

# Ten tips for working with services including child protection

## For birth parents

Here are some tips put together by parents who have worked with child protection and child and family services in Victoria

### 1. Reach out for support.

It can really help parents to have trusted friends or family in your corner. Try not to let feelings of shame or embarrassment stop you from reaching out and talking about what's happening to you. Tell your friends/family clear ways they can support you.

You might tell your friends/family that they can support you by:

- listening to you vent,
- helping you with daily tasks like shopping, cooking and cleaning,
- helping you to make and remember appointments,
- going with you to difference services,
- helping you to make a plan for addressing the concerns raised by your worker.

### 2. Get an independent advocate.

This could be another worker from a different service, a lawyer, or a dedicated friend or family member. Invite this person to all of your meetings. They can help you prepare questions ahead of time and speak for you if you feel upset or overwhelmed. They can make sure you get your point across and that you are treated with respect.

### 3. Stay focused and put your best foot forward.

Keep your goal in mind and try your best to work towards it. There are things you can do to show everyone you're making every effort to achieve your goals.

Parent suggestions:

- use respectful language,
- be mindful of how you dress in meetings,
- show up on time for appointments,
- if you can't make an appointment, call your worker to reschedule.

“Stay focused – don't get caught up in small day-to-day decisions that don't go your way – look at moving forward.”

### 4. Understand the concerns of your worker.

Make sure you're clear on what the concerns are. You could even ask for this in writing. Be prepared - it might be really hard to hear this and you might not agree with what they say. However, it's very important that you know so you can make a plan.

Ask your worker:

- what are your concerns?
- what are your expectations of me?
- what support can you give me to meet these expectations?

“Be clear about what the concerns are and what the service expects you to do to address them.”

## 5. Ask lots of questions.

You are allowed to ask as many questions as you like. Insist on getting answers, in writing if possible. Ask your worker what the best way to contact them is (e.g., email, phone call, text message). If your worker is not getting back to you, ask a trusted support person to follow it up on your behalf.

## 6. Know your rights.

Ask services for written information about your rights. It can also help to try and understand how the system works (e.g., by looking at the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Child Protection manual).

You may also wish to keep a copy of our Charter of Parental Participation with you. This has been developed by parents just like you and it says what you are entitled to when working with services.

## 7. Take notes and ask for copies of notes taken by your worker.

Write down notes from your conversations with workers and in meetings. Keep a record of the important things that were talked about and what was agreed upon. Write down the dates of these conversations. Ask for copies of notes taken by your worker e.g., minutes from a meeting. Sometimes, they might not be allowed to share their notes because of legal reasons. They should let you know if that is the case, and help you to figure out other options (for example, finding another person that can help you take notes).

Parent suggestion:

Keep a diary of all your conversations with workers, including dates and times. For example, who a phone call was with, what it was about, even if it seems minor. Keep this with you all the time and use the notes to back yourself up if you need to.

## 8. Google everything.

Information is power. Don't know a legal term used by your worker? Google it. Looking for a local support service? Google it. Need to find a GP to get a mental health care plan? Google it. Want to know how to make a complaint about your case? Google will help you find the right information.

Parent suggestion:

Try looking up supportive groups for parents on Facebook. It can help to talk to other people who might be going through the same things as you. Just be careful about what you're posting on a public page – negative comments about your worker or an organisation could put your case at risk.

## 9. Think about what you can do to help yourself.

It's important that you do whatever you can to help yourself throughout this process. This could include talking to a counsellor. You can get a mental health care plan from your GP. You can ask your workers to help find a counsellor for you. You can also call free hotlines like Lifeline (13 11 14) or Relationships Australia (1300 364 277).

“Don’t be worried or scared.  
Link in with other services  
(family workers, housing,  
agencies etc). Have a team of  
people on your side and don’t  
be afraid to ask questions.”

## 10. Don’t be scared.

You will get through this. You are not alone.

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## Where you can go information

After hours Child Protection Emergency Service – 13 12 78

Ask Izzy (helps you to find services)

Australian Government Translating and Interpreting Service - 131 450  
[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

Child FIRST

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800

Legal Aid – 1300 792 387

MensLine Australia (counselling for men with family and relationship concerns) – 1300 78 99 78

National Office for Child Safety

National Relay Service (phone call support for people with hearing difficulty) - Voice Relay  
number **1300 555 727**, TTY number **133 677**

Orange Door (family violence support)

Parentline Victoria – 13 22 89

Parents on a Mission (support from parents with lived experience)

Relationships Australia - 1300 364 277

Safe Steps – 1800 015 188 (after hours family violence support)

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service – 1800 064 865