Information about Childcare
About this resource

Childcare often plays an important part in family life. Sometimes family members, friends and neighbours can help, but you may be looking for more than this, so that you can go to work or take a break from caring to do other things. This information resource is about childcare services provided by professional practitioners.

This resource was developed by the Daycare Trust for Early Support.

Early Support

Early Support is a way of working, underpinned by 10 principles that aim to improve the delivery of services for disabled children, young people and their families. It enables services to coordinate their activity better and provide families with a single point of contact and continuity through key working.

Early Support is a core partner supporting the implementation of the strategy detailed in Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability, the Government’s 2011 Green Paper. This identified Early Support as a key approach to meeting the needs of disabled children, young people and their families.

Early Support helps local areas implement the Government's strategy to bring together the services families need into a single assessment and planning process covering education, health and care. Early Support provides a wide range of resources and training to support children, young people, families and service deliverers.

To find out more about Early Support, please visit www.ncb.org.uk/earlysupport.

Where a word or phrase appears in colour, like this, it means you can: look them up in the Glossary at the back of the resource; and find contact details for the organisation or agency highlighted in the Further information and useful links section.

Explanation of the term parent carer

Throughout this resource the term 'parent carer' is used. This means any person with parental responsibility for a child or young person with special educational needs or disability. It is intended as an inclusive term that can cover foster carers, adoptive parents and other family members.
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**Introduction**

All parent carers need to be confident that their child is safe, secure and happy, therefore choosing the right childcare for your family is important. This resource explains how to find out about childcare services in your local area and suggests some things you may want to think about as you consider options. Other families who have children with additional needs are often able to pass on their experience of using childcare services. Any practitioners already working with you, should also be able to tell you about the services that are available in your area, or at least tell you how to find out more.

You may wish to use the same childcare services used by other families and children in your area. Many childcare settings have experience and are welcoming and able to include children and young people who have special educational needs or other additional needs. Every early years and childcare setting has an inclusion policy and a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Some also have equality named coordinators (ENCOs) who support settings to be inclusive and to build good relations. ENCOs often work very closely with SENCOs to support children with additional needs. If you know of a setting you would like your child to attend, a good starting point would to be to speak to its SENCO.

Childcare providers are not allowed to discriminate against disabled children and must make reasonable adjustments to include them. The statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) also supports giving due regard to disabled children. The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to check provision for disabled children when assessing whether local childcare services are 'sufficient' to meet the needs of families in their area.

Some local authorities offer support and training to the childcare settings and will often work in partnership with the setting and the parent carer. Ask your local setting if they are supported by an early years area SENCO and ENCO network or inclusion team.

If you are looking for more specialist provision, many local authorities have early years provision which is specifically targeted at children with additional needs and children with special educational needs. The practitioners who are already working with you should be able to tell you about the services that are available. It's also worth asking other parent carers you meet about the childcare services they use. A good place to start is your Local Parent Carer Forum. You can find out about the forum in your area at the National Network of Parent Carer Forums website: www.nnpcf.org.uk/home.

Here are some quotes from parent carers and a practitioner about their experiences of childcare. They are taken from the Daycare Trust paper *Listening to parents of disabled children about childcare* (see www.daycaretrust.org.uk for further information):

"His nursery has helped him a lot... when the childcare is right, it's good for the parents, the child, for everyone."
“Networking and finding out information from other people is the most valuable source of information.”

“A lot of us these days need to work for financial reasons... and it's your right to be a parent and work.”

“If you’ve got a child with special needs you need some time without any children, just to recuperate.”

“At first, I was very apprehensive about it, because I’ve never actually worked with children with additional needs, but after I’d had some training and spoke to the parents at length, I was quite confident about doing it.”

Parent carers who took part in the Early Years Equality Survey on childcare and equality compliance (2012) expressed:

“We moved our son to this childcare [setting] because they are different; they see our son for the whole child he is.”

“We don’t want our child to grow up not knowing his home language just because he has special needs, and the childcare setting has helped us with this by helping him to hear Polish during the course of the general play. It helps us keep our language alive for him and makes it important to him as well, because he sees others seeing it in the childcare setting as a good thing”
What sort of childcare services are available?

The following childcare services are normally available:

**Ofsted-registered childminders**

They provide full-time and part-time care, and play and learning opportunities for children, usually in the childminder’s own home. They can give your child the opportunity to enjoy real life learning experiences, including cooking, shopping, gardening, sharing meals and going out to the park or library. Childminders are self-employed and can be flexible in the hours they work. This means that children are free to attend local playgroups, parent and toddler groups, clubs and visit friends. They are based in every community and from all cultures and walks of life. Usually childminders look after children under 12 years of age. They can look after up to six children under eight years old, although no more than three of those must be aged under five.

**Preschools**

These settings offer registered part-time or full-time care, playful learning and education for children between two and five years of age. In some areas, groups have been set up specifically for disabled children. These are often called opportunity groups.

**Day Nurseries**

These are normally for children under five to play and learn in a group. They provide registered early education and care, and offer full-time and part-time places. Some may have services linked to family support and other forms of community support.

**Children’s Centres**

The centres support children under the age of five and their families, providing easy access to health services, parenting and family support. They provide a range of advice and support for parents, including drop-in sessions, outreach services, integrated early education and childcare, and links to training and employment opportunities.

All childcare for children under the age of five needs to be registered on the early years register and to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage framework requirements.

**Out-of-school clubs and holiday clubs**

These clubs offer children aged five (sometimes four) and over the opportunity to play, do sports and creative activities, or study in a safe environment outside school hours and during the school holidays. Some places open at weekends offering Play Clubs.
Short breaks

These can be day, evening, overnight or weekend activities, and may take place in the child’s home, in the home of an approved carer, or in a residential or community setting. Local authorities also have a duty to provide short break services for disabled children, young people and their families. Short breaks can include an element of childminding: a young person or adult will befriend the child or young person with additional needs and help them to access community and leisure activities, such as play schemes, Saturday clubs, or after-school clubs.

Nannies

They offer care for an individual family’s children on a live-in or daily basis and can be registered on the voluntary Ofsted register.

The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to ensure there is sufficient, affordable childcare available in their area for working parents, including childcare for children with additional needs. For further information about the various childcare services available visit www.gov.uk/en/Parents/Childcare.
Finding childcare services in your area

“Information empowers families to make the right choices for them and to demand quality provision. When parents are able to make informed choices, it creates momentum amongst providers to create services that are affordable, available, high quality and sustainable.” Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare: Summary (2009), HM Government/DCSF

Most local authorities have a Family Information Service (FIS), which can give you information about the full range of childcare that is available in your area. You can contact the FIS through your local authority offices or the local authority website. For more information, or to get the contact details of your local service visit: www.daycaretrust.org.uk/findyourfis.

The FIS is required to provide expert information, advice and guidance to parents on childcare and early years services in its area. If you are struggling to find suitable childcare, it should offer a childcare brokerage service. This can provide information about the suitability of childcare settings for children with additional needs, including those with special educational needs. The information provided might include:

- any previous experience a setting has of providing childcare for children with additional needs
- any particular expertise in providing specialist care
- any specialist facilities available

Local children’s centres are also a good source of information and some offer different types of childcare and group opportunities, which you may like to try out.

All childcare providers looking after children below the age of eight have to be registered with and inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted). For information about how childcare services are regulated visit the Ofsted website, where you can also view information about inspections on individual childcare providers: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

You might also want to contact the national childcare charity Daycare Trust. It works to promote high-quality, affordable childcare for everyone, and provides information about all aspects of childcare.

The UK-wide charity Contact a Family may also be able to help. It provides support, advice and information for families with children who have additional needs. It runs a helpline for family members.

Many families find out what is available in the area at their local parent carer forum or from other parents and neighbours, who are most likely to be able to give an up-to-date, accurate view of the quality of childcare services.
What does a good childcare service provide?

Childcare can be an important opportunity for your child to:

- broaden their experience
- learn to play with other children and learn about others and themselves and their place in the world
- play, supported by the Early Years Foundation Stage framework requirements
- learn about diversity
- get used to moving about confidently in different and larger environments
- play with a wider range of toys than you can provide at home
- engage in activities and exploration to build their self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience
- increase their confidence indoors and outdoors

Childcare should be safe as well as fun for your child. The service needs to be reliable and you should also feel confident that your child is welcome and included. Consistency in childcare may be particularly important for your child, so remember to:

- ask which staff member/s will be looking after your child
- find out about staff training and turnover

Every childcare provider that offers care for children aged five and under should assign a key person to each child. This is a named staff member who will have the responsibility of building a relationship with you and your child. They should communicate and celebrate your child’s development and progress with you on a regular basis. They will also be responsible for working with others involved with your child to complete the recently introduced two-year-old check.

All childcare providers must meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), which is now included as part of the Equality Act 2010. This means that they must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to include disabled children. All early years settings are, therefore, required to think about how they will provide for children with additional needs and for those with special needs. You could ask them:

- how they have approached this requirement
- what provision they have already made

You can contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) for guidance on legal requirements if you feel your child is being discriminated against on the basis of their disability. Early Years Equality also provides disability equality support, guidance, advice,
discrimination casework and training to children, families, organisations, providers and policymakers across the UK.

Early years settings that you are talking to should be receiving support from a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), whose job is to help them think about how to develop the provision they make for children who need more help and support. Some will be supported by ENCOs too.
Considering options and making choices

Listening to the views of other parents, carers or practitioners that you trust is often very useful, but the best way to find out about any childcare service is to visit with your child and see how you feel about it. There are some things you will be able to see or sense and others that you will need to ask:

- Do they make you feel welcome as a parent carer?
- Is the environment reflective of diversity, including people with additional needs?
- Is there a good range of activities and equipment available for the children?
- Do other children appear to be settled and happy in the setting?
- Does the childminder, or childcare staff, seem positive and caring about your child and any other children they are caring for?
- Does the childminder, or childcare staff, have any experience of working with children with additional needs, including special educational needs?
- Do the staff members have a can-do attitude towards adapting activities and making things work for your child?
- Do you feel confident that they will keep you informed and involved?

The Early Support Our Family resource can make early discussions with potential childminders or childcare services easier, because it brings together essential information about your child in one place. It provides opportunity to detail not only your child’s additional needs, but your child’s interests, likes/dislikes, cultural background, religion or beliefs, language needs etc., to share with the childcare staff. You might want to share this information when you first visit with your child.

For further information about all aspects of childcare, visit www.gov.uk/en/Parents/Childcare.
If your child uses medication or special equipment

You need to feel confident that your child is safe. If childcare staff need information about medication, physical care or the equipment your child uses, it’s a good idea to plan ahead:

- Ask the practitioners who are already working with you to help you think about the things staff should know.
- Be prepared to spend extra time talking about this before your child attends for the first time.
- Ask who will be working with your child and make sure any relevant information has been passed to them.

The Early Support Our family resource is important here, as well. You can write down any information about medication, equipment or physical care that anyone taking responsibility for your child should be aware of. This is also a good place to alert people about allergies and give information about eating. Share this with anyone working with your child for the first time. Always remember that you are the best person to discuss your child’s needs with people working in childcare settings, because you know your child better than anyone else.

You might want to ask the following questions:

- What staff training has there been about health needs or the use of personal equipment – for example, mobility aids?
- Who are the trained first-aiders on the staff?
- Do they have a clear policy about storing, giving and recording medication, and effective systems for ensuring that all staff, including volunteers and agency staff, know about children’s individual needs?
- Have staff received training on lifting and moving?

Sometimes the community nurse and other health practitioners who work with your child may be able to train and support childminders or childcare staff. Your local authority’s family information service (FIS) holds information about funding that is available for staff training or equipment that the childcare setting may need. Find contact details for your local FIS at www.daycaretrust.org.uk/findeyourFIS.
If your child has particular communication needs

When communication is an important issue – for example, if your child is deaf or hearing-impaired, uses sign language, or English is an additional language for your child – it’s important that childcare staff understand how best to communicate.

Ask for some extra time to explain the ways you communicate with your child to anyone who will be looking after them. A specialist teacher or therapist who works with your child regularly should be able to help you prepare and support staff in this way in your chosen childcare setting.

The Early Support Our family resource can help. You can write down the things about communication that anyone taking responsibility for your child should be aware of. Share this with anyone working with your child for the first time.
Children with complex health needs

Childcare in your own home

One way of arranging childcare in your home is to employ a nanny or other home carer. Home-based child carers can choose to register on the voluntary Ofsted childcare register. If employing a home-based child carer, such as a nanny, you might prefer to use one who is registered, or willing to become registered.

Nannies registered on the voluntary Ofsted childcare register will have undergone an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check and have met other requirements, such as holding an appropriate first aid qualification and having training in the common core skills. They will also hold a public liability insurance certificate.

You may be eligible for help with childcare costs, such as the childcare element of working tax credit if you use registered childcare. Direct payments can also be used to pay for a home-based child carer following an assessment of need from your local authority. Further information about this can be found at www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs
Help with the costs of childcare

In theory you should not be charged additional fees because your child has additional needs. If a childcare setting requires additional support or equipment to provide a place for your child, they should contact the local authority. Some local authorities make special bursaries or other help available to assist with these additional childcare costs.

However, many families with children with additional needs report that they are being charged much higher fees as childcare providers say that children with additional needs cost more to accommodate and care for. It is advisable to check with your chosen childcare provider what their fee structures are before taking up a placement.

You may need additional help to meet your childcare costs. An extra disability element is added to your child tax credit calculation for each child who receives Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or is registered blind. A ‘severe disability’ element is added if your child receives the highest rate of the DLA care component. You can read more about DLA, the main state benefit for disabled children at www.dla-disability-living-allowance-benefit/overview.

If you’re in contact with a social worker, ask if there is any support for childcare. You could ask for this as part of a short break or as part of a package of care to help you juggle work and caring. To do this, you will need to ask the social worker to arrange for an assessment of your family’s needs.

The childcare element of working tax credit

This helps some working families meet up to 70 per cent of registered childcare costs. Tax credits are paid by HM Revenue and Customs and the amount you receive depends on your family circumstances and annual income. To find out more about tax credits contact:

- your local authority’s Family Information Service (FIS)
- the Tax Credit Helpline

Free early education

All three- and four-year-old children who live in England are entitled to 15 hours of free early education for 38 weeks of the year, starting from the term following their third birthday. You can use these free hours at many nurseries, pre-schools, children’s centres and at some childminders.

There are also free early education places available for some two year olds and the government is gradually increasing the number of these places. Your local Family Information Service will be able to tell you about the eligibility criteria in your local area.
Help from your employer

Working flexible hours

Many parent carers find they need to work flexible hours in order to juggle work and caring. Working parent carers have the right to request flexible working arrangements once they have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks. Flexible working could mean a change to the number of working hours, a change to the times employees work, or working from home. Employers have a statutory duty to consider such requests seriously and are only able to refuse when there is a clear business reason for doing so.

Once you have worked for your employer for one year, your employment rights are extended. You will have the right of up to 18 weeks unpaid leave if your child is entitled to receive Disability Living Allowance. You also have the right to take unpaid leave to deal with emergencies involving dependents.

To find out more, visit the ‘employment and skills’ section of www.businesslink.gov.uk where detailed guidance is available.

Salary sacrifice scheme

Some employers also offer help with childcare costs through a salary sacrifice scheme. Joining a salary sacrifice scheme can save working parents over £900 per year on tax and national insurance contributions. To find out about employer-supported childcare, speak to your employer or visit www.payingforchildcare.org.uk.

If you need more general information about employment rights, contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).
Further information and useful links

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)
This service offers general information about employment rights.
www.acas.org.uk
08457 474747 (text relay 18001 08457 474747)

Contact a Family
It provides support, advice and information for families with children who have additional needs. It runs a helpline for family members and can help you get in touch with other parent carers of children with additional needs living near you.
www.cafamily.org.uk
helpline@cafamily.org.uk
0808 8083555 (9.30am to 5.00pm, weekdays)

Daycare Trust
Its works to promote high-quality, affordable childcare for everyone, and provides information about all aspects of childcare.
www.daycaretrust.org.uk; www.payingforchildcare.org.uk
info@daycaretrust.org.uk

Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)
A service offering guidance on legal requirements if you feel your child is being discriminated against on the basis of their additional needs.
adviceline@equalityadvisoryservice.com
0800 444 205 (textphone 0800 444 206)

Early Years Equality
Provides disability equality, and other protected characteristic equality support, guidance, advice, discrimination casework and training to children, families, organisations, providers and policy makers across the UK.
www.earlyyearsequality.org.uk; www.earlyyearsequality.org.uk
enquiries@earlyyearsequality.org.uk
0114 2700214

Equality and Human Rights Commission
The statutory remit is to promote and monitor human rights, and to protect, enforce and promote equality across the nine ‘protected’ grounds – age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Family Information Service (FIS)
Holds information about funding that is available for staff training or equipment that the childcare setting may need. Find your local FIS for childcare in your area at:
Gov.uk
The government website has a section on childcare for a disabled child.
www.gov.uk/en/CaringForSomeone/CaringForADisabledChild/DG_10027203

Include Me Too
This charity supports disabled children, young people and their families from black, ethnic minority and other marginalised backgrounds, and aims to promote and support all disabled children and young people’s rights.
www.includemetoo.org.uk

Paying for Childcare
A Daycare Trust website offering information on financial help with childcare costs for children with a disability.
www.payingforchildcare.org.uk

Short Breaks Network
Information about short breaks and links to local authority short break statements.
www.shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk

Tax Credit Helpline
Find out more about tax credits and how they can help towards childcare costs.
www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits
Helpline 0345 3003900 (textphone: 0845 300 3909)

Working Families
A network for parent carers of disabled children who work or want to work.
Resources

Daycare Trust offers a free information guide and fact sheets on childcare, and an annual childcare costs survey, all of which you can download at their website:

* A guide for disabled parents: choosing and paying for childcare  
  [www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/booklets-for-parents.html](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/booklets-for-parents.html)

* Childcare for disabled children and children with additional needs  
  [www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/-factsheets-for-parents-63.html](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/-factsheets-for-parents-63.html)

Childcare costs survey  
[www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-surveys.html](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-surveys.html)

Daycare Trust also has a *Listening to families* series of three books available to buy on its website:  
* Listening to black and minority ethnic parents  
* Listening to lone parents  
* Listening to parents of disabled children  
**Glossary**

**Additional needs** – This term is used in this and other Early Support resources to refer to any child or young person who has a condition, difficulty, challenge or special educational need, whether diagnosed or not, who is likely to need additional support beyond universal services.

**Childcare brokerage** – A free service usually offered by your family information service to meet the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006. This Act requires all local authorities to provide advice and assistance to parents or prospective parents who use or propose to use childcare in the area of the local authority and who are experiencing difficulty in finding suitable childcare for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)** – A piece of legislation that promotes civil rights for disabled people and protects disabled people from discrimination. The Equality Act 2010 replaced most of the DDA.

**Disability living allowance (DLA)** – The main state benefit for disabled children. It is made up of a care component and a mobility component.

**Early years settings** – General name for nurseries, playgroups, day nurseries and childcare facilities for children under five.

**Equality Act 2010** – Bans unfair treatment and helps achieve equal opportunities, promotes good relations and protects equality protected characteristic individuals, groups and communities.

**Family Information Service (FIS)** – An information service provided by the local authority to tell you about the childcare that is available in your area. Find contact details for your FIS at [www.daycaretrust.org.uk/findyourFIS](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/findyourFIS)

**Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)** – It inspects and regulates to promote excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages.

**Parent and toddler, and play and share groups** – Cater mainly for children under two years, where parent carers stay with their children. The sessions allow parent carers and children to mix with others and experience a variety of activities.

**Reasonable adjustments** – The duty, under the Equality Act, to remove barriers that prevent disabled people from integrating into the setting.

**Special educational needs (SEN)** – Describe the additional help a child with learning difficulties/impairments needs to participate and learn. Children with special educational needs require extra or different help from that normally provided for other children of the same age.
Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) – A practitioner in a school or early years setting who has particular responsibility for identifying children with special educational needs and making sure they receive appropriate support.

Special needs – Additional needs that a child has because of an impairment or an additional need. They may be special educational needs or include extra help with mobility or with carrying out everyday activities.

Sure Start Children’s Centres – Provide a range of services, including childcare, for families and young children in one place. They often include health services and some provision for children with additional needs, including special needs.
We acknowledge with thanks the contribution of the following organisations in the production of this resource.

www.ncb.org.uk/earlysupport

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