

Factsheet for parents

Childcare for disabled children and children with special educational needs

High quality childcare is good for all children and families. This factsheet provides information about finding childcare for disabled children and children with special educational needs. It looks at sources of financial help available for the costs of childcare and gives suggestions about where to go for further advice.

What sort of childcare is available?

There is a range of childcare options available for your child and it's a good idea to start by thinking about what kind of childcare would be best for your child; for example, would you like your child to be cared for in a setting with lots of other children; would you like the setting to be mixed or specifically working with children with additional needs? Finding childcare can be difficult and as a parent of a child with a disability or special educational needs, you may find that your options are limited, particularly for older children.

For general information about childcare options, see our factsheet 'What are my childcare options?', available to download from our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Some childcare providers may have services specifically tailored for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Others may have inclusive childcare which offers care and learning for children of all abilities.

Financial help for childcare costs is generally restricted to paying for childcare services that are registered with Ofsted. Registered childcare may be any of the following:

- day nursery (private, community local authority or workplace);
- children's centre;
- childminder;
- nursery school;
- extended school;
- pre-school/playgroup;
- out-of-school and holiday club; and
- registered home-based care/nannies including a domiciliary worker or nurse from an agency 'registered' under the Domiciliary Care Agencies Regulations 2002 providing childcare in the child's home.

Any unregistered care you can use – which might be provided by a friend or family member – will not qualify for financial help from the Government. You may be able to use direct payments for care provided in your home by a relative, see 'Direct Payments' on page five.

How do I find childcare?

Your local Family Information Service can provide you with details of the registered childcare providers in your area; this will include childminders, nurseries, out-of-school and holiday clubs, pre-school/playgroups and children's leisure activities. Some Family Information Services may also be able to provide you with information about unregistered childcare, such as nannies or parent and toddler groups as well as providers who have specialist training and/or experience of caring for children with a specific disability or special educational needs.

To find out about local childcare in England, use the Family Information Directory on Daycare Trust's website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk/fid, or contact your local Family Information Service (FIS) by calling 0800 234 6346. You will need to contact the local FIS if you want to find out about childcare outside England.

For further information on finding and choosing childcare see the 'Parent information' section on our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

When talking to potential childcare providers, you will need to discuss how they can meet the needs of your child including any additional equipment they might need, language support, medical assistance or specific dietary requirements.

Each local authority has a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) who you can contact to discuss your childcare needs and any additional support your child may require. They should be able to advise you about any funding available for equipment, training and childcare support.

To speak to your area SENCO, contact the Early Years Team or Children's Services at your local authority - their details should be in your local phone directory or search for them on www.direct.gov.uk. Many larger childcare settings and schools will have a SENCO based on the premises who you can speak to about your child's needs.

Under the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities have additional duties to ensure there is suitable childcare for all families who need it. If there is no suitable childcare available in your area, the local authority should provide brokerage support for you to ensure your childcare needs are met. This means that they will offer support to you to help you to secure a place for your child at an appropriate setting and to ensure that you are not charged additional fees purely because the place is for a disabled child or child with special educational needs. This support is usually offered by the Family Information Service.

Discrimination

Childcare providers should state what provision they have for disabled children and children with special educational needs when they register with Ofsted.

Unfortunately, although many providers may state that they can offer places, in reality, provision can be very limited and childcare settings where staff are well trained and have experience of working with disabled children and children with special educational needs often have long waiting lists.

The childcare provider should make 'reasonable adjustments' to their services so that your child has access to the same activities as everyone else. If a childcare setting needs additional equipment or training, they should apply to the local authority.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act childcare providers should not treat a disabled child less favourably than other children. This means that your child should have the same play and learning opportunities as other children and that you should not be charged more for offering the same service to a disabled child as to other children.

If you are having difficulty finding a childcare provider for your child or think you are being discriminated against on the grounds of your child's disability or special educational needs, contact the local authority SENCO.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission can advise and offer guidance on all discrimination issues. Visit: www.equalityhumanrights.com or call 0845 604 6610 for further information.

Can I get help with my childcare costs?

You may be entitled to help with your childcare costs, for example, from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or employer-supported childcare. Parents of children with disabilities may also have access to other financial help.

For information about the financial help you can get for your childcare costs visit our website www.payingforchildcare.org.uk.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Disability Living Allowance is the main source of financial support available for the additional costs of your child living with a disability. Your child may qualify for Disability Living Allowance if they have a physical and/or special educational need and require more help or supervision than other children of the same age.

Disability Living Allowance has two components: care and mobility.

Usually, you can claim for the care component when your child is aged three months and for the mobility component when they are aged three years, although in some circumstances you can claim earlier.

The care component of Disability Living Allowance is paid at 1 of 3 levels, which range from £18.95 per week to £71.40 per week depending on the level of care your child needs.

This amount can be used to pay for childcare costs. Applying for Disability Living Allowance can be complicated as there is not a fixed set of criteria you must meet, as there is with most other benefits.

You can get a claim pack for Disability Living Allowance by contacting the Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 88 22 00 (textphone 0800 24 33 55) or you can download the claim form from www.direct.gov.uk.

The claim form asks for descriptions of your child's disability and how it affects their life; this information is then assessed and an award is made based on which level of care it is felt your child needs. The amount awarded to you can be of a lower rate than you think is appropriate, and you may need to ask for a review or an appeal to be paid at the level your child needs.

There are a number of organisations who may be able to offer help or advice to you when you complete the application form for Disability Living Allowance. They may also be able to help you to appeal. See 'Other sources of advice' below.

Disabled child element of Child Tax Credit

If you are claiming Disability Living Allowance for your child you may also be able to claim additional support from the disabled child element of Child Tax Credit. There are two elements available:

- the disabled child element (£2,715 per year) - for each child in the family claiming Disability Living Allowance or who is registered blind; and
- the severely disabled child element (£1,095 per year) - for each child in the family claiming the highest rate care component of Disability Living Allowance.

To apply for Child Tax Credit, contact the Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900.

For more information about Child Tax Credit, see our factsheet, 'General help with childcare costs', available on our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

Other sources of financial help

Early Years or Children's Services Team at your local authority

You or your childcare provider could speak to the local Early Years or Children's Services team at your local authority. Providers who have a childcare place available, but cannot offer it to a disabled child because they lack the facilities, staff or skills required, may be able to apply for specific funding from their local authority. This funding can be used to assist with childcare for young children with disabilities or special educational needs by paying for additional staff, training or specific equipment.

Direct Payments

If you have parental responsibility for a disabled child, you may be able to receive money that you can use to organise care and support for your child rather than having services provided by the local authority. Direct Payments can be made by Social Services after an assessment of need.

Getting money in place of social care services means you have greater choice and control over your life and are able to make your own decisions about how care is delivered.

Direct Payments can allow you to shape your own childcare package, including services and support that is not routinely provided by community care services. Some local authorities may also offer specific childcare support.

Contact the Social Services department at your local authority for information. You will find their contact details in your local phone directory or search for them at www.direct.gov.uk.

For more information about direct payments see 'A Parent's Guide to Direct Payments' which can be downloaded from the Department of Health website www.dh.gov.uk.

Other sources of advice

<p>Benefits Enquiry Line Government information service for disabled people and carers that can advise on the range of benefits available and send out claim forms. Tel: 0800 88 22 00 Textphone: 0800 24 33 55</p>	<p>Contact-a-Family Provides information, advice and support to families of children with disabilities. Tel: 0808 808 3555 Textphone: 0808 808 3556 E-mail: helpline@cafamily.org.uk Website: www.cafamily.org.uk</p>
<p>Disabled Information and Advice Line (DIAL UK) National network of advice agencies for people with disabilities. Their website includes factsheets and a search facility to find local contacts. Tel: 01302 310123 Textphone 01302 310123 E-mail informationenquiries@dialuk.org.uk Website: www.dialuk.info</p>	<p>Early Support Programme A government programme which aims to ensure that families of young children with disabilities receive effective support. Provides Early Support Family Packs. Website: www.earlysupport.org.uk</p>
<p>Family Fund The Family Fund gives grants to lower income families with severely disabled children for things such as holidays, washing machines, driving lessons, computers and hospital visiting costs. Tel: 0845 130 4542 Textphone : 01904 658 085 Website: www.familyfund.org.uk</p>	<p>Kids Works with disabled children, young people and their families, to enable them to develop their skills and abilities and to fulfil their potential. Guides disabled children towards mainstream inclusion in their community and offers support, guidance and respite to parents. Tel: 020 7359 3073 Website: www.kids.org.uk</p>

<p>National Portage Association Offers home learning opportunities for pre-school age disabled children and support for parents. Website: www.portage.org.uk</p>	<p>Shared Care Network Gives details of daycare, play schemes, clubs babysitting and residential care for disabled children. Website: www.sharedcarenetwork.org.uk</p>
<p>'Waving not drowning' network A network of parents of children with disabilities who work or want to work, run by Working Families. Working Families have free factsheets and information available about parents' rights, flexible working options, etc. Waving not drowning helpline: 020 7253 7243 Working Families helpline 0800 013 0313 Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk</p>	

Daycare Trust is the National Childcare Campaign. We have been working since 1986 to promote high quality affordable childcare for all.

If you have any questions about the information provided in this factsheet, or other questions about childcare, Daycare Trust's Information Line is available on **0845 872 6251**, alternatively you can email info@daycaretrust.org.uk. You can also access information on our website, www.daycaretrust.org.uk or www.payingforchildcare.org.uk.

The information in this factsheet refers to childcare in England. However, much of the information will be relevant throughout the UK. For information relating to Wales, see the Welsh version of this factsheet. For further information specific to Northern Ireland or Scotland, contact your local information service by calling 0800 234 6346.

This factsheet provides general information only and was accurate at the time of publication. The information is not to be taken as legal advice. You are advised to seek independent advice if you need further assistance.