

Family health and wellbeing

Multicultural parent easy guide 1

ENGLISH



A happy and healthy family is important for children. The family in which a child grows up has a big influence on their confidence, coping skills, and relationships with others.

Different cultures may have different ways of dealing with family issues, but most share similar beliefs and practices in relation to the family. These include:

- > the important role of the family in everyday life
- > the important role of the extended family, kinship group or community in raising children
- > the need to protect children and keep them safe from harm
- > the importance of good food and health
- > the need to help parents to be the best parents that they can be.

The family unit is important in Australia and there are laws which protect the safety and rights of all family members, especially women and children.

Different types of families

There are many different types of families in Australia.

Most include a father, mother and children. There are also families where only one parent cares for the children or where parents who are separated or divorced share the custody and care of their children. There are also families where adults and their children from a previous relationship live together as one family.

Some families have grandparents living with them while others may also share a house with uncles, aunts, cousins and other relatives. Who lives in a family may be determined by culture, need, convenience and support for family members.

Whatever a family looks like, it plays an important role in the health and wellbeing of its members, particularly children.

Your role as a parent

It is often said that being a good parent is one of life's most challenging and rewarding roles.

Being a parent in a new country can be confusing at times. Child rearing attitudes and practices in

Australia may be different from those of your homeland. As children grow older, they may feel that they need to balance the expectations of the Australian and family cultures. This can sometimes cause conflict within the family. Parents need to be sensitive to the pressures this can create for children and be understanding and supportive.

Parents have a legal and moral responsibility to care for their children until they become adults, which in Australia is 18 years of age. This includes providing your children with food, a place to live, schooling and medical care. It also includes ensuring that your children are supervised and kept safe from harm. The law in Australia does not state how old children should be before they can be left at home alone but it is clear about the responsibility of parents to protect their children.

In families where both parents work, the task of balancing work and family responsibilities can sometimes feel overwhelming. Most parents consider that their first priority is to provide materially for their children. While this is certainly true, it is important to remember that talking, playing and spending time with your children is just as important to their wellbeing.



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SA Health

Helping parents be their best

Keeping your family healthy

Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be an exciting time. It can also be an anxious time for some women, especially those who are having their first baby.

If you are pregnant and newly arrived in Australia, you may have many questions about where to go for information and support. A good place to start is your family doctor who will explain your options and refer you to other services. Your doctor will also tell what you should be doing to have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. Women's health services in your local area can also provide information and support in your own language.

In Australia, babies are usually born in hospital especially if any complications are expected. Most hospitals provide special classes to help you prepare for the birth of your baby. There are also many services which can assist you after the birth of your baby. Talk to your midwife, doctor or hospital about these as well.

Eating healthy food

Providing healthy food for your family will contribute to their health and wellbeing. Eating healthy food can also prevent long term health problems such as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure which are becoming serious problems in many western societies. Some important points to remember:

- > Breast milk is best for your baby. It is all the food and drink a baby needs for the first 6 months.
- > Drink plenty of water. Plain tap water is the best drink for all your family members including children.
- > Plain milk is a good drink for children older than one year.
- > Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods. All family members including children need a range of healthy foods every day - breads and cereals; fruits and vegetables; dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt; lean meats, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and legumes (eg chick peas, kidney beans, lentils).
- > Limit foods that are high in fat such as fried foods, hamburgers, chips and pizza.
- > Limit foods and drinks that are high in added sugar such as soft drinks, fruit drinks, cakes, biscuits and lollies.
- > Check what your children may be buying from their school canteen or tuck shop.
- > Avoid small, hard bits of food for children under 4 years of age as these can cause choking – eg raw carrot, nuts, hard lollies.
- > Encourage your children to wash their hands before eating.

Food allergies

About one in 20 children in Australia experiences a mild allergic reaction to certain foods, but serious allergies are rare. Foods which sometimes cause a reaction include peanuts and other nuts, eggs, cow's milk, wheat products, fish and seafood or soy products. If your child has an allergy to a particular food, they will usually react within 30 minutes of eating the food. They may have skin reactions, swelling, tummy pain and vomiting, and diarrhoea. If this occurs, contact your family doctor.

If your child shows more serious symptoms such as becoming pale and limp, having difficulty breathing, experiencing swelling (face, lips, tongue or throat), or breaking out in spots - don't wait. Dial 000 for an ambulance immediately.

Immunisation

In Australia, immunisation protects babies, children and adults against many serious diseases. Babies and children can get free immunisation for many diseases including chickenpox, polio, meningococcal disease, whooping cough, measles, mumps and rubella. Other vaccinations may be required if your family members travel overseas. Immunisation for all members of your family, including the elderly, should be discussed with your family doctor or community health worker.

Enjoying an active lifestyle

As well as eating healthy food, being active every day is important for your family's health and wellbeing. You may enjoy walking, playing ball games in your back yard or local park, taking part in sport and recreation programs or school sport, or joining sports clubs.

Activities that are best for your family will depend on their individual interests, what you can afford, and other considerations such as transport. Walking is a good form of exercise and something that your family can do together. Encourage your children to switch off the television or their computer and get active! Getting active with your children is good for you too.

Emotional health and wellbeing

Pressures faced by families newly arrived in Australia

The emotional health of your family members is just as important as their physical health.

New settlers in Australia, especially those who have arrived as refugees, may have experienced severe trauma related to war, violence, poverty, the death of loved ones, separation from family, and lengthy periods in refugee camps. Some have been abused or tortured. It can sometimes be difficult to put these experiences aside and begin a new life. The additional pressures of settling and adjusting to life in a new country can also affect families. Depression, anxiety, conflict between family members, and other problems are not uncommon and should be addressed.

Different ways of responding

Family members may respond differently to the pressures described above.

Some fathers may feel that their status and authority has been affected by what they consider to be more relaxed attitudes in Australia. They may become angry and express their anger in inappropriate ways. Financial hardship and not being able to find work can also contribute to their feelings of helplessness and frustration.

Mothers may become depressed and isolated, especially if they are at home alone caring for younger children.

It is sometimes difficult for children to understand or talk about their feelings. Instead, they may get angry, fight with their brothers or sisters or school friends, or become withdrawn. Older children in particular may feel the burden of having to balance the traditions and values of their parents with those of Australian society. They often feel like they are being pulled in two directions in their attempts to please their parents and also fit in with their friends and school community. They may rebel or show particular anger towards their parents.

If family tensions and problems are not addressed, they can continue to become worse until there is a family crisis. It is important for families to try and recognise these problems and seek help just as they would for any physical issue.

What can you do?

There are a number of services listed in this guide that you can contact for help with family issues.

If your family is having problems that it cannot resolve on its own, you can seek help from your doctor or speak to a qualified counsellor at the Migrant Resource Centre who speaks your language. Following a strictly confidential assessment of your family's concerns, the counsellor can refer you to specialist services that will provide you with the support your family needs in your preferred language. Migrant Resource Centre staff can meet with the family or individual family members who want to focus on their particular concern.

Services that can assist you:

Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA)

The MRCSA is a leading settlement agency in SA. It provides information, counselling, referral, community education and other support services to families and individuals of refugee background and their new and emerging communities.

59 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000
Tel: (08) 8217 9510
Website: www.mrcsa.com.au
Office hours are between 9.00am and 5.00pm

The Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia also has centres in outer metropolitan and country regions:

Northern Area Migrant Resource Centre

28 Mary Street, Salisbury SA 5108
Tel: (08) 8283 0844

Murraylands Migrant Resource Centre

5 Second Street, Murray Bridge SA 5253
Tel: (08) 8532 3922

Limestone Coast Migrant Resource Centre

13 Eleanor Street, Mount Gambier SA 5290
Tel: (08) 8725 2753

Migrant Health Service (MHS)

The MHS is a primary health service for refugees, other humanitarian entrants and asylum seekers.

21 Market Street, Adelaide SA 5000
Tel: (08) 8237 3900

Community Health Centres

There is a community health centre in your local area that can provide you with health information and assistance. Many have workers who can speak your language. Look in your White Pages telephone book under Primary Health Care Services.

Women's Health Services

Women's Health Statewide (Adelaide)
Tel: (08) 8239 9600 or (free call) 1800 182 098
Website: www.whs.sa.gov.au

Dale Street Women's Health Centre (Port Adelaide)
Tel: (08) 8444 0700

Southern Women's Health Centre (Noarlunga Centre)
Tel: (08) 8384 9555

Elizabeth Women's Health Centre (Elizabeth)
Tel: (08) 8252 3711

Telephone services

In an emergency dial 000 for an ambulance or fire or police.

Government of SA Interpreting and Translating Centre

Tel: (08) 8226 1990 any time for telephone interpreting over the phone.
www.translate.sa.gov.au

Parent Helpline

Tel: 1300 364 100 any time for help with babies or children's health, or parenting

Child and Family Health Centres

Tel: 1300 733 606
9.00 am - 4.30 pm Monday - Friday to make an appointment at your local Centre.

Youth Healthline

Tel: 13 17 19 any time - an information service for young people.

Crisis care

Tel: 131 611 for urgent help outside office hours from 4.00 pm to 9.00 am on weekdays and 24 hours on weekends and public holidays.

Healthdirect

Tel: 1800 022 222 any time for free health advice from registered nurses.

Kidsafe SA

Tel: (08) 8161 6318

Websites

www.cyh.com

The Child and Youth Health website has information on a wide range of children's health and parenting topics.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

The Parenting SA website has over 80 Parent Easy Guides on parenting topics and information on parenting support groups in the community.

www.kidsafesa.com.au

The Kidsafe SA site has information about keeping babies and children safe and products available for sale.

Parent Easy Guides for New and Emerging Communities

This Parent Easy Guide was produced as a partnership initiative between the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA) and Parenting SA, Children Youth and Women's Health Service, Government of SA.

It is available in Arabic, French, Swahili, Dari and Dinka from the MRCSA, Parenting SA and www.parenting.sa.gov.au.

For more information

Migrant Resource Centre of SA (08) 8217 9510

Parent Helpline 1300 364 100

Parenting SA

Children, Youth and Women's Health Service

Telephone (08) 8303 1660

Internet: www.parenting.sa.gov.au

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Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia

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