

CHOOSING CHILDCARE

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



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 complex needs 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 childcare 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 prefer 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.
- **Search for a registered childcare provider on your local childcare directory.** These are managed by the Family Hubs or Family Information Service for your area, who may be able to offer extra support to parents of children with additional needs. See the Ask about section later.
- **Ask for leaflets and brochures but don't rely on them.** Make sure you visit a setting 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 childcare setting must have an SEN and Inclusion Policy, 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?
- **Have they looked after a child with similar needs to yours?**
- **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?
- **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?**
- **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?



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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 choose 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 a child's individual needs.
- How well are 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?
- Has the carer been given enough training? If not, who will organise this?
- Is the carer allowed to lift or give medication? Are they insured?
- Does the carer 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 occasionally. 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

- **Amaze – Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with special educational needs and disabilities for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Visit our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk>. Email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk or call 01273 772289

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- **Early Years Services** - work with pre-schools and nurseries to help support under fives with SEND or medical conditions in their childcare setting. Referrals are usually via your child's nursery or pre-school. Read more about the **East Sussex SEND Early Years Service (SEYS)** <https://1space.eastsussex.gov.uk/Services/4849> and **Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service Early Years team** on <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/directories/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send-support/brighton-hove-inclusion-support-3>
- **Free childcare for 2 year olds with SEND** - children who get Disability Living Allowance or have an EHC Plan are entitled to 15 hours free childcare per week from the term after their 2nd birthday, even if their parents do not work. Apply online at <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/children-families/childcare/costs/childcare-costs> or <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/families-children-and-learning/childcare-and-family-support/childcare-and-childcare-funding>. All working parents can claim 15 hours free childcare from when their child is 9 months old. This rises to 30 hours when they are 2 years old.
- **Inclusion Funding** – Nurseries, preschools and childminders can apply for extra funding to help children with SEND or medical conditions access mainstream childcare. Ask your nursery or childminder to contact your local Early Years Service (see details above) to apply.
- **Specialist early years provision** - under fives with more complex needs may be able to access specialist pre-school support. In Brighton & Hove, there is a specialist PRESENS nursery at the Jeanne Saunders Centre in Hove. Ask your child's health visitor, GP or another professional to refer you to **PRESENS**. East Sussex specialist provision is located at Glynde Gap Nursery in Bexhill, and at the Southfield Centre in Summerdown School and at South Downs School and Nursery in Eastbourne. Contact the **SEND Early Years Service** to ask about specialist support. You can refer yourself via this page <https://1space.eastsussex.gov.uk/Services/4849> or ask a professional to do so here: <https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/send/front-door>
- **Short breaks/respite care** – to qualify for this kind of care you will need to have a 'needs assessment' carried out by your local children's disability service. In Brighton & Hove, contact Front Door for Families via on 01273 290 400 or email FrontDoorforFamilies@brighton-hove.gov.uk. In East Sussex, you can contact the Single Point of Advice, Tel: 01323 464222 or email spoa@eastsussex.gov.uk.
- **PA Noticeboard – Possability People** publishes a noticeboard that matches families who need care with carers who are looking for work. For **Brighton & Hove**, visit <https://panoticeboard.org.uk> and for **East Sussex** visit <https://eastsussex.panoticeboard.org.uk/>
- **Private nannies and au pair agencies** – nannies, au pairs or babysitters will not be Ofsted registered, but might be just what you're looking for. You will need to research these yourself.

Further reading and useful links

- **Childcare Choices** – online government resource. Visit www.childcarechoices.gov.uk
- **Brighton & Hove Family Help online** - <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/family-help-online>
- **Brighton & Hove Local Offer:** <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities>
- **East Sussex 1Space Local Offer directory** - <https://1space.eastsussex.gov.uk/Categories/342>
- **East Sussex Local Offer:** <https://localoffer.eastsussex.gov.uk/send-information-and-services>
- **Working Families** – online resource for working parents, including a section 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