



Tool 4: Referral tool for educators

This tool supports educators working through Step 3 – ‘Action’ of the Family Partnerships Practice Model.

Before you use the tool, make sure you have read the ‘Step 3 – ‘Action’” section of the Family Partnerships Guide and most importantly, ‘Snapshot – Supporting a referral process’. These sections explain when you are likely to need this tool in your family partnerships. They also provide reminders about using the tool in the wider context of your service’s policies and procedures, as well as keeping important principles of consent, confidentiality and collaboration in mind.

This tool has been designed for educators working in a variety of contexts. It can be used to inform your thinking, acknowledging that educators are also guided by local policies, practices and requirements which vary across the many settings in which educators are working.

Use this referral tool after you have completed step 2 of the model (‘Conversation’) and are developing your action plan. This tool can support you to identify whether any referrals will be part of your action plan, and whether there is any other information, links or suggestions that you might be able to provide to the family.

Supporting referrals checklist

Use this list to guide the support you offer to an individual child and their family

1. **Look at your action plan** and think back to the ‘Conversation’ you had at step 2 of the model. Are there any needs for referrals to be made as part of this action plan? Make a note of any areas identified in the box below:

YES If you have noted a referral need above – **continue** through this checklist.

NO If the action plan does not include any formal referrals, **jump ahead** to items 4 and 5 on the checklist. There may be some online supports and resources or local services that are relevant to the support you are planning for the child, even in cases when there is no formal referral process being undertaken.

2. **Familiarise yourself with your service’s policies** and procedures for referrals, to be clear on what is expected from you in your setting. In some settings, educators may also have access to internal services and supports for children and families. Make sure you are aware of the availability of any such resources that might be applicable in your context.

3. **Is there any action you need to take** to facilitate a referral in this situation?

YES I am making a direct referral to: (note the internal or external service).

NO The family will follow up a GP or other referral pathway.

Common referral pathways

Family seeks referrals through a general practitioner

Within the primary health care system in Australia, the recommended pathway is that a family's first port of call when seeking advice and treatment for their child's health concerns is through their general practitioner (GP), including seeking referrals. In addition to treating physical health concerns, GPs can provide important support to families dealing with mental health challenges. Families can also talk to their GP about what Medicare rebates are available to support them.

Learn more about [the role of GPs in supporting families](#) in this podcast:

- [A GP's role in supporting the family](#)

Family seeks care by approaching practitioner directly

Some practitioners can be accessed by families directly without the need for a referral from a GP. Private mental health practitioners and other allied health professionals can often be accessed directly. Families should be aware of any costs associated with the providers they are seeking to access and whether there are currently waitlists to access services.

Educator makes a referral directly to an external allied health practitioner

In some settings, there may be allied health practitioners who accept referrals from early learning services to see families. An example of this might be services such as speech pathologists or occupational therapists working within non-profit agencies that have a relationship with your service. In these situations, ensure that the family has given consent for the referral to occur and that they genuinely understand the process and likely next steps. Make sure you work with your service leaders to follow local procedures to make this referral. If you're unsure whether this option is relevant in your workplace, ask your leaders.

Educator makes a referral internally at their service

Some early learning services may have access to internal support services such as psychologists and other practitioners. The process for making referrals in these situations is likely very specific to your local context. Work with your leaders to be aware of these services and know how to make referrals. Regardless of the process you follow, make sure to keep the family informed and ensure you have their consent to follow any referral pathways.

4. What **online supports** and/or resources would be beneficial in this situation?

Online support alongside referrals to practitioners

Online supports and services can help to support families in situations where they are working through a referral process. At times, accessing these services involves lengthy waitlists or the costs of accessing specialist services are prohibitive for families. Online supports can provide several benefits in these situations:

- Building mental health literacy and providing language for families to use that can help increase agency and confidence for the family as they seek support through their GP and other practitioners
- Providing support while families are waiting to access face-to-face or telehealth practitioners
- Providing free supports and information for families who are not able to access care through more expensive services

Using online support as a preventative approach

Online supports and services can be helpful in many situations as a preventative approach to child mental health challenges. They can build mental health literacy, language and understanding for families that can be helpful in supporting children through a range of challenges. Consider linking families to online supports, programs and networks as part of your action plan in a wide range of situations.

Online support services and resources

These links provide connections to a range of online supports and resources from Emerging Minds and many other organisations. You might like to make a list of any relevant options for your service to use and add all the other online supports and resources you and your colleagues are aware of.

- [Emerging Minds Families](#)
- [Other online supports for children and families](#)

5. What **local community** supports, services, programs or groups would be beneficial in this situation?

Local community supports, services, programs and groups alongside referrals to practitioners

In the same way that online services can layer with referrals to provide a range of support for families, local community services, programs or groups can also add to your existing plans to support a child and their family. By linking families to local programs, you can encourage the family to build their support network and their mental health literacy.

Local community supports, services and programs as a preventative approach

In situations that do not require referrals to practitioners, children and families can still find benefit in the preventative and early support that can often be found in local community services. The benefits for the child and the family include increased knowledge, understanding and confidence to keep working through their challenges. Seek out opportunities to link families to relevant supports that you're aware of, and make a note of any programs that you hear about from families to add to your list of local options.

Local community support ideas

This list is general in nature and may not include options that are relevant to your situation. You can add to this list or make your own for your school to use.

- Local playgroups and supported playgroups
- Local health services
- Maternal and child health services
- Non-profit organisations providing programs in your area
- Local youth services
- [headspace youth counselling](#)
- Sporting and community clubs

6. Would you like to **learn more about the practitioners** who work with children?

This section can guide your thinking regarding the specific family partnership you are working on today, and you can revisit this resource to build your knowledge in this area more generally.

General practitioners are often the first port of call for parents seeking advice and treatment for their child's health concerns. The following podcast provides an overview of the role of a GP working with a family:

- [A GP's role in supporting the family](#)

General practitioners may refer to **paediatricians** as part of a process of exploring the child's needs. Learn more about the role of a paediatrician in the following video:

- [What is a paediatrician?](#)

Mental health nurses

A mental health nurse is a registered nurse who specialises in providing mental health support services. Learn more about the role of a mental health nurse in the following video:

- [What is a mental health nurse?](#)

Allied health practitioners

Many of the other practitioners that children are referred to come under the banner of 'allied health'. There are many roles that sit within this group; some of those commonly working with children include:

- Occupational therapists
- Speech pathologists
- Psychologists
- Social workers
- Physiotherapists

As an educator you might like to learn more about practitioners to help you understand their role and feel confident working in family partnerships alongside them. The Emerging Minds Families 'Practitioners speak' series features various allied health practitioners explaining their role and how they can support children and families:

- [Watch the Practitioners speak videos](#)

You might also find this podcast on professional roles in child mental health support helpful:

- [Professional roles in child mental health support](#)