

Thriving together: Co-creating wellbeing supports for parents of autistic children



The reality for many parents

Parent wellbeing score: **2.9/5** average wellbeing

Many parents described living in “survival mode”, balancing caregiving, advocacy, and navigating complex systems.

Top impacts on wellbeing

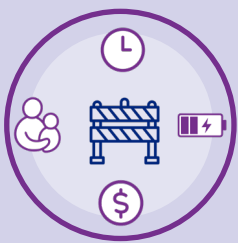
- Burnout, stress and anxiety – **73.7%**
- School support challenges – **47.4%**
- Financial pressure – **39.5%**
- Navigating NDIS/ services – **68.4%**
- Lack of respite/childcare – **42.1%**
- Isolation/loneliness – **36.8%**
- Lack of time for self – **60.5%**

“Exhaustion makes it hard to make good health choices such as exercise and eating well.” - Parent

Barriers of accessing support -

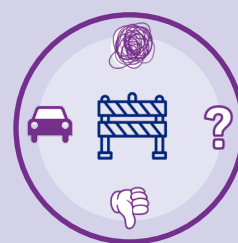
Practical barriers

- Timing of sessions - **57.9%**
- Childcare responsibilities - **55.3%**
- Cost - **42.1%**
- Fatigue/low energy - **57.9%**



Social and emotional barriers

- Not knowing anyone – **34.2%**
- Anxiety about joining groups – **29%**
- Transport – **21%**
- Fear of stigma or judgement – **18%**



Parents are not lacking interest in support — they are constrained by time, energy, and caregiving demands.

What parents say would improve wellbeing -

Parents identified both practical and emotional needs.

Top priorities

- Practical support (respite, transport, meals)
- Emotional and mental health support
- Peer connection with other parents
- Advocacy help navigating systems
- Information and learning (lower priority)

“The best thing that would help struggling parents is taking something off their overflowing plate” - Parent

Success factors for parent wellbeing -

- 1 Time for self**
Parents need space to rest and recharge.
- 2 Flexible support options**
Flexible attendance and drop-in participation were critical.
- 3 Connection with people who “get it”**
Peer support reduces isolation and strengthens resilience.
- 4 Practical navigation support**
Help with forms, funding, school systems, and next steps.
- 5 Mental health and emotional support**
Dedicated support for parents — not only the child.

“...Having the ability to share with a group like this reduces isolation” - Parent

What makes support accessible -

Parents identified what makes participation possible.

Top enablers

- Flexible times/days – **71%**
- Free or low-cost sessions – **63%**
- Small group environments – **45%**
- Online options – **39%**
- Childcare / supervised children’s area – **45%**



Final insights

Parent wellbeing improves when support is:

- Practical
- Flexible
- Autism-specific
- Lived-experience informed
- Relational & community-based

Parents are not asking for another service. They are asking for connection, practical help, and space to breathe.

The impact parents hope for -

If the model works, parents said they would feel:

- More supported – **77.8%**
- Less stressed – **70.4%**
- More connected – **66.7%**
- Better informed – **63%**
- More resilient – **59.3%**
- More confident as a parent – **55.6%**