

Safe Hands Support Family Support Handbook

Resources, Strategies and Practical Tools for Families Supporting a Child with Disability

This handbook is designed for families who are caring for, advocating for, and growing with a child who has disability, developmental delay, additional support needs, or complex health needs.

It combines practical home strategies, family wellbeing guidance, school and service navigation tips, planning tools, and printable record pages in one place.

The handbook is written in a warm, strengths-based style so it can be shared with parents, carers, grandparents, and support workers.

Prepared for the Safe Hands Support resource library
Australia | 2026 edition

How to Use This Handbook

Families often receive information in pieces. One therapist gives home ideas, school sends a separate plan, a doctor mentions another referral, and a support coordinator talks about funding. This handbook pulls those pieces into one organised resource so families can use it as a living reference instead of starting from scratch each time.

The focus is practical. You will find explanations in plain language, tables that help you compare options, conversation starters for meetings, and printable pages you can reuse. Not every section will apply to every family, so choose the pages that fit your stage, culture, routines, and goals.

Throughout the handbook, the term family includes parents, grandparents, kinship carers, foster carers, and any other person who has a major caring role. The term child is used broadly and can include babies, school-aged children, teenagers, and young people who still rely heavily on family supports.

Important note

This handbook is educational information for families and support workers. It does not replace medical, legal, psychological, financial, or emergency advice. Always speak with the relevant professional service for advice about your own child and family situation.

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1. Understanding Your Family's Journey

Raising a child with disability or additional support needs can bring joy, fierce love, deep pride, uncertainty, grief, practical pressure, and constant learning all at once. Families often move through changing emotions rather than neat stages. It is common to feel hopeful one day and exhausted the next.

Many families describe the early period after concerns are raised or a diagnosis is mentioned as information overload. Appointments increase, new words appear, and future plans suddenly feel less predictable. During this time, families benefit from clear information, one trusted notebook or folder, and permission to slow down decisions that do not need to happen immediately.

A helpful starting point is to separate what needs action now from what can wait. Immediate actions might include safety needs, urgent therapies, school communication, or applications with deadlines. Other decisions, like choosing long-term goals or comparing every available service, can often be taken one step at a time.

- You do not need to know everything straight away.
- Your child is more than any diagnosis, report or label.
- Family routines, culture, and values still matter.
- Progress is rarely straight. Small gains still count.
- Asking for help is part of good care, not a failure.

Common feelings families mention

- Relief when there is finally an explanation for what has been happening.
- Worry about the future, especially school, independence, behaviour, or health.
- Guilt about not doing enough, even when you are already doing a lot.
- Isolation when friends or relatives do not fully understand the caring load.
- Pride and hope when a child reaches a hard-won goal or shows their unique strengths.

A simple way to think about family adjustment

Adjustment often becomes easier when families build four foundations: information, relationships, routine, and rest. Information reduces confusion. Relationships reduce isolation. Routine reduces daily friction. Rest protects health and decision-making. When one of these foundations is weak, the whole family can feel less steady.

Foundation	What it looks like	Warning sign	Helpful first step
Information	Clear notes, shared understanding, basic knowledge of services	Feeling lost at every appointment	Keep one family folder and write down three key questions before each meeting
Relationships	Trusted people who can listen, help, or check in	Doing everything alone	Choose one person to update regularly
Routine	Predictable daily flow for meals, sleep, therapy and school	Constant last-minute stress	Create a simple weekly plan
Rest	Breaks, sleep, respite and mental health support	Snapping, crying often, brain fog, illness	Book one small recovery activity this week

2. A Strengths-Based Family Approach

A strengths-based approach means starting with what your child can do, what interests them, and what helps them feel safe, calm, connected and motivated. Families who use this approach do not ignore challenges. Instead, they make sure challenges are considered alongside capacity, personality, preferences and relationships.

This matters because goals are more realistic when they are connected to the child's real life. For example, instead of a broad goal like improve communication, a family might aim for a more meaningful goal such as using pictures, gestures or words to choose a snack, ask for a break, or join a favourite game.

Strengths-based planning also protects dignity. Children are more likely to engage when adults notice effort, celebrate small wins, and talk about them in respectful ways. Families can encourage professionals to write reports and plans that reflect both support needs and strengths.

- Notice what your child enjoys and what gives them energy.
- Pay attention to when things go well, not only when they go wrong.
- Use goals that fit ordinary family life.
- Celebrate effort, persistence and communication in any form.
- Include your child's preferences whenever possible.

Questions that help uncover strengths

- When does my child seem most settled or engaged?
- What activities hold their attention the longest?
- What sensory input do they seek or avoid?
- Who brings out the best in them and why?
- What makes success easier: visual supports, movement, routine, humour, extra time, choices, or quiet spaces?

Turning strengths into goals

Observed strength	Possible real-life goal	What support might help
Loves music and rhythm	Join group mat time by using action songs	Use song cues for transitions
Strong visual memory	Follow a visual morning routine	Photo schedule near bedroom and bathroom
Enjoys helping adults	Carry own lunchbox and therapy bag	Offer jobs with simple steps
Persistent with favourite toys	Practise turn-taking in play	Short turns, visual timer, clear finish point
Comforted by movement	Manage waiting by walking or using a wobble cushion	Plan movement breaks before hard tasks

Good family language to model

- "This is hard right now, but we can break it down."
- "Your body is telling us you need support."
- "Let's look at what helped last time."
- "We can aim for progress, not perfection."
- "You are learning, and so are we."

3. Building a Support Network

No family should have to carry care alone. A support network can include people who provide practical help, emotional support, cultural connection, advocacy, transport, respite, information, or simple companionship. The strongest networks often include a mix of informal support and formal services.

Informal support might include relatives, neighbours, family friends, faith communities, sporting groups, or other parents who understand disability and caring. Formal support can include therapists, support coordinators, doctors, early childhood teams, school staff, social workers, respite services, and disability organisations.

Support networks work better when roles are clear. One person might be the one you call for a school pick-up. Another might be good at listening. Someone else might help with meals after hospital visits. Clear requests make it easier for people to help.

- Start with people who are reliable, not only people who are available.
- Make specific requests such as school pick-up, meal help, or babysitting siblings.
- Keep a short list of emergency contacts where all caregivers can find it.
- Update key helpers when routines, medication, or safety needs change.

People who can be part of your support circle

Person or service	How they help	How often	Notes

How to ask for help without feeling awkward

Many families say they struggle to ask for help because they do not want to be a burden. In reality, people often want to help but do not know what would actually be useful. A clear request gives them a real way to support you.

Try short requests such as: “Could you pick up groceries on Thursday?”, “Can you sit with the kids for an hour while I attend this appointment?”, or “Can you check in with me after our specialist review?” This makes help more practical and easier to say yes to.

Ideas for practical help from family and friends

- Meal drop-offs after hospital stays or intense therapy blocks
- Childcare for siblings during appointments
- Driving to school, sport or therapy
- Sitting with your child so you can shower, nap or make calls
- Helping with paperwork, printing or filing forms

- Doing a pharmacy run or grocery shop
- Joining you at a meeting so there is another set of ears

4. Looking After Caregiver Wellbeing

Caregiver burnout is real. It can show up as exhaustion, irritability, poor sleep, feeling numb, struggling to concentrate, getting sick more often, or losing interest in things you normally enjoy. Burnout does not mean you care less. It usually means the load has been too high for too long without enough recovery.

Self-care in a caring family is not only about spa days or big breaks. It is often about very basic needs being met consistently: eating regularly, sleeping when possible, attending your own appointments, having a few minutes of quiet, saying no to non-essential tasks, and reaching out before you hit crisis point.

Families often need a layered wellbeing plan. That plan might include small daily recovery habits, short weekly breaks, occasional respite, and professional mental health support when stress becomes too heavy.

- Watch for early signs of overload instead of waiting until collapse.
- Build recovery into the week the same way you schedule appointments.
- Use supports such as counselling, peer groups, coaching or respite if available.
- Remember that your health affects the whole family's functioning.

Burnout warning signs and matching responses

What you notice	What it may mean	Helpful response
Snapping at small things	Stress bucket is already full	Reduce one demand this week and ask for one practical task to be shared
Forgetting appointments or tasks	Mental overload and poor rest	Use one calendar, one notebook, and phone reminders
Crying often or feeling flat	Emotional strain is building	Book a GP check-in or counselling support
Feeling trapped or resentful	Care load may be unequal or nonstop	Review respite, shared responsibilities and boundaries
Headaches, stomach issues, poor sleep	Your body is carrying the stress	Check hydration, sleep routine, GP advice and stress supports

Low-effort self-care ideas for hard weeks

- Sit outside in the sun for five minutes after drop-off or before dinner.
- Eat one simple protein-rich snack instead of skipping meals.
- Use voice notes to unload thoughts rather than keeping them all in your head.
- Ask someone to take over one routine task, even if it is only once.
- Set an alarm to drink water and stretch.
- Lower the standard on non-essential chores for one week.
- Take a short walk while a trusted person watches the kids.

When to seek more support

- You feel you are not coping most days.
- Stress is affecting work, relationships or parenting.
- You have persistent sadness, panic, hopelessness or constant anger.
- You are thinking about harming yourself or believe others would be better off without you.
- Your body is showing serious stress symptoms such as ongoing insomnia, chest pain or fainting.

5. Home Life, Routines and Daily Organisation

Most families function better when the day is predictable enough to feel safe but flexible enough to handle surprises. A calm routine reduces arguments, forgotten items, rushing, and stress around transitions. This is especially important for children who find change hard, need more time to process language, or rely on visual structure.

Family organisation does not need to be complicated. The best system is the one everyone will actually use. In many homes this means one calendar, one bag for appointments, one visible place for medication and forms, and a small number of routines that stay steady across the week.

Visual supports can help children understand what is happening and help adults give fewer repeated verbal instructions. A visual routine might show wake-up, toilet, breakfast, shoes, bag, car, school, then home. Older children can use checklists, whiteboards, timers or phone reminders.

- Make mornings as simple as possible.
- Prepare bags, clothing and medication the night before.
- Use the same words for regular transitions.
- Build buffer time around travel and appointments.
- Plan a quiet recovery period after demanding parts of the day.

Routine builders that help many families

Routine area	Problem it solves	Simple tool	Tip
Morning routine	Rushing and repeated prompts	Picture schedule or checklist	Lay out clothes, lunch and bag the night before
After-school routine	Meltdowns after a long day	Snack + quiet time plan	Avoid too many questions the moment child gets home
Bedtime routine	Sleep battles and overtiredness	Consistent order of steps	Use low lighting and reduce screens before bed
Therapy practice	Forgetting exercises	Habit tracker on the fridge	Attach practice to an existing routine
Medication	Missed doses	Medication chart and alarms	Keep scripts and repeats together

Keeping records without drowning in paperwork

Families are often handed reports, assessment forms, scripts, school notices, referrals, invoices, care plans, and therapy handouts. A simple filing system can save hours. Keep paper copies in one binder with clear tabs, and create matching folders on your phone or computer for scanned versions.

Useful folder tabs include identity and Medicare details, diagnoses and reports, medication, school, therapy notes, behaviour plans, emergency information, funding letters, and receipts. A one-page child profile at the front can help new staff or family members understand key needs quickly.

6. Working with Therapists, Doctors and Support Workers

Good collaboration with professionals is one of the biggest stress reducers for families. The aim is not to attend every appointment perfectly. The aim is to make each appointment useful. Families get more from appointments when they prepare a short agenda, bring key records, and leave with clear next steps.

A family does not need to say yes to every recommendation immediately. It is okay to ask what the goal is, how progress will be measured, how the strategy fits with daily life, and what to do if it is not working. It is also okay to ask for plain language explanations or written notes.

Support workers and therapists are most helpful when they understand the whole child, not just the skill they are focusing on. Let them know about what motivates your child, what upsets them, any sensory needs, safety issues, preferred communication, and what the family wants life to look like in ordinary routines.

- Write down your top three questions before each appointment.
- Bring medication lists, recent reports and relevant school information.
- Ask what you should practise at home and how often.
- Request clear examples, not only general advice.
- Check who is responsible for follow-up actions.

Questions families can ask at appointments

- What is the main goal of this therapy, review or assessment?
- What is the most important thing to focus on between now and the next visit?
- How will we know if this strategy is helping?
- What should we do if our child refuses, becomes distressed or gets tired?
- Can you show us exactly how to support this at home or school?
- Is there a lower-effort version for hard weeks?
- Are there safety issues or warning signs we should watch for?

Keeping home programs realistic

Families often receive home exercises or strategies from multiple professionals at once. Trying to do all of them can lead to guilt and burnout. A better approach is to decide what is essential, what is optional, and what fits naturally into real family routines.

For example, rather than planning a long therapy block each night, a family might embed practice into bath time, meals, dressing, or play. This approach is easier to sustain and more likely to continue after the first burst of motivation fades.

A practical rule

If a home strategy regularly creates more family stress than benefit, review it with the therapist. Good therapy should support daily life, not take over all of it.

7. School, Learning and Inclusion

School can be one of the most rewarding and stressful parts of family life. Families are often balancing learning goals, friendships, transport, attendance, fatigue, inclusion, therapies, and communication with staff. Progress at school is strongest when family and school understand each other's priorities and keep information flowing.

A child may need support with learning, communication, mobility, regulation, behaviour, or participation. Some children need adjustments only in certain situations, while others need more structured support across the school day. Families can help by sharing what works at home, what signs show stress is building, and what helps the child re-engage.

Meetings with school staff are often easier when families bring notes. Focus on concrete examples. Instead of saying school is not working, it can help to say, for example, transitions after lunch are the hardest part of the day, my child often comes home dysregulated on Tuesdays, or visual prompts have helped with independence at home.

- Keep a record of concerns, strengths and examples over time.
- Ask what adjustments are already being used and how they are working.
- Share successful strategies from home without expecting school to copy everything exactly.
- Plan ahead for transitions into preschool, primary school, high school and post-school pathways.

School meeting checklist

Before the meeting	During the meeting	After the meeting
Write down concerns and examples	Ask for clear actions, who will do them, and by when	Send a short email summary to confirm agreed actions
Collect reports or recent notes	Ask how progress will be tracked	Add review dates to your calendar
Think about your child's strengths too	Speak up if language is unclear or too much jargon is used	Keep copies of plans and correspondence

A school-home communication page can include

- Sleep quality, medication changes or morning stress that may affect the day
- Any major events, appointments or changes in routine
- What went well at school that day
- Challenges or triggers noticed
- Strategies that helped the child calm, engage or communicate

8. Communication, Advocacy and Family Meetings

Families become advocates whether they planned to or not. Advocacy is not only formal complaints or big meetings. It often looks like asking questions, sharing useful information, clarifying needs, following up in writing, and making sure a child's dignity stays at the centre of decisions.

Good advocacy starts with clarity. Try to name the issue, the impact, and the change you want. For example: my child is regularly missing key instructions because verbal directions are too fast, and I would like visual supports and checked understanding during class routines.

It can help to remember that respectful persistence is not being difficult. Families often need to repeat information, re-explain a need to new staff, or ask again for something that was previously overlooked.

- Keep notes after important phone calls and meetings.
- Use email summaries for important agreements.
- Ask for jargon to be explained in plain language.
- Bring another support person to bigger meetings if possible.

A simple advocacy script

Situation: Briefly describe what is happening. **Impact:** Explain how it affects your child or family.

Request: State clearly what you are asking for. **Review:** Ask when the change will be reviewed.

Example

“My child is becoming highly distressed during long waits before therapy. This means the session often starts when they are already dysregulated. Could we trial an earlier slot, a quieter waiting space, or text us when the therapist is ready?”

Family meetings at home

Short family meetings can reduce confusion and resentment. They do not need to be formal. Even 10 minutes once a week can help adults review the schedule, discuss concerns, share responsibilities, and make sure siblings know what is happening.

A useful meeting rhythm is: what worked, what felt hard, what is coming up, what support is needed, and who is doing what. If the meeting becomes a place only for problems, include one small win as well.

9. Siblings and Family Dynamics

Siblings often notice more than adults realise. They might feel proud, protective, confused, embarrassed, worried, annoyed, left out, or all of those things at different times. Honest, age-appropriate conversation usually helps more than silence.

Siblings need to feel that they matter in their own right, not only as helpers. They benefit from one-on-one time, chances to talk about their feelings, and reassurance that different family arrangements are not the same as being less loved.

It is okay for siblings to help in family life, but caring responsibilities should remain fair and age-appropriate. Children should not quietly become the backup parent because adults are overwhelmed.

- Name what is happening in simple, honest language.
- Invite questions and do not expect one big talk to solve everything.
- Protect sibling time with each parent or carer where possible.
- Notice when siblings are taking on too much responsibility.

What siblings often need

Need	What it can sound like	Helpful response
Information	“Why does he do that?”	Explain in simple, respectful language matched to age
Attention	“You’re always busy with her”	Plan small regular one-on-one moments
Permission for feelings	“I feel bad for being annoyed”	Let them know mixed feelings are normal
Safety	“I don’t like it when there is shouting or hitting”	Have a clear safety plan and ask professionals for help if needed
Normal life	“Can I still do my sport or activity?”	Protect space for friendships and interests

Helpful sibling phrases

- “Your brother’s brain works differently, so some things are harder for him.”
- “You are allowed to love your sibling and still get frustrated sometimes.”
- “You do not have to answer questions from other people if you do not want to.”
- “Our family has different needs, but everyone’s feelings still matter.”

10. Managing Behaviour, Stress and Sensory Needs

Behaviour is communication. When a child is hitting, screaming, refusing, running away, shutting down or melting down, the behaviour is often a sign that a need, stressor or mismatch exists. The goal is not just to stop the behaviour in the moment. The goal is to understand what the behaviour is telling you and what support can reduce it over time.

Useful questions include: What happened just before this? What is the child trying to get, avoid, communicate or regulate? Is there pain, hunger, tiredness, sensory overload, confusion, demand difficulty, or a change in routine? How did adults respond, and what happened next?

Families usually get the best results from calm, consistent responses and prevention planning. Prevention might include clearer routines, visual supports, movement breaks, lower language load, pain checks, sleep support, or smaller demands.

- Keep language short when a child is distressed.
- Focus first on safety and regulation, then on teaching.
- Notice patterns over time instead of judging one bad day.
- Write down triggers, times, places and what helped afterwards.

Meltdown, shutdown or refusal: think support, not blame

When adults treat every difficult moment as disobedience, children who are already overwhelmed can become more distressed. Support-focused responses aim to keep people safe, reduce stress, and build skills over time.

That does not mean there are no boundaries. It means boundaries are paired with co-regulation, clear communication, and realistic expectations matched to the child's nervous system, development and capacity in that moment.

A quick behaviour detective table

What happened before?	What did the behaviour look like?	What might the child need?	What helped after?

11. Financial Planning and Practical Supports

Financial pressure is a major stressor for many families. Costs can include reduced work hours, transport, parking, equipment, therapy gaps, home modifications, continence needs, school expenses, and time away from work for appointments. Even when support funding exists, families often still carry out-of-pocket costs.

A practical first step is to understand the difference between essential expenses, recurring expenses, one-off large expenses, and future planning costs. This makes it easier to budget, prepare for reviews, and explain real-life needs to services or funding bodies.

Families often benefit from keeping receipts, tracking travel and medical costs, and reviewing subscriptions, transport routines, and therapy frequency. Good records can also help when discussing supports, reimbursements, or applications.

- Keep a simple expense tracker rather than relying on memory.
- Set reminders for review dates, scripts, equipment replacement and funding renewals.
- Ask providers for quotes in writing when needed.
- Review what is truly helpful and stop paying for supports that are not delivering value.

Examples of family cost categories

Category	Examples	One-off or ongoing	Planning tip
Transport	Fuel, parking, tolls, long trips for specialists	Ongoing	Track regular monthly average
Health and therapy	Gap fees, consumables, equipment hire	Ongoing	Keep invoices together
Home setup	Safety items, sensory tools, storage	Mixed	Prioritise what reduces daily stress most
Education	Technology, camps, uniforms, learning aids	Mixed	Ask school what supports already exist
Respite and care	Babysitting, support workers, short breaks	Ongoing	Plan for busy periods, not only ordinary weeks

Longer-term planning topics families might discuss with a professional

- Income protection and work flexibility
- Guardianship, decision-making and future supports as children grow older
- Special disability trusts or other estate planning options where relevant
- Long-term housing and care needs
- Transition planning for adulthood and post-school pathways

12. NDIS and Australian Family Support Resources

Australian families may use a mix of mainstream services, disability services, school supports and carer supports. Not every child will be an NDIS participant, and many useful supports sit outside the NDIS. Knowing the broad landscape can help families find the right door to knock on first.

The NDIS provides funding to eligible people with disability and also links people with disability to community and mainstream supports. For younger children, the early childhood approach supports children younger than 9 and their families, and some children can receive early connections even without becoming NDIS participants.

Carers can also access support in their own right. Carer Gateway is an Australian Government program that provides free services and support for carers, including counselling, coaching, peer support, skills courses and help with accessing respite options. Services Australia also provides information about payments and services for carers.

A simple guide to common Australian supports

Support	What it can help with	Who it is for	Good first step
NDIS	Disability-related supports, planning, community participation, capacity building	Eligible people with disability	Read current NDIS guidance and gather reports showing daily impact
Early childhood approach	Early support, advice and connection for younger children and families	Children younger than 9 and families	Contact an early childhood partner or NDIA information source
Carer Gateway	Counselling, peer support, coaching, respite information and practical help	Carers	Call or visit Carer Gateway and ask what supports are available in your area
Services Australia carer supports	Payments and services for eligible carers and families	Carers and families	Review current eligibility and claim information
School and education supports	Adjustments, inclusion support and education planning	Students with disability and additional needs	Start with your school and your state education department guidance

Preparing for an NDIS planning conversation

- Write down your child's ordinary day, including where support is needed and where family load is high.
- Bring reports or letters that describe functional impact, not only diagnosis names.
- Think about immediate needs and future goals.
- List current supports, informal supports and gaps.
- Write down questions and ask for anything unclear to be explained.

Helpful family reminder

Funding systems can feel technical and impersonal. Your notes about real daily life matter. Concrete examples of what happens at home, school and in the community often explain support needs better than broad labels.

13. Emergency Planning and Hospital Preparation

Emergencies are easier to manage when key information is already written down. Families do not need a perfect plan, but they do need a plan that can be found quickly by another adult if the main carer becomes sick, injured or suddenly unavailable.

An emergency plan can include the child's routines, communication methods, medication list, allergies, calming strategies, mobility or transfer needs, feeding information, emergency contacts, doctor details, school details, and important legal or funding information. A hospital go-bag or quick-grab folder can also reduce stress.

Planning ahead does not mean you expect the worst. It means you are reducing chaos if something unexpected happens.

- Keep emergency contacts current.
- Store medication lists and copies of scripts together.
- Make sure at least one backup caregiver knows where key information is kept.
- Review the plan every few months or after major changes.

What to include in an emergency care plan

- Child's full name, date of birth and Medicare details
- Primary diagnoses, allergies and key medical history
- Current medication, dose, timing and how it is given
- Doctors, therapists, pharmacy and emergency contacts
- Communication style and what the child understands best
- Mobility, lifting, feeding, sleep and personal care routines
- Sensory triggers, fears, preferred comforts and calming strategies
- School or preschool details
- Any cultural, language or family preferences that matter in care

Hospital preparation tips

If hospital care is likely, keep a list of what your child usually needs in a stressful environment. This might include comfort items, preferred foods, communication tools, continence supplies, chargers, noise-reducing headphones, visual supports, and a one-page child profile for staff.

Families often find it helpful to carry a short summary that explains their child's communication, sensory and regulation needs. This can save time and reduce repeated explanations, especially in busy settings.

14. Transitions Through Childhood and Adolescence

Transitions can be hard even when they are positive. Families may move through transitions into childcare, preschool, school, high school, puberty, new therapies, community activities, or post-school planning. Preparing early reduces stress and gives everyone time to ask questions.

A good transition plan includes information sharing, visits where possible, a clear timeline, and a short summary of what helps the child succeed. The summary can include communication, routines, triggers, strengths, motivators, personal care needs, health information and safety considerations.

Teenage years can bring new layers such as identity, privacy, body changes, friendships, social media, independence, risk, and future decision-making. Families often need fresh support during this stage rather than assuming what worked in early childhood will still work.

- Start transition planning earlier than feels necessary.
- Use photos, stories or visits to make new settings more familiar.
- Update support summaries as your child grows.
- Remember that adolescence also brings strengths, interests and future possibilities.

Transition planning checklist

Transition	What to prepare	Who to include	When to start
Into preschool or school	Health info, routines, communication supports, visit plan	Family, school staff, therapists	Months before start if possible
Change of therapist or service	Goals, current strategies, recent reports	Family and both services where possible	Before the last session ends
Into high school	Organisation, travel, regulation supports, social worries	Family, current and new school	During the year before transition
Toward adulthood	Daily living goals, work or study ideas, future supports	Young person, family, school, relevant professionals	Early secondary years onward

15. Frequently Asked Questions

The questions below reflect issues families often raise when they are balancing love, care, appointments, and uncertainty.

How do I know if I am doing enough?

Most families feel this worry at some point. A better question is whether your current plan is sustainable and whether your child is safe, supported and moving forward over time. No family can do everything at once. Consistency usually matters more than intensity.

What if relatives do not understand my child's needs?

Start with simple explanations and specific requests. People often understand better when you explain what your child needs in practice, such as more time, lower noise, visual choices, or avoiding surprise touch. Written summaries can help.

Should siblings help more?

Age-appropriate helping can build empathy and connection, but children should not carry adult-level care burdens. Watch for resentment, anxiety or lost opportunities for their own activities and friendships.

How do I keep on top of all the paperwork?

Use one paper binder and one digital folder system. Keep a running list of passwords, contacts, funding dates, and report locations. A ten-minute weekly admin reset can prevent paperwork from exploding.

What if I disagree with a professional?

Ask for the reasoning behind the recommendation, what alternatives exist, and how the plan would fit real daily life. You can ask for time to think, seek a second opinion, or request information in writing.

16. Selected Australian Resource Directory

The organisations below are useful starting points for families who want practical, current information. Because programs and eligibility can change, it is best to check the organisation's current website or contact line for the latest details.

Service	What it offers	Website
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme information, planning, early childhood approach, funded supports and participant guidance	ndis.gov.au
Carer Gateway	Counselling, peer support, coaching, respite information and practical support for carers	carergateway.gov.au
Services Australia	Carer payments, family payments and claim information	servicesaustralia.gov.au
Raising Children Network	Evidence-informed parenting and disability resources for Australian families	raisingchildren.net.au
healthdirect	Health information and links to health services and support lines	healthdirect.gov.au
NSW Department of Education	Inclusive learning support information for parents and carers in NSW	education.nsw.gov.au
Beyond Blue	Mental health information and support	beyondblue.org.au

Safe Hands Support can also use this section as a local resource page by adding community contacts, therapy clinics, parent groups, transport contacts, respite providers and emergency numbers relevant to your area.

Appendices and Printable Worksheets

The pages in this section are designed so families can print, fill in, and keep them together in one folder. They can also be used by support workers to build a clearer picture of routines, goals and care needs.

Appendix A. Family Snapshot

Use this page to introduce your family, your child's strengths, and your biggest priorities right now.

Prompt	Your notes

Appendix C. Support Circle Map

List the people and services around your family so help is easier to coordinate.

Name	Relationship or role	How they help	Contact

Appendix D. Weekly Family Planner

Use one row per day to track therapies, school events, transport and important reminders.

Day	Main plans	Important times	Notes

Appendix E. Therapy and Appointment Log

Keep a short record of what happened at each appointment, any recommendations, and what you need to do before the next visit.

Date	Service or provider	Main points	Home practice	Next step

Date	Service or provider	Main points	Home practice	Next step

Appendix F. Medication and Health Tracker

Use these pages to record medications, side effects, health symptoms, seizures, pain patterns, sleep changes or other key health information.

Date	Medication or symptom	Time	What happened	Action taken	Notes

Date	Medication or symptom	Time	What happened	Action taken	Notes

Appendix G. School Communication Log

A page for notes from home to school and school to home.

Date	From	Main message	Action needed	Follow-up

Appendix H. Behaviour and Trigger Notes

Write down patterns over time so you can see what happens before, during and after difficult moments.

Date and time	What happened before	Behaviour	What helped	What to try next

Date and time	What happened before	Behaviour	What helped	What to try next

Appendix N. Annual Review Checklist

Use this checklist once or twice a year to review what is working, what needs updating, and what can be let go.

Completed	Review item	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Update emergency contacts, medication lists and doctor details	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check school supports, goals and communication systems	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review therapy goals and whether each service is still useful	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Renew scripts, referrals, equipment checks and maintenance	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review family budget, expenses and claims	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check funding review dates and key paperwork	

Completed	Review item	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Update the child profile and support summaries	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask siblings how they are coping and what they need	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review respite options and backup caregivers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Book the main carer's own health appointments	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look at next major transitions and start planning early	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Celebrate progress and record important wins from the year	

Final Encouragement

Families do not need to have everything sorted to be doing a good job. Much of family support is built through ordinary moments repeated many times: a calm explanation, a packed bag, a gentle routine, one more question asked at a meeting, one small break taken before stress tips over.

Safe Hands Support can use this handbook as a practical resource page for families, support workers and community partners. Local phone numbers, referral pathways, service contacts and community supports can be added over time to make it even more useful.

Remember

- Celebrate small victories.
- Keep what works and let go of what does not.
- Use support early, not only at crisis point.
- You are not alone.

Toolkit Page 3. Goal Tracker

Track family goals over time. Keep goals practical and linked to real daily life.

Goal	Why it matters	Support needed	How we will notice progress	Review date

Toolkit Page 4. Equipment and Consumables Tracker

Keep a record of equipment, repairs, replacement timing and regular consumables.

Item	Used for	Supplier	Review / replace date	Notes

Toolkit Page 8. Home Routine Builder

Sketch out the order of your day and identify where small changes could reduce stress.

Part of day	What usually happens	What often goes wrong	What might help

Toolkit Page 10. Meal and Nutrition Notes

Record preferred foods, difficult textures, appetite changes, allergies, supplements or feeding concerns.

Date	What was offered	What was accepted	Notes / concerns

Closing Note

This handbook was created for the Safe Hands Support resource page so families have one clear, practical place to start. Over time, Safe Hands Support can customise the toolkit with local services, community programs, referral steps and branded contact details.

The strongest family plans are the ones people can actually use on an ordinary Tuesday. Keep the pages that help, ignore the ones that do not, and update the handbook as your child and family change.