

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Need a Helping Hand : Types of Help Available

Many families are overwhelmed, confused and frustrated by the process of trying to get help for their child and family. It is often hard to know where to start, and many dead-ends may be encountered before finding somewhere that suits your specific needs.

There are many organisations and programs that exist to help young people and their families. One of the difficulties is that due to the nature of the service system, services, funding and workers change regularly. Patience and persistence is important.

These help sheets provide some practical ideas for getting the help you need for your young person and your family.

### Schools

If your child is still at school, it is important to talk to school staff about the difficulties that your child or family is experiencing. The school may be able to provide help for your family, particularly if they employ a school welfare officer, or they may be able to refer you to someone else. In any case, it is important for the school to know what is going on so that your child's teacher can be supportive of your child.

Please note that the structures and services described here apply to Victorian state secondary schools. If your child attends a Catholic, Islamic or other private school, check with the school what structures and services are in place.

### Pastoral teacher

Schools have pastoral care systems, where particular teachers are responsible for overall care of certain students. They may be known as the pastoral or home group teacher. Often they teach a core subject to that class, such as English or Maths. If you are not sure who the pastoral or home group teacher is for your child, ask at the school office.

Make an appointment to see the pastoral teacher and explain your concerns. Ask for help, or tell them what you have organised. Talk about whether you prefer this information be kept totally confidential, or would like other teachers to be briefed.

### Co-ordinators

It can also be a good idea to speak to someone with a co-ordinating role, such as the Year Level Co-ordinator, Assistant Principal or Student Welfare Co-ordinator.

### Student Welfare Coordinator

Each secondary school usually has a Student Welfare Coordinator on staff. The Student Welfare Coordinator is a teacher responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating support provision in the school. They should have some training in providing welfare support to students. They usually provide some direct support and refer the young person to other staff or agencies as appropriate.

### Social worker\*

Most state schools have access to a social worker who works across a cluster of primary and secondary schools. Social workers can provide support regarding a range of needs and may refer the student or family to another specialist or agency.

### Educational psychologist\*

Schools have access to an educational psychologist, who can assess students' development and learning needs including: cognitive, psychological and social development. School psychologists may do some counselling themselves and will refer on to other services when necessary.

\* Schools may use the term 'Guidance Officer' for these roles.

### School nurse

A school nurse promotes health and wellbeing in the school community. They give support to individuals on health issues. They may also run groups or deliver health education workshops on topics such as social skills, sexuality, healthy eating or drug use.

### Chaplains

Some schools also have chaplains. They provide pastoral care and guidance from a Christian perspective, for students, families and staff. Connecting people with appropriate services in the community is also part of the role.

### Doctors

Your local doctor (GP) may be a good starting point for help.

It is a good idea for a young person experiencing problems to have a doctor who they feel comfortable with and can see regularly. Doctors can work more effectively when they have a good patient history and know the context of health issues. Young people may need some encouragement and help to find a doctor they feel comfortable with and are happy to see on an on-going basis. Allow your child to choose a doctor they feel comfortable with themselves. This may be a different general practitioner than the one your family has traditionally been visiting. Don't pressure your child to see the same doctor you see, if they are not comfortable with that person.

A doctor may be able to help you and your young person clarify what the issues are and possible strategies for addressing them. They should know some of the services that exist to help. They can provide a referral for an assessment, such as a psychiatric or psychological assessment, if this is required.

Doctors are often busy or rushed, and it can be a good idea to book a double appointment when there is need for more in-depth discussion about problems. If possible, let them know that you have something important to discuss about family issues that will require some time.

If you find it difficult to speak with your doctor, it could be worth trying a different one. Youth services can sometimes recommend doctors who have a good reputation for working well with young people.

A Primary Mental Health Team supports doctors in treating people with the most common mental health issues of anxiety and depression. Your GP may involve them or you can ask your doctor to call them in if you feel this is necessary.

### Generalist youth counselling and support services

Generalist youth services provide information, advice and counselling to young people and often link young people into specialist programs if these are required.

Youth services are usually open to young people from around the age of 10 to either 18 or 25 years (age limits for programs vary). Some services are only open to young people, and some work with family as well.

Most areas have several youth support services, but the types of service, names and the way they operate vary a lot. It can be a bit confusing. It may help to write things down in a note-pad to make it clearer and help you remember things.



In trying to find the right service, it might be a good idea to start with ideas from the school, your doctor or your Community Health Centre. There may also be a listing in your local community directory for 'youth services'.

Local councils usually have youth services as well – call and ask who is responsible for youth services in their region, or try their website to see what links they offer.

### Specialist youth services

Specialist youth services and programs usually focus on providing assistance or treatment for a particular problem or issue. They may have a geographical focus as well.

Examples of some specialist services are:

#### Alcohol and other drugs

- Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS)
- Eastern Region Drug & Alcohol Service (EDAS)

#### Sexual assault

- Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)

#### Mental health

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Mobile Youth Outreach Team
- Connexions, Jesuit Social Services (a youth dual-diagnosis service)

#### Housing

- Youth housing workers

#### Sexuality

- Same-sex attracted young people programs

**Reconnect programs** aim to prevent youth homelessness by working with young people and families. A range of

organisations provide these programs, and use different approaches. For example, in outer Eastern Melbourne, there is Reconnect – Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS) – providing family counselling where there is a young person with Alcohol and Other Drugs issues. Reconnect – Regional Extended Family Services (REFS) – provides a wilderness therapy program for young people and also provides support to their families.

Generalist services, medical services and school services will usually refer you to appropriate specialist services. You can also find agencies through the phone book or internet.

### Youth social and recreational activities and programs

Another common type of program offers social support and recreation opportunities to young people.

The activities may be general ones for young people with common adolescent difficulties, or they may target young people with more serious or specific issues. For example, there may be social groups for young people with mental health issues; outdoor recreation groups for young people with drug issues; support groups for young women with experience of sexual abuse.

It can be very beneficial for young people experiencing serious problems to mix with other young people who have similar experiences.

These programs come and go over time, depending on funding and perceived need, so we cannot give you specific examples here. But the youth services in your area and your local council should be aware of them.

## Services for families

**Youth & Family Services** include the family when working with the young person. They may work with the family even when the young person is not willing to participate. Services usually include individual or family counselling, and may also include mediation, which is a structured program used to sort out specific disagreements.

**Family Support Services** may provide case-management, which involves working with the family to sort out the main issues and then recommending suitable services. They may also provide parenting assistance, family counselling and mediation. They may come to your home, or meet you at their office, or another location. These services tend to work with families with children under 18 years.

**Family Counselling Services** offer support for individuals and families and some will provide counselling regardless of the age of family members. These services may provide individual, couple relationship, family counselling, or mediation.

There are also private family therapists who work with the whole family. They may work for an organisation or in private practice (see below).

To find out about the youth & family services that operate in your area, ask your local government, community health centre, local doctor, or welfare organisation.

## Private practitioners

Another way to consult a health or welfare professional is through private practice. This is when they have their own business rather than work for an organisation. Many practitioners work in both public and private sectors.

Private practitioners include: Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social Workers, Family Therapists. They may specialise in a specific issue, for example, anxiety or drug use.

It will usually be more expensive to see someone privately, but it may be more flexible. For example, they may be able to work with someone regarding a range of issues and over a longer time than some community organisations.

To find a private practitioner ask your doctor or Community Health Centre for advice, look in a local community directory, or search websites. (See 'Using the internet to locate services'.)

## Providers

### Welfare organisations

Many programs for young people are provided by welfare organisations or agencies. These organisations may receive funding from local, state or federal governments for different programs. They may also run other programs that they fund independently.

To find a welfare organisation in your area, ask your local government, community health centre, local doctor, or look for one of these organisations in the phone book or on the internet.

- Jesuit Social Services
- Anglicare Victoria
- Uniting Care Connections
- The Salvation Army
- St Vincent de Paul
- Brotherhood of St Lawrence
- Catholic Centrecare
- Odyssey House
- St Luke's Bendigo
- Berry Street
- Youth Substance Abuse Service
- Mental Illness Fellowship
- Anchor
- Regional Extended Family Services

## Government services

### Local government

Most local governments have a youth department. This may be a good starting point for finding out about other services in your area.

They are also direct service providers for some youth support programs. Local government services are likely to include a youth drop-in information centre, counselling for young people and families, and possibly support groups for young people.

### Victorian State Government

The Victorian State Government provides core health services. Most state youth services come under the umbrella of the Department of Human Services, which is divided into regions across the state. State government services include:

- Intellectual Disability Services
- Psychiatric Services
- Drug Treatment Services
- Dual-Diagnosis Services (drug & mental health)
- Child Protection Services
- Juvenile Justice Services

### Commonwealth Government

The federal government departments with responsibility for youth and family services are:

- Department of Family and Community Services
- Department of Health and Ageing

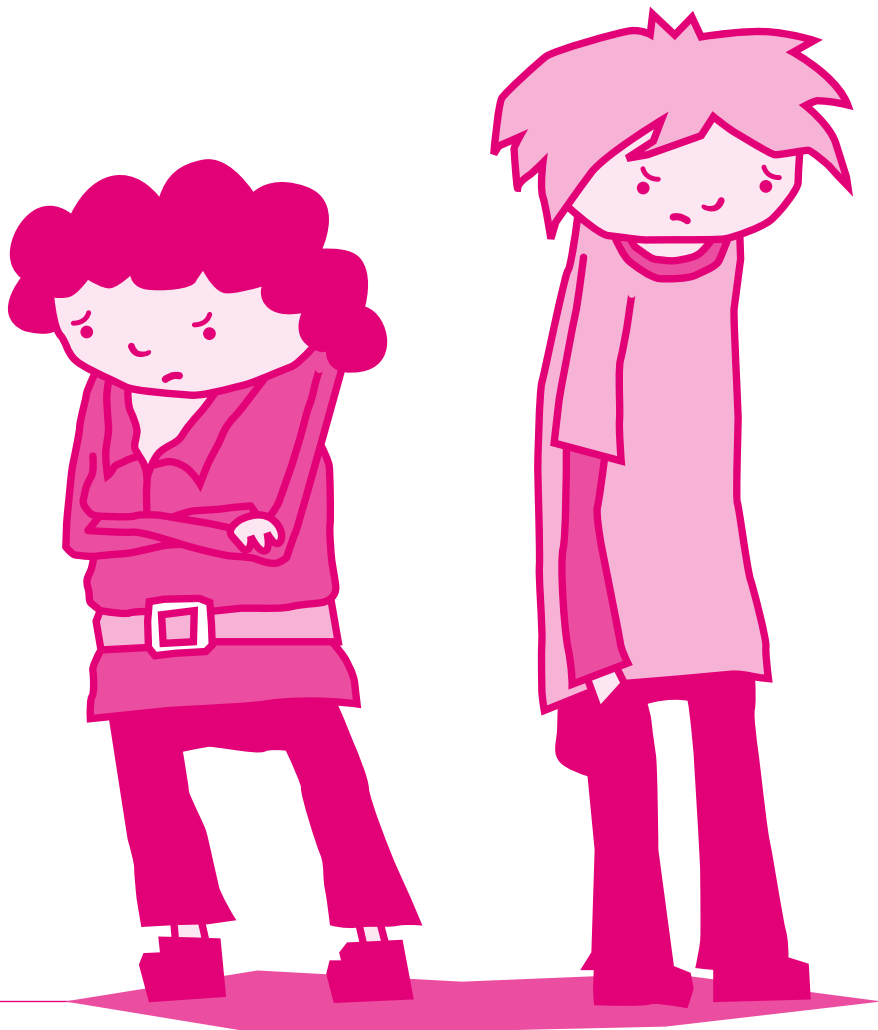
However, the federal government usually funds programs to be run by other services rather than acting as a direct service provider. Reconnect programs are funded by the federal government, but are provided by a variety of local providers.

### Community Health Centres

Community Health Centres\* provide a range of health services – for example dentist, podiatrist, physiotherapy, counselling, youth programs, respite care, health promotion. Some have doctors as well.

They service a particular area, and are open to everyone in that area, though eligibility for particular programs varies. Services are usually free or low cost to eligible people.

\*some are called Community Health Services



## Telephone advice and support groups for families

There are a number of telephone advice and support services operating in Victoria. Contact details can be found in the front of the White Pages telephone book. Some of them are:

### **Family Drug Help** **Ph: 1300 660 068**

Family Drug Help is a Victorian Service for families and friends of people who use alcohol or other drugs. This service is largely run by volunteers who have personal experience of family members with drug problems. A 24 hour phone line is available, as well as parent groups and resource materials including a newsletter.

### **ARAFEMI** **Ph: 9889 3733**

ARAFEMI is the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill. ARAFEMI provides services to the Victorian community for the care and support of families and individuals dealing with an emotional or mental illness.

### **Parentline** **Ph: 13 22 89**

Parentline is a free service offering telephone counselling, information and referral to parents and carers of children aged 0–18 years. For example, they may offer advice about managing difficult behaviours, including conflict and relationship issues.

Mon-Fri 8am-12 midnight, Sat and Sun 10am – 10pm.

### **Parentzone** **Ph: 9721 3634**

Parentzone is a free service providing support and referral to resources and services for families on parenting and family issues.

Address: 666 Mountain Hwy, Bayswater VIC

## Using the internet to locate services

Many services have their own website, and many can be found through links provided by other services.

For links to Victorian Government

- [www.dhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au)
- [www.youth.vic.gov.au](http://www.youth.vic.gov.au)

For links to Commonwealth Government

- [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au)

For information on Reconnect Services

- [www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/reconnect.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/reconnect.htm)

For links to your local shire or council

- [www.vicnet.net.au/government/localgovt](http://www.vicnet.net.au/government/localgovt)
- <http://www.doi.vic.gov.au/doi/internet/localgov.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/victorian+local+governments>

In your local site, search under ‘community’, or ‘family’ or ‘youth’ or ‘directory’ for services offered by the shire or council and other services in your area.

For links to Community Health Centres

- [www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth)

This list is organised alphabetically by the name of the service, not by location. If you are having trouble working out which is your local one, try starting from a community directory or Council service.

For links to locate private practitioners

- Psychologists

[www.psychology.org.au/study/working/11.2\\_1.asp](http://www.psychology.org.au/study/working/11.2_1.asp)

(Click on 'About Psychologists', 'Find a Psychologist')

- Psychotherapists and Counsellors

[www.pacfa.org.au](http://www.pacfa.org.au)

(Click on 'National Register', 'How to Find a Therapist', Enter State and Type of Counselling, then click on people's names to find contact details)

- Family Therapists

[www.vaft.asn.au](http://www.vaft.asn.au)

(Click on 'Therapist Database', then your region)

Other links

- Family Drug Help

[www.familydrughelp.sharc.org.au](http://www.familydrughelp.sharc.org.au)

- ARAFEMI (Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill)

[www.arafemi.org.au](http://www.arafemi.org.au)

- General parenting advice:

[www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)

(This information was current in April 2006)



### Related Help Sheets

- Dealing with Services
- Understanding Drug Use
- Understanding Mental Health
- Understanding Complex Problems





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→ **Strong Bonds is a project of Jesuit Social Services.**

Jesuit Social Services work cooperatively with others to engage disadvantaged individuals, families and communities and the wider society to promote health and wellbeing and to address social exclusion.

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