



**Caring for
Children**
Tips on raising
children in Australia

Caring for Children

has been written to help parents who are settling in Australia to keep their families strong, happy and healthy.

Parenting can be difficult. For parents who have come to Australia from overseas, there are the added pressures of raising children in a new country and a new cultural environment.

Children, through school and other activities, often adapt more easily and may learn Australian customs, language and culture faster than their parents.

This booklet will help parents to care for their families in Australia and find help when they need it.

Caring for Children provides information about:

- **How children grow**
- **Communicating with children**
- **Raising teenagers in a new culture**
- **Leaving children at home on their own safely**
- **Disciplining children**
- **Keeping children safe**
- **Where to find advice, help and support**

This booklet has been produced for parents and as a resource for workers discussing these topics with parents as part of casework or group work.

It is available in Arabic, Bangla, Dari, Dinka, English, Farsi, Karen, Swahili, Tamil and Tibetan at:
ssi.org.au/resources/publications

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Funded by the



How our children grow

From the moment they are born our children are growing and changing. Every child is different; some children grow quickly, and some grow slowly. Parents want to know that children are growing up healthy and happy and learning as they grow. This list is a guide to common ways that children grow and change.

0–6 months

In their first 6 months babies like to be held close and cuddled. Babies communicate by crying. As they grow they cry in different ways to tell parents what they need – I'm hungry, I'm tired, I'm scared, or I'm wet. Babies learn by watching, listening and touching. It's good to give them new things to touch and see. Talking, singing and reading to babies makes them happy and helps them to learn to speak. Listening to a parent's voice is soothing and calming.

6–12 months

From 6 months to 12 months babies need parents and family members to talk, sing, read and play with them. They make lots of noise and when they get your attention, they give back smiles and laughter and baby talk. They know the voices of family members but can be shy with new voices and faces. Babies will reach out, sit up, roll and some will start to crawl and try to stand up.



12 months–2 years

By 12 months most children can say a few words and by 2 years they can make simple, short sentences. Children will also be playing, exploring and learning to walk. They need to be close to family members and they like to give and get lots of hugs. They are starting to learn to do things when parents ask them to.

2–3 years

Children between 2 and 3 years old are learning many things. They want to stay close to parents but they are also exploring the world around them. They want to do things without help and they say 'no' a lot. If they don't get what they want they can scream and shout and stamp their feet. This can be very tiring for parents but it's natural and children need their parents to show them love and keep them safe.

3–5 years

Between 3 and 5 years old children love talking and they ask lots of questions and say 'why' a lot. They talk to everyone - family, friends, their toys, themselves. They're very loving and they start learning to share and make friends. They can now start to understand right and wrong.



5–7 years

Children 5-7 years old are full of ideas and energy; they enjoy playing, making up stories and building things. Starting school is a big change that is exciting but also tiring and scary so they need lots of care from the family. They want people to like them and treat them as adults and they can be easily upset if they think other children are unkind to them. They can be slow to do what they are asked, so parents need to be very patient.

**Every child is different;
some children grow quickly,
and some grow slowly.**

7–10 years

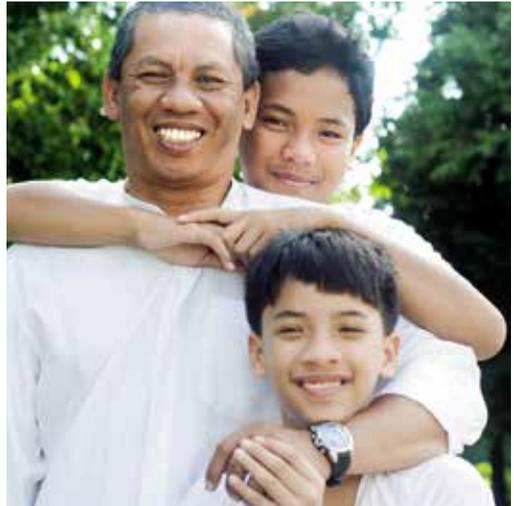
Children 7-10 years are growing up fast, learning new things and making new friends. They want people to like them and they want to be good at things. Supporting and guiding children at this time will help them to become confident and successful at school.

10–12 years

The physical changes that start now can make children feel uncomfortable and shy. Many children start to question or argue with their parents' beliefs and decisions. Their emotions can change quickly and they can show less interest in the family. Feeling respected is important to children so parents need to take time to listen. Many children start worrying about what other people think about them so it's important to help them to feel good and be self-confident.

13–19 years

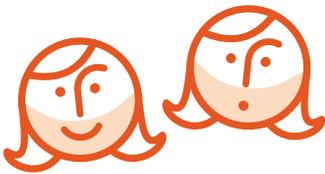
These are called the 'teenage' years, when a young person is moving from being a child to an adult. It can be a good and exciting time but also difficult. It's natural for teenagers to want to spend more time with friends and less time with family. They are learning about who they are and they like to find their own style with clothes, hairstyles, music, and friends. It's also natural for teenagers to feel strong emotions – happy, angry, and not wanting to talk. Parents can guide teenagers, and say what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, but it helps if they can give teenagers some freedom and independence.



Communicating with children

The job of parents and communities everywhere is to care for children, to keep them safe, happy, healthy, and strong. Parents in different countries and communities communicate with children in different ways. Good communication is when parents and children trust and respect each other.

How parents communicate also changes as children grow up. There will always be difficult times when children don't want to do what parents ask or behave in a way that parents don't like. When parents and children communicate well, most of these problems can be avoided.



Communication is two-way

Good communication is about talking and listening. When parents listen to what children say, they learn a lot about their children and it helps children to feel confident, respected and safe. Children communicate in different ways at different ages but all children need your full attention; let them finish what they are saying and try not to interrupt or criticise.



Understanding

What is easy for an adult to understand is not always easy for a child to understand. Sometimes when children seem to be deliberately disobedient, it's because they do not always understand. Asking children questions and letting them explain things in their own words can make things clearer. Sometimes bad behaviour is a sign that something else is wrong and that a child needs extra attention and care.



Enjoy spending time with children

Spending time with children and doing things with them that they enjoy builds trust and good communication. Talk to children about the things they enjoy like music or sport and listen to what they have to say. Play games with your children, spend lots of time with them and have fun.

Tell children when you are happy with them

Children like to know that parents are happy and proud of them, so let them know when they do something well. This encourages children to want to please their parents and increases their confidence. Feeling happy and confident helps children to learn, have friendships and behave well.

Make rules clear, consistent and reliable

It's important for children to have rules that they can understand and follow. Rules should be fair, make sense and suit the child's age. It's good if the rules don't change all the time but it's also good for parents to be flexible. For example, rules about bedtime might change during school holidays.

Help children to talk

It is very difficult for a child who is frightened to communicate and to be trusting and truthful. Making fun of children, shouting at them or threatening to hurt them makes it much harder to communicate. Even if you think they have been naughty, it's good to let children explain their actions. Listening to children can help you to understand what they have done and why.



Don't be angry

Try not to be critical, angry or upset about the things your children say to you. Your angry response can stop children from talking openly. Don't talk to children if you are feeling angry or upset. Calm down and talk to them later.



Raising teenagers in a new culture

Young people aged between 13 to 19 years are called 'teenagers'. It's a time of change for young people and their families.

Changes are normal and necessary

Teenagers are changing from being children to adults and they are learning many new things. They are experiencing changes in their bodies and feelings and in their social lives and behaviours.

Parents may notice some of these typical changes in their teenage children. They:

- start to see themselves as separate from the family and want more privacy
- want to make more decisions for themselves
- form different views and opinions to parents
- want to spend more time with their friends and pay more attention to people their own age.

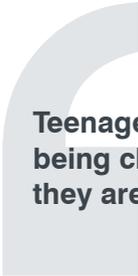
Parents sometimes worry that their teenage children are behaving badly. This can lead to conflict but if parents are patient they can find new ways to care for their children as they grow into adults.

Know your teenagers

Parents need to have information about what their teenage children are doing and thinking to make sure that they are safe and well. Spending time with teenagers, doing things they enjoy and taking time to understand what they are interested in can help to build trust.

Talking to teenagers

It is important that parents have good communication with their teenagers. The way to talk with a teenager is not the same as talking to a small child. Teenagers are starting to feel like adults and they need to be respected, so listening and open discussion is important.



Teenagers are changing from being children to adults and they are learning many new things.



It is better to show teenagers how to behave than to just tell them

Encourage and respect

Teenagers like to be encouraged to do things well and praised when they do something good. Parents need to notice the good things teenagers do. Respect for their privacy will also build trust and confidence with teenagers.

Fairness and flexibility

It is difficult to force teenage children to do something that they don't want to do. Saying 'no' or 'you will do this' without allowing the teenager to make a choice or express an opinion can lead to conflict. It is still good for parents to make some rules but they also need to give the teenager some choice.

For example, if a parent is worried about a teenager attending an event with other young people for the first time, they could allow the teenager to join the event but only if they agree to certain conditions like being dropped off and picked up again at an agreed time by a parent.

Saying 'no' and 'sorry'

When parents need to say 'no', it should be in a calm and respectful way. It will help if parents explain the reasons behind their decision. If parents have made a mistake, saying 'sorry' will help to build good communication with teenagers.

Teach by example

It is better to show teenagers how to behave than to just tell them. They may act like they don't take notice of their parents, but they take a lot of notice. For example, if you want them to be kind and careful, then treat them and other people in a way that is kind and careful.

Parents need support too

It can be tiring and difficult for parents of teenagers. Talking to community or religious leaders or other parents who have had the same experiences can be helpful. It can also be helpful reaching out and getting support from extended family. Or call Parent Line for advice and support on 1300 1300 52.



Leaving children at home on their own



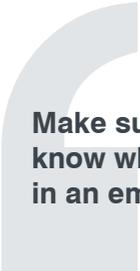
Many parents who have migrated to Australia want to know at what age they can safely and legally leave their children at home.

The law in NSW

The law in NSW does not set an age when children can be left alone. The law says that children must be properly looked after and protected from danger at all times. If the police believe that children are not well looked after and are at risk of danger, they can remove the children and charge parents or guardians with breaking the law.

When is it OK to leave children home alone?

This depends on their age and maturity, their ability to take care of themselves and to stay safe when you are not there. Children left alone must be old enough to take action in an emergency and know what to do and where to get help.



Make sure children know what to do in an emergency

Never leave babies and young children alone

Babies and young children must not be left alone anywhere including in a home, a car or a pram. It is dangerous for babies and young children to be left alone even for a short time because they cannot look after themselves or keep themselves safe. Make sure that you or someone who you trust is with them and can keep them safe.

How long will you be away?

If you are planning to leave children alone, you need to think about their age and maturity, the time of day, how long they will be alone and if they can manage on their own for that amount of time. Always let children know how long you will be away.

Dangers in the home that could harm unsupervised children

Common dangers in homes include heaters, stoves, microwaves, baths, chemicals, swimming pools, open windows and balcony doors. The Kidsafe website has information that can help you reduce dangers in the home: www.kidsafensw.org.

Leaving younger children with older children

As children grow older they learn how to look after themselves and others. In many cultures it is common for older children to look after younger brothers and sisters. If you leave an older child looking after younger children you need to be sure that the older child is mature enough to look after the younger ones and keep them safe.

Make sure children know what to do in an emergency

Speak with the children about what to do in an emergency such as a fire, a break-in, accident or injury. Show them how to call 000 in an emergency. Make sure that your children know how to operate locks and get out of the home in an emergency. Never lock children in the house from the outside.

Let children know how to contact you

Make sure that children can contact you and that they know how to use the phone. Phone and check in on your children to make sure that everything is OK. You can also arrange for other family members and friends to be available and to check in on them.



Disciplining children in Australia

Parents everywhere use discipline to help children learn the right ways to behave including how to be safe from danger, how to develop self-control and how to be responsible. The way parents discipline children and the laws around discipline vary from country to country. In Australia there are laws about child protection that all parents must follow.

Parents who are new to Australia are sometimes surprised by the child protection laws and worry that they will stop them from doing their job as parents. If parents understand the laws about protecting children, they can feel confident about disciplining their children without breaking the law.

Hurting children is against the law.

The law in NSW says:

- Parents must not hit any part of a child's head or neck;
- Parents must not hit any part of a child's body if it continues to hurt the child for more than a short time, for example if it causes bruising or swelling;
- Parents can only hit a child with an open hand. They must not hit a child with a closed fist. They must not hit a child with any object, such as a belt or a stick.

The law protects children's safety

Children's bodies are easy to hurt. A hit that seems small to an adult can do permanent damage to a child's body. The head and neck are very sensitive areas and it is possible that even a small hit can cause a disability or be life-threatening. Shaking a baby roughly is very dangerous and can lead to brain damage and permanent disability.



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What parents can do

The use of physical punishment (e.g. smacking) as a form of discipline can hurt children physically and emotionally. Parents in Australia are encouraged to use discipline that does not involve physical punishments. Here are some common ways to discipline children without using physical punishments.

Rules and rewards

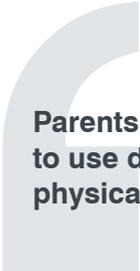
- Make rules that are fair and easy for children to understand.
- Make sure that children understand the rule, why you made it and how they can obey it.
- Reward good behaviour to encourage children to do the right thing.

Discipline to suit the child's age

- Children under 2 years do not understand rules or punishment so to change their behaviour, distract them or move their attention to something else.
- From about 3 years children can learn that their actions have consequences: "When you do this...this is what happens" so explain this when they make mistakes.
- For children over 2, 'time out' can be used, ask them to stay in one place for a short amount of time and think about their behaviour.

Older children and teenagers

If a young person does not cooperate with a reasonable rule or request, a privilege, such as using a computer game or seeing friends, can be stopped for a period of time.



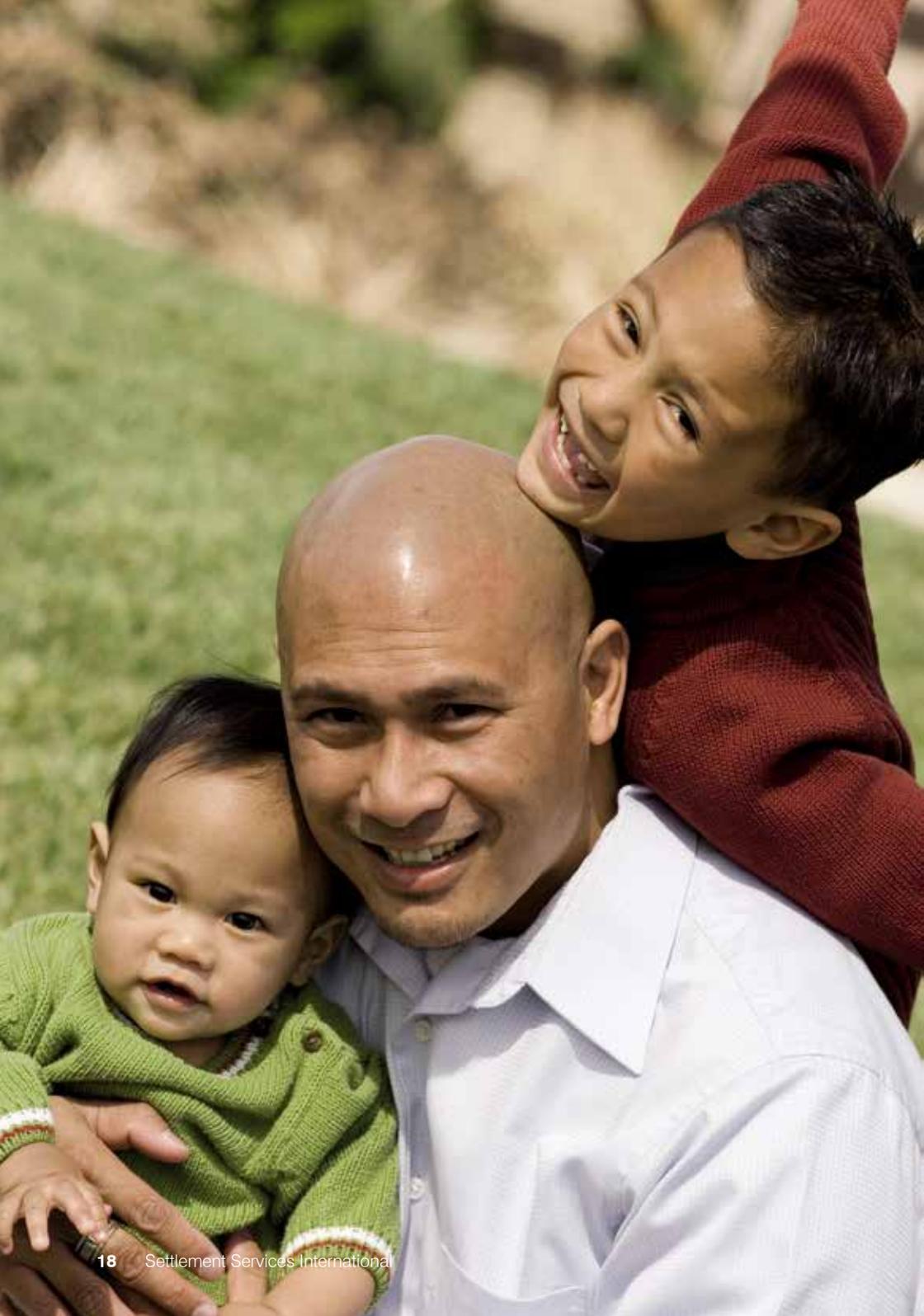
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Good communication

- Do not tell children that they are bad. It can encourage a child to keep doing the wrong thing or make them lose confidence.
- Talk with children after you have disciplined them about how they feel and what they have learnt.
- If a child gets too excited and behaves badly take them to a quiet place to calm down. Ask them to think about why their behaviour was wrong and what they can do to make it better.
- Teach by example. When a child does the wrong thing, help them to fix it. For example, if a child writes on a wall, ask the child to clean it and help them with it.
- Stay calm when disciplining children. Try counting to 10 or breathing slowly to calm down.





Keeping Children safe

Australia has child protection laws that all adults, including parents and other adults who care for children and young people, must follow. These laws mean that physical and sexual abuse of children, and neglect of children (aged under 18 years) is against the law and can be punished.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Neglect means that parents or adult carers do not look after a child's basic needs such as proper housing, food, education, clothes or medical care. It can also include not supervising children to keep them safe or leaving them alone for long periods of time.

Physical abuse means that a parent or carer hurts a child by hitting, beating, shaking, burning or bruising. It includes shaking a baby or hitting children with something like a stick or belt to discipline them. Female genital mutilation is physical abuse under Australian law and is a serious offence.

Emotional abuse means hurting the feelings of a child. This could be telling them they are not loved, yelling at them all the time, frightening them or threatening to hurt them. It can also be allowing a child to see violence being done to other members of the family, such as their mother. Emotional abuse is harmful for children and can make them think that they are worthless.

Sexual abuse is when someone involves a child in a sexual activity. Children are often bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them participate in the activity. Sexual abuse can do serious damage to a child for the rest of their lives.

Child marriage and forced marriage

Marrying someone who is under 18 is illegal in Australia. There are very limited circumstances where a person aged 16 or 17 can marry, but only if permission is given by a court.

It is also illegal to force people of any age to marry. A forced marriage is one where a person gets married without freely consenting because they have been tricked, threatened or pressured into it.

What are the signs of abuse and neglect?

Neglect – the child is too light or skinny for their age; is often unwashed; steals food, has physical problems that are not looked after like sores on the body; tries very hard to get attention from adults.

Physical abuse – the child has bruises on the head, face or neck; bite marks; scratches or cuts; broken bones; burn marks; or signs of female genital mutilation. An abused child might try to hide what has happened to them by telling a story that is hard to believe.

Emotional abuse – the child feels worthless, can't trust others, behaves badly to get adult attention or doesn't know how to get on with others.

Sexual abuse – sometimes the child tells an adult about the abuse or says things that give a signal that something is not right. Sometimes the child wants to harm their body, may refuse to eat or eat too much, or want to go to bed with their clothes on. The child may describe sexual acts or have a lot of knowledge about sex for their age.



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How is child neglect or abuse reported?

Anyone who thinks that a child might be neglected or physically, sexually or emotionally abused, or involved in a child marriage or forced marriage can report it to the Department of Family & Community Services (FACS) at the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 (TTY 1800 212 936). It is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If a caller does not speak English, the caseworkers will arrange an interpreter.

What will FACS do?

If FACS believes there is a risk to the safety of a child, its caseworkers will talk with parents and with the child if they are old enough. They may also talk with the child's relatives, teacher or other carers. The caseworker may decide that parents need help to look after children and link parents with support services. Sometimes the caseworker believes that a child is in danger and when this happens FACS may remove the child from their family to a safe place.

For more information

FACS has a brochure called *Spot It; Help Stop It* that explains the common signs of neglect and abuse. The brochure is available in many languages. For a copy of the brochure visit the website at www.community.nsw.gov.au

Where to find advice, help and support

There are many services that can help parents, children, young people and families. Many of these services are free. Workers in local councils, community health centres or settlement caseworkers can help families to find out about local services.

Most of the services listed here will organise an interpreter for people who do not speak English.

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Local Community Health Centres

have services for children, parents and families. These include home visits for new parents and babies, early childhood services, parenting groups, talking to a counsellor, and health checks for children.

Advice and support lines

are telephone numbers to call if talking to someone will be helpful. Some are open 24 hours and some are not. All lines are available either free or for the cost of a local call when using a landline.

- **Parent Line** – experienced counsellors will listen and give support and information about many topics including children's behaviour, discipline, teenagers, single parents, issues at school, and child care.
Phone: 1300 1300 52.
www.parentline.org.au
- **Tresillian Parent's Help Line** – qualified child and family health nurses give advice about parenting children aged up to 5 years.
Phone: 1800 637 357 or (02) 9787 0855.
www.tresillian.net
- **Karitane Careline** – Family Health nurses give advice about pregnancy and parenting children up to 5 years.
Phone: 1300 227 464.
www.karitane.com.au
- **Family Relationship Advice Line** – advises about parenting issues and arrangements after separation.
Phone: 1800 050 321.
www.familyrelationships.gov.au
- **Domestic Violence Line** – gives telephone counselling and information about family violence. Trained female caseworkers are sensitive to the needs of women who have experienced domestic violence.
Phone: 1800 656 463
(TTY 1800 671 442).
- **Child Protection Helpline** – call to report suspected child abuse or neglect, or to discuss concerns about a child or young person.
Phone: 132 111
(TTY 1800 212 936).
- **Kids Helpline** – free and private telephone and online counselling service for young people aged between 5 and 25.
Phone: 1800 55 1800
- **Lifeline** – someone to talk to when there is a worrying problem; a service staffed by trained volunteers who are supported by professional staff.
Phone: 13 11 14.
www.lifeline.org.au

Parenting Information

These websites provide information about parenting and services for parents, children and families.

- Resourcing Parents at:
www.resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au
- NSW Department of Family Community Services at:
www.community.nsw.gov.au
- Families NSW at:
www.families.nsw.gov.au
- Raising Children Network at:
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs)

MRCs provide services to migrants and refugees. Services are likely to include: settlement assistance, information and referral, family support, play groups, parenting programs, disability support services, domestic violence support programs, social outings and multilingual information. If you need this kind of support, contact an MRC in your area.

Auburn Diversity Services

17 Macquarie Road
Auburn NSW 2144
Phone: (02) 9649 6955
Email: info@auburndiversity.org.au
www.auburndiversity.org.au

Community MRC

4 /1 Horwood Place
Parramatta NSW 2150
Phone: (02) 9687 9901
Email: cso@cmrc.com.au
www.cmrc.com.au

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre

Corner Railway Parade and
McBurney Road
Cabramatta NSW 2166
Phone: (02) 9727 0477
Email: info@fmrc.net
www.fmrc.net

Illawarra Multicultural Services

17 Auburn Street
Wollongong NSW 2500
Phone: (02) 4229 6855
Email: info@ims.org.au
www.ims.org.au

Liverpool MRC

Ground floor, 108 Moore Street
Liverpool NSW 2170
Phone: (02) 9601 3788
Email: info@lmrc.org.au
www.lmrc.org.au

Macarthur Diversity Services

Level 3, Suite 2, Campbelltown City
Centre
171-179 Queen Street
Campbelltown NSW 2560
Phone: (02) 4627 1188
Email: info@mdsi.org.au
www.mdsi.org.au

Metro Assist

Level 2, 59-63 Evaline Street
Campsie NSW 2194
Phone: (02) 9789 3744
Email: metromrc@metromrc.org.au
www.metromrc.org.au

Northern Settlement Services

8 Chaucer Street
Hamilton NSW 2303
Phone: (02) 4969 3399
Email: nss@nsservices.com.au
www.nsservices.com.au

St George MRC

552 Princes Highway
Rockdale NSW 2216
Phone: (02) 9597 5455
Email: sgmrc@sgmrc.org.au
www.sgmrc.org.au

Sydney Multicultural Community Services

3 General Bridges Crescent
Daceyville NSW 2032
Phone: (02) 9663 3922
Email: info@sydneymscs.org.au
www.sydneymscs.org.au

SydWest Multicultural Services

Level 2/125 Main Street
Blacktown NSW 2148
Phone: (02) 9621 6633
Email: info@sydwestmsi.org.au
www.sydwestmsi.org.au

Refugee Counselling Services**NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)**

Help for children and adults who have been through persecution, war, violence or human rights abuse before coming to Australia and need help to feel confident and well again.

Phone: (02) 9794 1900.
www.startts.org.au

Transcultural Mental Health Centre

Help for people from different cultures and language backgrounds who have mental health problems. Services include counselling and information about mental health.

Phone: 1800 648 911 or
(02) 9912 3851.
www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au

