side of using service providers and whether services will suit your child and family.



1. Can you and your child get to the service easily? For example, can you get there by public transport, or is there a car park nearby?
2. When, how often and for how long will your child need the service?
3. How long is each session likely to take?
4. What are the service's operating hours?
5. Is there a cost involved?
6. Is there a waiting list? How long will it take to get an appointment?
7. Do you have to go to a centre or will they visit it in the community?
8. Maybe something about meeting your family's needs?
9. Can we receive support between appointments?
10. Do you provide service via Telehealth? Is this an option in case of illness or if I'm unable to travel to an appointment?

Service standards and staff qualifications

1. What qualifications and experience do the professionals in your organisation have? Does the service have an accreditation system?
2. Is the service government funded, or connected with a university or hospital?
3. Do you use the Early Childhood Intervention Australia National Guidelines: Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention or the National Standards for Disability Services?
4. What are your service's mission, vision, and values?
5. How long has your service been operating?

If you're still not sure after comparing the pros and cons, it's OK to:

- go back to service providers and ask more questions
- ask other professionals what they think might be best for your child
- ask other parents about their experiences.

Once you've found a potential therapist to work with your child:

Arrange to meet the provider (at least talk to them on phone or video) - you can find out if they are really listening to you and trying to understand your needs and goals. It's OK to visit services more than once before choosing, or to ask to meet with several different professionals within the service. Sometimes you might decide on a service provider and get started, but then you realise that the service provider isn't right for you after all. That's OK – you can change providers.



A final piece of advice...

Selecting a provider to work with your child is an important decision. Working with a provider is about building positive relationships that are real partnerships and based on collaboration, family centred practices, and mutual respect. _

Choosing a provider who is a good fit for you and your child, and is prepared to work with you to meet your needs and requirements, will vastly increase your chances of getting a positive outcome.

References:

<https://livingtothemax.com.au/select-occupational-therapist/>

https://www.cyda.org.au/images/pdf/eci_4_about_family-centred_practice.pdf

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/services-support/services/choosing-service-providers>