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| Child FIRST workbook  Course 1: Understanding disability |
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# The National Disability Insurance Scheme Learning and Development Program

With the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), workers in the child and family system have an important role in identifying families with disability and helping them access and navigate the NDIS. This NDIS Learning and Development Program aims to build the capacity of workers in the child and family system to improve outcomes for families with disability.

You will probably already be using some of the skills and knowledge covered in this course; others might be new. Whether you’ve been working in this area for a short or long time, this course aims to build on your existing skills and knowledge to improve the outcomes of children and/or parents and carers with disability.

The program consists of four sequential eLearning courses and corresponding workbooks. The courses are designed to be completed alongside the NDIS 101 eLearning course. The workbooks are designed for you to work through at the completion of each course – to give you the opportunity to apply what you’ve learned to your individual work setting.

Across the four courses the NDIS Learning and Development Program will build your knowledge, skills and confidence to:

* recognise and understand disability
* understand the NDIS and the support needs of families with children and/or parents and carers with disability
* engage families in conversations about their support needs, and support them through the NDIS access, planning and implementation stages
* work collaboratively with the NDIS and other services.

# About this workbook

This workbook gives you the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge you learned in Course 1: Understanding disability. Course 1 covered disability and its impact on families. In it you explored:

* signs of and diagnosis of disability
* invisible disabilities
* the impact of culture on how disability is perceived
* the impact of disability on the family
* the changing needs of people with disabilities and their families throughout their lifetimes
  + tips for working with parents and families with disability.

If you haven’t already completed the eLearning component of Course 1, please do so before attempting the exercises in this workbook.

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| Microsoft Word document icon | Remember, you can download a full transcript of Course 1 under the ‘Menu’ tab on the home page of the eLearning course. |

This workbook has the following sections:

* 1. Exercise: Family scenario. This exercise gives you an opportunity to apply your knowledge to a fictional family scenario
  2. Resources. This is a list of practice guides and other resources that might be useful in your work with families with disability
  3. Glossary. This is a list of definitions for key terms and acronyms used in the eLearning course

# Exercise: Family scenario

Box 1 contains a description of a typical family that you might encounter during your usual practice. Read the family’s story and apply your learnings from Course 1 to answer the questions below. If others in your workplace are also doing this course you might like to work through the exercises together. We’ve provided some suggested responses at the back of this workbook.

This family scenario has been produced for educational purposes. Information provided about individuals is fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

## Box 1: Family scenario

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| Dana has a daughter, Sienna, who is 12, and a son, Alex, who is 10. The family recently moved to a new region as a result of many years of family violence. A current intervention order is in place against Dana’s former partner, the children’s father, who has no contact with the children and who does not provide financial support.  Alex has been significantly affected by the family violence perpetrated by his father and displays behaviours of significant concern. At home he is violent towards his mother and sister and has tried to harm the family dog.  Alex attends the local primary school, where staff are developing strategies to manage his behaviour in the school environment. His classroom teacher and the school nurse have also raised concerns with Dana about his development, noting that he’s well behind his peers in terms of his language, literacy and numeracy skills. He also seems to have difficulty remembering things.  Dana has a history of depression, anxiety and substance abuse. Having just moved regions, the family are socially isolated with no friendship networks or extended family nearby.  The school has contacted Child FIRST for support. |

## Questions

1. What are the indicators that Alex might have a disability?

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1. Are there any other family members you are concerned about?

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1. What other risk factors or family vulnerabilities might be present?

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1. In addition to these risk factors or family vulnerabilities, are there any other explanations for the concerns that you have – for example, cultural considerations, developmental stage or age?

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1. How might you introduce your concerns to the family? What strategies might you use?

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1. Who else might you consult to check your concerns?

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1. What are your considerations when speaking with others about the family?

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1. Are there any statutory or legal considerations? What do you need to do about these?

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1. What else would you need to consider if this family were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background? What if they were newly arrived refugees?

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| Tick icon | You can find some suggested answers to these questions at the back of this workbook. |

# Resources

## Resources for you

Here are some resources that you might find helpful when working with families with disability.

### Disability report

For information about current research, statistics and policy about people with disability in Australia

[Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-conditions-disability-deaths/disability/overview) <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-conditions-disability-deaths/disability/overview>

### The nature and impact of caring for family members with a disability in Australia

For information about how caring for a family member with disability impacts the carer and their family

[Australian Institute of Family Studies](https://aifs.gov.au/publications/nature-and-impact-caring-family-members-di/executive-summary) <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/nature-and-impact-caring-family-members-di/executive-summary>

### Disability and health inequalities in Australia: research summary

For information about health outcomes and challenges faced by people with disability in Australia

[VicHealth](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~/media/resourcecentre/publicationsandresources/health%20inequalities/vh_disability%20summary_web.ashx) <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~/media/resourcecentre/publicationsandresources/health%20inequalities/vh\_disability%20summary\_web.ashx>

### National Inquiry into Employment and Disability: issues paper 1

To help you understand the employment challenges for people with disability in Australia

[Australian Human Rights Commission](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/national-inquiry-employment-and-disability-issues-paper-1) <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/national-inquiry-employment-and-disability-issues-paper-1>

## Resources to share with parents and carers

These articles from [raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au/) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/> may be helpful to share with parents and carers when talking about disability.

[Conditions that can occur with autism spectrum disorder](https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/learning-about-asd/about-asd/conditions-that-occur-with-asd) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/learning-about-asd/about-asd/conditions-that-occur-with-asd>

[Disability assessment and diagnosis](https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/guide-to-disabilities/assessment-diagnosis) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/guide-to-disabilities/assessment-diagnosis>

[Early signs of autism spectrum disorder](https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/learning-about-asd/assessment-diagnosis/early-signs-of-asd) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/learning-about-asd/assessment-diagnosis/early-signs-of-asd>

[Signs of autism spectrum disorder in older children and teenagers](https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/learning-about-asd/assessment-diagnosis/signs-of-asd-in-teens) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/learning-about-asd/assessment-diagnosis/signs-of-asd-in-teens>

[Families, friends and your child with autism spectrum disorder](https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/family-friends-asd) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/family-friends-asd>

[Family stress and autism spectrum disorder](https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/family-stress-asd) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/family-stress-asd>

[Parent feelings: children with additional needs](https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/parent-feelings-additional-needs) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/parent-feelings-additional-needs>

[Parent relationships: children with additional needs](https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/parent-relationships-additional-needs) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/parent-relationships-additional-needs>

[Talking about your child’s disability](https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/talking-about-child-disability) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/talking-about-child-disability>

[Your child’s disability: handling people’s reactions](https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/disability-handling-reactions) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/communicating-relationships/disability-handling-reactions>

# Glossary

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| Acquired brain injury | An acquired brain injury is an injury caused to the brain since birth – for example, as the result of a fall, road accident, tumour or stroke. |
| Active listening | Active listening skills are key to building trust and rapport in a collaborative relationship, and include asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing and summarising, checking for understanding, and that your language and body language is appropriate in the cultural context that you’re working in. |
| Care Services | Care Services (formerly Out-of-home care) refers to the living arrangements for children and young people who cannot live in their family home. These arrangements can be temporary, medium or long term and include foster care, kinship care, permanent care or residential care. |
| Carer | The term carer has a particular meaning in the context of disability. A carer is the person responsible for the majority of the day to day care of a person with additional needs. A carer can be a parent, partner, grandparent or kinship carer, foster carer, child, sibling, friend, or guardian. When a child is caring for a parent with disability, they’re called a young carer. Carers are not paid support workers. Some families have more than one person with disability, so a carer might be caring for more than one person. |
| Child and family system (CFS) | The child and family system (formerly Children Youth and Families (CYF) division of DHHS) includes: Child and Family Services, Care Services (formerly Out-of-home care) and Child Protection. |
| Children Youth and Families (CYF) | Now known as the child and family system (CFS) |
| Families with disability | In this course, we refer to ‘families with disability’. This will be used to refer to families with a parent or carer with disability; families with one or more children with disability; families with both a parent and child with disability; and carers with legal responsibility for children with disability. |
| Intellectual disability | Intellectual disability involves problems with mental abilities that affect how a person learns and functions in everyday life, including difficulty understanding new or complex information and learning and applying new skills. A diagnosis of intellectual disability involves formal testing. This can be done by a psychologist. |
| Local Area Coordinators (LAC) | Local Area Coordinators (LACs) work for local organisations in partnership with the NDIA, to help participants, their families and carers access the NDIS. LACs will help participants write and manage their plans. They will also connect participants to mainstream services and local and community-based supports. |
| National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) | The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is administered by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) |
| National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) | The NDIS is a single, national scheme that funds reasonable and necessary support to help people with disability reach goals throughout life. It also supports carers of people with disability. It replaces the state-based disability services previously run by DHHS. |
| Neurological disability | Neurological disability is caused by damage to the nervous system (including the brain and spinal cord) A person might have difficulty with memory, motor skills, speech, language, or organisational skills. |
| Out-of-home care (OOHC) | Out-of-home care (OOHC), now known as Care Services |
| Physical disability | Physical disability affects a person's physical capacity and/or mobility |
| Psychosocial disability | Psychosocial disability is a term used to describe a disability that may arise from a mental health issue. Not everyone who has a mental health issue will have a psychosocial disability but for those that do, it can be severe and longstanding. |
| Reasonable and necessary supports | The NDIS funds ‘reasonable and necessary supports’ which means support must be directly related to the functional impact of the participant’s disability. All plan goals and supports must relate to the impact of the disability on the participant’s life. |
| Sensory disability | Sensory disability is a disability of the senses – sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste. It can affect how a person gathers information from the world around them. |
| Team leader | Your team leader is your line manager or supervisor; the person who supports you in your role. |
| Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) | Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) can support organisations in the child and family system to become culturally competent when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families with disability. |

# Suggested responses to the Exercise: Family scenario

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| 1. What are the indicators that Alex may have a disability?   There are a number of potential indicators that Alex may have a disability:  evidence of developmental delay  memory concerns  behavioural concerns.  Given the history of family violence and trauma these indictors could suggest a potential acquired brain injury and/or psychosocial disability.   1. Are there any other family members you may be concerned about?   We need to be mindful of invisible disability here. Dana (mum) has a clear history of mental health issues, which will likely be exacerbated by the family violence and the fact that she’s socially isolated and likely to be experiencing high levels of parenting stress and financial hardship.  Sienna is also vulnerable – she has also been exposed to family violence and trauma and is currently exposed to high levels of family distress. While we don’t yet know much about Sienna, it would be important to assess her individual needs/concerns/risk and the impact of her family situation on her safety, mental health and educational outcomes.   1. What other risk factors/family vulnerabilities might be present?   There are multiple vulnerabilities for this family. Dana is experiencing social isolation having had to relocate. She has a history of mental health concerns and substance abuse. Given the circumstances the family will most likely be experiencing financial hardship and housing stress. There is also an ongoing risk of family violence by Alex.  This scenario doesn’t tell us about the family’s cultural background, but this should also be taken into consideration.  Depending on previous experiences with services Dana may be reluctant to disclose concerns, fearing that she may lose her children if she can’t look after them properly.   1. Are there any other explanations for the concerns that you have, for example, cultural considerations, developmental stage or age?   Alex has been exposed to family violence and trauma which are likely contributors to the observed behavioural and developmental concerns.  Alex is on the cusp of puberty, which will have a developmental, physiological and psychosocial impact and may impact his potential disability needs.   1. How might you introduce your concerns to the family; what strategies might you use?   It would be important to first gain an understanding of the family’s story, using open-ended questions and demonstrating active listening by paraphrasing what Dana has said and checking for understanding.  Explore with Dana what other professionals and services have been involved with her and the children, what supports she has accessed and found helpful in the past and her previous experience of the system.  Support Dana to recognise that Alex may have a disability that could benefit from an assessment and potential connection with disability supports and services. A referral could also be organised for Dana to a family services agency so that she can be supported in her parenting.  Support Dana to problem-solve and make decisions about what she would like for her family (rather than telling her what to do) and explore options for involvement of other supports including the NDIS.  Be open and honest with Dana, particularly about any statutory or reporting requirements that may be relevant and again, check for her understanding.   1. Who else might you consult with to check your concerns?   With Dana’s consent it will be helpful to talk to the school or any practitioners who have been involved with Alex or the family. You might also talk to your team leader or a disability specialist in your area.   1. What are your considerations when speaking with others?   Prior to speaking with others, consent will need to be obtained from Dana. You will need to ensure that privacy and confidentiality is maintained, and that Dana is aware of any mandatory or statutory limitations to confidentiality.   1. Are there any statutory or legal considerations? And, what do you need to do about these?   This family is not a statutory client so there are no legal issues to consider.   1. What else would you need to consider if this family were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? A new refugee?   When families are from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds it is particularly important to work in a culturally competent way:  Be mindful of factors that might impact on engagement with services – for example, previous negative or traumatic experiences with ‘the system’.  Ensure that communication is in the family’s preferred language, and at the appropriate literacy level.  Consider the broader family and community context, for example the roles of elders or grandparents.  Understand cultural perceptions of disability and how that may impact on disclosure of disability and support seeking. |