## Guidelines for Implementing the Engaging Parents in Career Conversations (EPiCC) Framework with Families of Students with a Disability

These Guidelines are provided to support teachers, trainers and careers practitioners working with families of young people with disability. It is expected that the EPiCC Framework will be customised/contextualised to meet the needs of participants and be highly interactive.

When using the EPiCC Framework with families or carers of students with disability, the role of the family on career choices and decision-making needs to be understood and acknowledged.

Disabilities may include intellectual and physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorders, mental health and language disorders.

It is essential that when working with families of young people with a disability, the definition of career, as the sum total of paid and unpaid work, learning and life roles undertaken throughout your life, should be explored in detail. Some young people with disabilities may not be able to move towards paid employment. Exploring the concept that a career also includes participating in things such as leisure activities, community groups, volunteering and sport can support parents to develop a more holistic view of their young person’s future. Additional time may need to be spent encouraging parents to explore their young person’s interests and how these could connect to different careers.

Supporting a young person with a disability to develop their own aspirations and make their own career choices may be a challenging concept for some parents. They may be accustomed to professionals making decisions on their behalf. They may also have formed the view that their child cannot have a career due to their disability. Many parents will also experience ongoing feelings of loss and grief. These situations need to be handled with sensitivity.

Commencing the career conversation early is an important part of working with parents of young people with a disability. Parents may be anxious about the capacity of their child to engage in career planning and decision-making. Exploring the full range of career opportunities and supports available when the child is younger should reduce the stress associated with making decisions as the young person nears the end of their school education.

EPiCC workshops could be run in conjunction with other professionals with whom families are familiar, such as a school psychologist, specialists and integration aides. They can assist the career practitioner in speaking with parents, facilitating activities and linking with services. Parents of former students who have successfully transitioned from school into their career may also be able to provide insight and help address the anxieties participants are experiencing. If they are unable to attend the workshop they should be consulted during the workshop planning.

Families may be unfamiliar with the education system and labour market. When discussing the changing world of work, career practitioners should be aware whether parents have disabilities themselves and ensure that the information presented is accessible to them. Assumptions should not be made about the experiences of parents. Encouraging parents to discuss their own career journey will help to build a shared understanding of their experiences and depth of knowledge. Parents may also be unfamiliar with the range of careers and supports available to young people with a disability. Allowing time to explore these may support this understanding. Additional time may need to be spent explaining the different pathways to education, training and employment. Information about local service providers should be made available to parents.

Consideration should be given to the ability of parents of students with a disability to access networks and support, as they may not live in close proximity to the school. Workshops or discussion groups can provide a foundation for parents to create supportive networks.

As with any form of communication, the specific needs of the audience must be considered and the information presented in a way that is clear and accessible. Schools are encouraged to make use of interpreters or assistive technology if necessary. Allowing time for questions and feedback is important. The use of visual resources to support the text in slides may also be helpful. If possible, aides or case workers could be involved to ensure that workshop participants are fully supported during activities.

**KEY CONSIDERATIONS:**

* This is a very difficult transition for some. Often parents believe that their son or daughter cannot have a career and they now are being asked to see this as a possibility.
* Conversations with parents need to begin early to increase their understanding of career development.
* Start exploring suitable post-school options early.
* Remind parents that they are not alone and encourage them to access networks and supports.
* Know your parent cohort; “meet them where they are at”.
* Be creative and try alternative approaches – we do not live in a ‘one size fits all’ world.

Adapt to engage the group, encourage discovery and cultivate hope!

## Additional Resources

**Education Support Staff**

Schools may employ Education Support Staff to support students while at school. These staff will usually have a strong rapport with students and their families, and may be able to support the career practitioner in planning and delivering workshops. Career practitioners should familiarise these staff with appropriate career development concepts prior to delivering a workshop.

**National Disability Coordination Officer Program**

The National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program targets the barriers that people with a disability face in successfully accessing and completing post-school education and training and subsequent employment. NDCOs perform a range of functions to help people with disability gain access to and successfully complete post-school education and training and employment. NDCOs can provide practical assistance and advice to individuals with a disability and their families, education and training providers, as well as employment and community support agencies.

<http://www.innovation.gov.au/Skills/SkillsTrainingAndWorkforceDevelopment/NationalDisabilityCoordinationOfficerProgram/Pages/default.aspx>

**Department of Human Services programs**

The Futures for Young Adults (FFYA) program provides support to students with a disability who need additional assistance to make the transition to post-school options. The program is available to eligible students from when they complete school until they turn 21.

The Transition to Employment (TTE) initiative is focused on providing support to young people with a disability who want to pursue further education, training and employment but are not yet ready to move directly into employment, or receive assistance through a Commonwealth Employment Service.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/disability/community-life-and-jobs/transitioning-to-employment>

**Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training**

The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) provides post-secondary education, training and employment information and resources for people with disability or ongoing medical conditions.

[www.adcet.edu.au/](http://www.adcet.edu.au/)

**VTAC and SEAS**

School leavers with a disability who are applying for University or higher-level study in TAFE can apply through VTAC for the Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS). For further information please see [www.vtac.edu.au/seas-home.html](http://www.vtac.edu.au/seas-home.html)

**Family – School Partnerships Framework**

This is a publication from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations that provides advice around schools developing an approach to working effectively with families.

<http://foi.deewr.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/familyschoolpartnershipsframework.pdf>

**Career Information Flyers**

The career information flyers outline a range of career information, resources and support available for young people and adults. The flyers provide relevant information on the career development programs and resources funded by the Department of Education, and also include a range of useful links for further information and support.

<http://docs.education.gov.au/collections/career-information-flyers>

**DEECD Career Resources for Young People with a Disability**

* Career Resources for Young People with Disabilities

http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/resourcekit/Pages/disability.aspx

* Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework – Additional Support for Targeted Groups

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/carframe/Pages/support.aspx>