

CHOOSING CHILDCARE

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.
Clinical information has been approved by West Sussex practitioners.



Childcare for children with SEN and disabilities

Childcare for disabled children often means more than the traditional nursery, childminder or after school club. If your child has more severe disabilities you might need respite care for an evening or weekend so you can take a break. Or perhaps you'll want a personal assistant or carer who can come to your home regularly to help out. Whatever type of care you are thinking about you will need to make sure the person or setting is right for your child. This fact sheet gives you tips on choosing childcare and details of schemes and services that can help.

How to choose a child care provider

- **Think about what sort of care you need.** Would your child prefer to be in their own home? Would they like to be cared for individually or with other children? Would they enjoy building a relationship with one carer or do you feel more comfortable knowing they could call on the support from lots of staff?
- **If possible, get your child to think about what's important to them too.** Often things that seem insignificant to adults make a big difference to a child.
- **Contact your local Family Information Service** (see Ask about section later). They hold details of all the registered childcarers and childcare settings in your area and can offer advice on getting help with childcare costs. They can also offer additional support and advice on choosing childcare to parents of children with additional needs.
- **Ask for leaflets and brochures but don't rely on them.** Make sure you go and visit a setting for yourself.
- **Make lots of visits and take your child.** Visit at different times of the day and when other children are about. Short visits give everyone a chance to get to know each other without feeling overwhelmed and you get the chance to observe what's going on.
- **Speak to the SENCO.** Every nursery or child care setting must have an SEN Policy and Inclusion Statement and a member of staff in charge of ensuring that children with additional needs get the support they need to thrive.

What to look for when visiting child care providers

- Is the setting homely, bright and cheery? Are the toys and equipment clean and well maintained? Is it accessible? And secure enough for runners? Do carers eat with the children? Is there a relaxed and happy atmosphere? Are children included in conversations?
- What does your child have in common with the other children? Do they have similar needs or interests? Is your child likely to feel vulnerable or frustrated around these children?
- Have they looked after a child with similar needs to yours before?
- What happens if a child is distressed or upset?
- Ask other children and young people what they like about the place and what they don't like. Compare their answers with what the child carers tell you.
- Can your child expect to see the same staff each time?



CHOOSING CHILDCARE



- How much information does the setting gather about your child's likes and dislikes, routines, communication, and medical needs? How is this recorded and shared?

What to look for with overnight care

If your child is having overnight care, you will want to ask whether children have their own bedroom space. Can they bring their own things and put up posters? When children share a room, are they matched sensitively? What safeguards are in place should your child wake or need help in the night?

Ask to see a sample care plan. Check that it tells you:

- In what ways children are supported to do as much as they can for themselves but not be left to struggle when they can't manage
- How children are encouraged to make choices about how they spend their time, what they wear and eat
- How physiotherapy, toileting or behaviour programmes are put in place, monitored and reviewed. What happens if a child is upset or distressed and how the setting adapts their response to match each child's needs
- How well activities are planned. What's in place to support a child if things don't go as expected

Questions for and about child carers

- Is their age or gender important?
- Does your child need someone to make decisions for them, to support them to make their own choices, or just a friend?
- Have carers been given enough training? If not, who will organise this?
- Are carers allowed to lift? Or give medication? Are they insured?
- Do carers have experience? Until you've struggled with a wheelchair or the time it takes to communicate a simple message, it's hard to appreciate what you are taking on.

Making it work long term

Always be prepared to keep checking that everything is going OK. Listen to what your child tells you or shows you through their behavior and be alert to a potential problem if your child becomes unusually tearful, withdrawn or angry and seems reluctant to be left.

Have at least the same expectations of the setting or child carer as you have of yourself. You can challenge any practice that's less favourable to your child in the childcare setting than at home and you can influence why and how things are done. Make sure you know who to talk to if you have any concerns.

Accept there will be hiccups from time to time. Even when everything is going well and you think you've got it all sorted, childcare arrangements can still break down. Try to have a back up plan for emergencies.

Ask about

- **Childcare Brokerage Officer.** The **Family Information Service (FIS)** can offer additional support with finding childcare to families of children with SEN and disabilities. Call **01273 293545**.



CHOOSING CHILDCARE



- **At Home Childcare service.** All At Home Childcarers are registered with Ofsted, DBS (CRB) checked and have a childcare qualification and paediatric first aid certificate. You can search for an At Home Childcarer at www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk or call FIS to request information on 01273 293545
- **Childcare Inclusion Funding** may be provided by the local authority to help disabled children access mainstream childcare. It can be used to fund training for a worker or special equipment. Your childcare provider can apply or you can contact FIS for advice.
- **Free childcare for 2 year olds.** Children who get Disability Living Allowance or have an EHC Plan or Statement of SEN are entitled to 15 hours free child care per week from the term after their 2nd birthday. Apply online at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/children-and-education/childcare-and-family-support/free-childcare-two-year-olds or call FIS for advice on 01273 293545
- **PA Noticeboard: Possability People** (formerly The Fed Centre for Independent Living) publishes a noticeboard that matches families who need care with carers who are looking for work. Visit www.thefedonline.org.uk/pa-noticeboard
- **Specialist nurseries: PRESENS** offers specialist support to pre-school children with SEND either on a dedicated site or in their mainstream nursery. Ask your child's health visitor, GP, paediatrician or therapist for a referral or call PRESENS direct on 01273 294944.
- **Inclusive after school and holiday clubs.** Extratime (01273 420580) run fully inclusive after school and holiday schemes for kids with and without SEND. Whoopsadaisy (01273 554178) run schemes for children with physical disabilities. Cherish (01273 295192/295530) run youth clubs and holiday schemes for young people with learning disabilities.
- **Short breaks/respite care:** To qualify for this kind of care you will need to have a 'needs assessment' carried out by the Children's Disability Service. Call Seaside View Child Development Centre on 01273 265825.
- **Direct payments:** If you do qualify for short breaks services, you can get direct payments to pay for and arrange those services yourself. Speak to your child's social worker or call Seaside View on 01273 265825.
- **Private nannies and au pair agencies:** Although nannies, au pairs or babysitters will not be Ofsted registered, they might be just what you're looking for. You will need to research these yourself.

Further reading and useful links

- **Childcare Choices booklet:** Family Information Service (FIS) booklet with information on finding childcare for children with special needs. Call FIS on 01273 293545 to request a copy or download from www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk
- **Factsheets on Short Breaks, Direct Payments and Fun things to do** by Amaze/Reaching Families are available to download at www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/factsheets
- **Working Families:** Online resource for working parents including section specifically for parents and carers of disabled children. Visit www.workingfamilies.org.uk/article-categories/caring-for-adults-and-disabled-children or call 0300 012 0312

