



# Aids, equipment and adaptations

Information for families

UK

## Introduction

Caring for a disabled child can sometimes be made easier with the use of certain aids, equipment and/or adaptations. For some families, having the right equipment can also enhance a child's ability to become more independent and help ease the process of transition into adulthood.

Some items, such as mobility aids or special beds, are expensive and the range available is vast. This guide has information on how to obtain equipment from statutory sources and where to go for further advice. It also has sources of information on equipment for play and leisure, second hand equipment, financial help, VAT relief on equipment, help adapting your home, and useful contacts.

### Information in this guide

Although great care has been taken in the production of this guide to ensure accuracy, Contact a Family cannot take any responsibility for any errors or omissions.

## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Who provides equipment? .....            | 3  |
| Health .....                             | 5  |
| Communication .....                      | 6  |
| Continence .....                         | 7  |
| Mobility .....                           | 8  |
| Education .....                          | 11 |
| Play and leisure .....                   | 12 |
| Second hand equipment .....              | 13 |
| Information technology .....             | 14 |
| Financial help .....                     | 14 |
| Value Added Tax (VAT) .....              | 15 |
| Commercial suppliers .....               | 16 |
| Consumer rights .....                    | 18 |
| Adapting your home .....                 | 18 |
| Challenging decisions .....              | 22 |
| Further sources of help and advice ..... | 23 |
| Frequently asked questions .....         | 24 |
| Explanation of terms .....               | 26 |

## Who provides equipment?

### National Health Service (NHS) and local authority responsibilities

Both the NHS and your local authority (LA) can provide aids and equipment to disabled people.

Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (England & Wales), and the equivalent legislation for Scotland and Northern Ireland, state that a local authority (LA) has a duty to provide practical assistance and additional facilities for the greater safety, comfort or convenience of people who are assessed as needing them.

This often means providing equipment as well as other forms of practical help. In

your area there may be a local agreement which clarifies who is responsible for different types of equipment.

### Who does what?

The NHS is responsible for providing equipment to meet **nursing** or **medical** needs. Often, the LA's children's services are responsible for providing equipment for **daily living**, and the **non-medical** needs of disabled children and young people.

Equipment needed to help your child's **independence** or meet any of

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their **social care** needs is usually the responsibility of the LA (social work department in Scotland or health and social services trust in Northern Ireland). This includes help with arranging adaptations to the home, or any additional facilities for your child's greater safety, comfort and convenience. It also includes aids and equipment to help with lifting and transferring your child, their personal care, eating, bathing and washing.

Equipment to help a child access the curriculum may be arranged by the school or the education department of children's services.

### **Equipment choice**

Local authorities and the NHS increasingly operate a self assessment or self selection schemes, enabling you to choose some items of equipment yourself. In some areas of England, a needs assessment will result in an equipment 'prescription' being issued. This prescription may be taken to a retail outlet and the equipment supplied up to a specific cost; you may choose a more expensive version of your prescribed equipment and pay the price difference yourself.

### **Items which must be provided free**

In general, the health service cannot charge for any of its services, including medical aids and equipment needed for health reasons. If you live in England, certain aids and equipment provided by the local authority cannot be charged for. These include equipment for daily living such as a shower chair, and minor adaptations costing £1,000 or less.

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### **Who to contact**

In the first place, contact your social worker if you have one, social services (social work department in Scotland), or your GP, and tell them about the kind of help you're looking for. You can also approach other healthcare or personal care professionals, such as a district nurse, physiotherapist or school nurse.

### **Assessing you and your child's needs**

An occupational therapist (OT) or social worker will usually visit you in your home to discuss the situation further and carry out the assessment. An OT is a professional who can advise on equipment for daily living and managing more easily in the home. When you're visited by the OT or social worker, it is important that your needs as a carer and those of other family members are taken into account. This includes any health and safety concerns.

If your child also needs equipment to help with medical or health needs, then a joint assessment should be carried out and the social worker or OT may contact the community nursing service or your GP.

Where a need is identified, the social worker or OT must consider ways of meeting that need. This may include practical advice about doing things differently to make things easier, providing aids and equipment, and/or arranging alterations to the house. See 'Adapting your home' on page 18.

### **Making a complaint**

If you're unhappy with the outcome of the assessment, then you can make a complaint using the local authority's complaints procedure. When making a complaint, it may be useful to get help from a local disability or carers organisation. The Contact a Family helpline can provide further advice and tell you about any local organisations which can help further.

We have guides to *Disabled children's services* in England, Scotland and Wales which have more advice about making a complaint, available from our freephone helpline. If you live in Northern Ireland, our helpline advisers can give you more information about the complaints process in your area.

## **Health**

Aids and equipment needed for nursing and medical care at home are usually the responsibility of the local health authority. Equipment can be supplied through the NHS on a free loan basis, with certain items being prescribed by the GP or a consultant. This might include special beds and bed equipment, hoists, incontinence aids,



feeding aids, mobility aids and aids for hearing.

### **Complaints**

If there is any aspect of health provision that you're unhappy with, then you should raise this with the person responsible. Families in England can also ask their local patient advice and liaison service (PALS). Community health councils in Wales can offer support and guidance on how to make a complaint. Families in Scotland and Northern Ireland can make a complaint with the help of their local health council or health and social services council respectively. For contact details, search online or call our freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 .

### **Hearing**

Your GP can make a referral to an audiologist for an examination and hearing test. If a hearing aid is necessary, another referral is made to a hearing aid department where an appliance will be supplied and fitted. NHS hearing aids are serviced, maintained and supplied

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with batteries free of charge. Hearing aids can also be bought privately. For more information, you can contact the organisations below:

### **NDCS (The National Deaf Children's Society)**

Helpline: 0808 800 8880  
Textphone: 0808 800 8880  
Web: [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

Provides information and advice to families with a deaf child.

### **Action on Hearing Loss**

Freephone helpline: 0808 808 0123  
Web: [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

Offer information advice and support on any aspect of deafness, hearing loss or tinnitus.



### **Vision impairment**

Low vision aids such as hand and stand magnifiers can be prescribed under the NHS through the hospital eye service, along with more complex appliances. The following organisations can provide further information on aids for visually impaired children:

### **RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind)**

Helpline: 0303 1239 9999  
Web: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

Offers information, support and advice to people with sight loss.

## **Communication**

Any concerns about your child's communication should be discussed with a speech and language therapist. You can either contact the therapist directly or ask your GP to refer you. Therapists are usually based in hospitals or clinics in the community. Following an assessment of your child's needs, the therapist may be able to loan any required equipment.

Please note that speech and language therapy for children is often an educational provision. This means that funding for it can be provided by the local authority (LA) as well as by a health trust. This provision should be identified in your child's statement of special educational needs, or co-ordinated support plan if you live in Scotland. Please call our freephone helpline for information on 0808 808 3555.

The following organisations can also provide further information:

### **Afasic**

Helpline: 0845 355 5577

Web: [www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk)

A parent led charity that helps children and young people with speech and language impairments. Also provides information and training for parents and professionals.

### **I CAN**

Tel: 0845 225 4071

Web: [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

I CAN supports the development of speech, language and communication skills in all children, with a special focus on those who find this difficult.

### **Aidis Trust**

Freephone helpline: 0808 800 0009

Web: [www.aidis.org](http://www.aidis.org)

Helps disabled people make best use of information and communication technology by giving information, help and support on all aspects of disability computing.

### **The Sequal Trust**

Tel: 01691 624 222

Web: [www.thesequaltrust.org.uk](http://www.thesequaltrust.org.uk)

The Sequal Trust fundraises on behalf of its members with speech and/or movement difficulties to provide communication equipment. They also provide equipment on a 'life-long free loan basis'.

## **Continence**

You can ask for advice on continence matters from health visitors, district nurses, learning disability nurses, community nurses, or social workers. Most health authorities will also have a designated continence adviser for specialist help and advice. Once your child is no longer an infant, continence aids can be supplied by your local health authority, provided your child's difficulties with continence are due to a disability. These may be charged for, or free, depending on where you live. Aids such as bedding protection, disposable nappies, catheters, pants and odour controls may be provided by the health authority, or can be bought privately.

The Department of Health report on *Good Practice in Continence Services*, (published 2000), states that, 'In most cases it will not be appropriate to provide free pads before the age of four, but flexibility should be allowed for special cases such as children with multiple handicaps and decisions should be made in liaison with the designated paediatrician.'

Help might also be available with water charges. If your water supply is metered, then you may be able to get your bill capped. Please contact our helpline for further advice. Other help for families dealing with continence difficulties is the laundry service, although not all local

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authorities offer this. Where available, it is usually attached to the home help service of the social services department. In other areas, it is operated by the NHS.

Families with severely disabled children can apply for help with washing, such as a washing machine, from the Family Fund. See 'Financial help' on page 14.

You may live in an area where you can get a donated or recycled machine.

**The Furniture Re-use Network** is the national co-ordinating body for 400 furniture and appliance re-use and recycling organisations in the UK. They collect a wide range of household items to pass onto people in need. For information about a project in your area, visit the website [www.frn.org.uk](http://www.frn.org.uk)

The following organisations provide practical information and advice on continence issues:

**ERIC (Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence)**

Helpline: 0845 370 8008

Web: [www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)



Provides information, support and resources to children and young people, their families and health professionals.

**The Bladder and Bowel Foundation**

Tel: 01536 533255

Nurse helpline: 0845 345 0165

Web: [www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org](http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org)

Formerly Incontact and the Continence Foundation, they provide information and support for all types of bladder and bowel related problems. Run a specialist nurse helpline, providing clinical support for patients and carers alongside its general enquiry line.

**Mobility**

Any concerns about your child's mobility should be discussed with your GP first, who can then make a referral to the physiotherapist at your local hospital. There your child's mobility needs will be assessed. Basic walking aids can be provided on loan from the local hospital or community health service, usually on the recommendation of the physiotherapist.

**Information on local health services**

**Northern Ireland**

Web: [www.n-i.nhs.uk](http://www.n-i.nhs.uk)

**Scotland**

Web: [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk)

**England**

Web: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Wales**

Web: [www.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.wales.nhs.uk)

Assessment and provision of a wheelchair (powered, attendant-controlled powered or manual wheelchairs) is carried out by your local NHS wheelchair service. In Wales, the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service (ALAS) is responsible for providing the wheelchair service.

Children's buggies can also be supplied through the wheelchair service.

The service should help you to choose a wheelchair that meets your child's needs. This includes extras such as cushions, armrests or trays. Your GP, local health centre, physiotherapist or occupational therapist should be able to tell you where your local wheelchair service is. Families in Wales, can call NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647. Parents in England and Northern Ireland can ring NHS Direct 111 and in Scotland, families can ring NHS 24 on 08454 242424. Alternatively, visit the wheelchair services section of the NHS website at <http://preview.tinyurl.com/cu7hyo4>

The wheelchair is supplied to someone whose need for a chair is permanent. The service will also be responsible for its maintenance, provided any problems are not caused by misuse or neglect. You should be given the number for a local approved repairer who will be responsible for repairs.

In theory, any wheelchair can be supplied by the NHS wheelchair service. However, this will depend on local criteria, resources available and the circumstances of the individual. In Scotland, there are national criteria for the provision of powered wheelchairs.



Usually, you have to buy outdoor electric wheelchairs, scooters or specialist sports chairs. If you're unhappy with the choice available and need something other than a standard chair, then you could consider the wheelchair voucher scheme (England only). This allows you to pay the difference between the costs of a basic manual wheelchair, provided by the wheelchair service, to a more expensive wheelchair of your choice.

Additional sources of help with wheelchairs include:

### **Whizz-Kidz**

Tel: 020 7233 6600

Web: [www.whizz-kidz.org.uk](http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk)

Whizz-Kidz can provide essential mobility equipment for children up to 18 that is

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Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

Any concerns about your child's mobility should be discussed with your GP first, who can then make a referral to the physiotherapist at your local hospital.



not available from the NHS. Also provides wheelchair skills training.

#### **Go Kids Go! (Association of Wheelchair Children)**

Tel: 01482 887163

Web: [www.wheelchairchildren.org.uk](http://www.wheelchairchildren.org.uk)

This is a small, national charity enabling young wheelchair-users throughout the UK to become independently mobile. They provide practical wheelchair skills training, assessment and support to young wheelchair-users and their families. Also provides disability awareness training in mainstream schools.

#### **Mobility schemes**

If your child receives the high rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component, and has at least twelve months award length remaining, then you can join the Motability Scheme. The scheme can help disabled people hire or buy a car, or a powered wheelchair, or a buggy. You can only be on the Car Scheme or the Wheelchair and Scooter Scheme, not both at the same time.

For more information, contact Motability operations on 0800 953 3060, or visit [www.motability.co.uk](http://www.motability.co.uk)

Starting from June 2013, Personal Independence Payments (PIP) will replace DLA for people aged 16 to 64. If you get the enhanced mobility component of PIP, you will be eligible for a car under the Motability Scheme.

#### **Other mobility services**

##### **Forum of Mobility Centres**

Tel: 0800 559 3636

Web: [www.mobility-centres.org.uk](http://www.mobility-centres.org.uk)

The Forum of Mobility Centres is a network of 17 independent organisations covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They offer information, advice and assessment to individuals who have a medical condition or are recovering from an accident or injury which may affect their ability to drive, access or exit a motor vehicle.

**The Blue Badge scheme and road tax**  
If your child gets the highest rate of DLA

mobility component, you can apply for road tax exemption and for a Blue Badge for disabled parking. The Blue Badge may also be awarded where a child is aged two or over and has a permanent disability which makes walking difficult, or where they are aged under two and either need to be accompanied by bulky medical equipment or kept near a vehicle so that they can receive medical treatment at short notice.

If you get the enhanced mobility component of PIP you will also be eligible and for an exemption from road tax. If your child qualifies for the standard mobility component you may be eligible for partial help with the road tax.

Eligibility for the Blue badge will depend on the number of points awarded for certain activities which relate to mobility. Qualifying points will also depend on which part of the UK you live in. Contact the Helpline for further information.

### Complaints about wheelchair services

Unfortunately, things can go wrong. If you feel unhappy with the wheelchair service, you can first try to resolve this by letting the service know you are unhappy. If this doesn't work, you can make a complaint. Ask the wheelchair service for a copy of their complaints procedure which will explain how to make an official complaint.

If the wheelchair service is based in a hospital in England, they will have what is called a 'patient advice and liaison service' (PALS) that should be able to help you with this. In England, your local Healthwatch organisation can also give

you information and help you through the complaints process. Visit the website [www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk) for contact details of your local Healthwatch.

## Education

Aids that a child or young person needs for education may be supplied by local authorities, the school or college. The school may arrange for an occupational therapist to assess your child and may provide aids for use in school and at home. Contact the head teacher or special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) for further information.

If your child has a statement of special educational needs, then details of specific equipment required to help your child at school should be included. If you have concerns about your child's needs, then these should be raised with the school.

In Scotland, a child's co-ordinated support plan should detail any equipment necessary to meet a child's educational needs.

Contact a Family's guides, *Special educational needs* for Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland include further advice about your rights and lists other relevant organisations for further help.

### Further and higher education

For young disabled people in further and higher education, additional help may

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**



Tel: 028 9024 4274  
Web: <http://egsa.org.uk>

Egsa provide information and advice to students studying in Northern Ireland.

## Play, leisure and child development

be available. This can be in the form of specialist aids and equipment or allowances to help pay for equipment or practical help. To determine what help is necessary, your child will need a special assessment.

### Disability Rights UK

Disabled students freephone helpline:  
0800 328 5050  
Web: [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

Disability Rights UK can provide further information and advice to students studying in England.

### Lead Scotland

Freephone helpline: 0800 999 2568  
Web: [www.lead.org.uk](http://www.lead.org.uk)

Lead Scotland can provide information and advice to students studying in Scotland.

### Careers Wales

Freephone helpline: 0800 100 900  
Web: [www.careerswales.com](http://www.careerswales.com)

Careers Wales can provide information and advice to students studying in Wales.

### Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)

All children, including disabled children, have the right to play, have fun and take part in recreational activities. This is important as play has a very important role in a child's development. Play can help develop speech, sensory skills, imagination, independence and social skills. Toys and play can be fun as well as educational and therapeutic. It is crucial that all children, whatever their abilities, are given the opportunity to play and access leisure facilities.

### Toys, play and development

For further advice and information on suitable toys, you can speak to a paediatric occupational therapist. Through activity and play, the paediatric occupational therapist works with children to help them attain the highest possible quality of life. The paediatric occupational therapist can work in a variety of settings including the NHS, social services, educational or charitable organisations.

Find out where your local toy library is. Toy libraries are usually free for children who access local services, (such as Portage, or speech and language therapy), or who receive DLA, or are on the local children's services register. You can borrow a wide range of sensory toys and equipment. The toy librarian

can help you choose suitable toys for fun and development. Good quality toys and sensory equipment are often expensive to buy for children with additional needs, so being able to borrow these is really useful. Toy librarians can also signpost you to other local play and leisure services and, in some areas, run their own play sessions.

There may be a local play scheme or parent support group in your area where toys and ideas can be shared or exchanged. Call our freephone helpline for local information. Contact a Family also has a guide, *Holidays, play and leisure*, available free for parents from our reephone helpline.

There are a number of commercial outlets and specialist suppliers. Some of these are listed under 'Commercial suppliers' on page 13. Because there are so many, it is important for parents to get the right advice to ensure they get value for money. The following organisations can provide further specialist information:

### **Disabled Living Foundation**

Tel: 0845 130 9177  
Web: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

### **Listening Books**

Tel: 020 7407 9417  
Web: [www.listening-books.org.uk](http://www.listening-books.org.uk)

Provide audio books for leisure and learning on MP3, CD, and via internet streaming for anyone who has difficulty reading.

### **Smart Play Network (Scotland)**

Tel: 0131 664 2746  
Web: [www.smartplaynetwork.org](http://www.smartplaynetwork.org)

Run a range of play projects and offer services directly to children and families. Also, help and support toy libraries and play projects in Scotland to deliver quality services for children and families.

## **Second hand equipment**

The Spinal Injuries Association and Disabled Living Foundation have helpful factsheets on buying and selling second hand equipment. They include details of publications to advertise in and other helpful organisations. Information from the Spinal Injuries Association also lists dealers in second hand wheelchairs and adapted vehicles.

### **Spinal Injuries Association**

Tel: 0800 980 0501  
Web: [www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk)

### **Disabled Living Foundation**

See above.

### **Disability Equipment Register**

Tel: 01454 318 818  
Web: [www.disabilityequipment.org.uk](http://www.disabilityequipment.org.uk)

A not-for-profit organisation providing a service for disabled people and their families to enable them to buy and sell items of used disability equipment on a direct basis.

### **Mobility Market**

[www.themobilitymarket.co.uk](http://www.themobilitymarket.co.uk)

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

A website where you can buy or sell used mobility aids and equipment.

### **Furniture Re-use Network**

See page 8.

## **Information technology**

Access to the internet can open up a wealth of information and networks for families through specialist websites and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Additionally, there are now a wide variety of websites, applications and products such as laptops and tablets available to families with disabled children. These can help in everyday life as well as help with your child's development, communication and learning.

Young people can also achieve independence through the use of environmental controls and assistive technology. These products can help with operating certain appliances such as light switches, TV, phone or opening doors.

Equipment and packages can also help with sound and vision and also help overcome difficulties with operating a computer and entering information. Solutions may include voice recognition or eye tracking systems, touch screens or replacing the mouse with a trackball.

Your child may have the opportunity to trial a piece of equipment or particular application. Extra help may also be available if your child has a statement of special educational needs. This could lead

to the provision of special equipment to help with learning.

Funding and provision of equipment like this may be available from your local authority if you're assessed as needing it and you meet the criteria. Alternatively, help may also be available from charitable trusts. Call our freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 for information about grant giving organisations which may be able to help in this way.

Because of the volume of information and products available, it is important to obtain specialist advice. The following organisations can provide further information:

- Ability Net (see page 24)
- Aidis Trust (see page 7)
- ACE Centre (see page 23)
- Disabled Living Foundation (see page 23)
- Meru (see page 24)
- The LiveNet assistive technology loan scheme, (N Ireland) (see page 23).

## **Financial help**

### **Charities and benevolent funds**

#### **Family Fund**

Tel: 0845 130 45 42

Web: [www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk)

The Family Fund gives grants to low-income families to meet the additional needs of caring for a severely disabled child. In England and Wales, the age limit of children and young people they can help is aged 17 and under.

The Fund will not help with costs that are the responsibility of the local authority or health services.

### Turn2us

Web: [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

Freephone: 0808 802 2000

Online service to help people access information on all benefits and grants available to them from both statutory and voluntary organisations in the UK.

Our freephone helpline can also give you information about grant-giving trusts and other possible sources of help.

### Benefits and tax credits

To ensure you get everything you're entitled to and you're not losing out, our free guides on benefits, and *The tax credits guide* give more detailed advice. Our *Checklist for parents* also has a brief summary of entitlements. Call our freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 for a full benefits check. We may also be able to supply information on local trusts. For information on benefits and local advice agencies, call our freephone Contact a Family helpline.

### Using direct payments to buy equipment

Families from all over the UK can use direct payments to buy equipment. Our guides *Getting direct payments for your disabled child in England and Wales* and *A parents guide to direct payments in Scotland* look at how to ask for them and how they work in practice. For a copy and more information about direct payments, call our freephone helpline. Families in Northern Ireland can also contact our



helpline for advice.

## Value Added Tax (VAT)

Certain aids and equipment for disabled people are zero-rated for VAT purposes. This means that you do not have to pay any VAT when you buy these goods for the personal use of your disabled child.

### Not all goods and services for disabled people are zero-rated

Zero-rating applies to:

- adjustable beds, chair lifts, hoists and sanitary devices
- auditory training aids
- low-vision aids
- certain medical and surgical appliances
- emergency alarm call systems
- motor vehicles and boats adapted to meet a disabled person's condition.

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**

Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

However, not every vehicle or adaptation will qualify, so seek further advice

- any other equipment or appliances designed solely for the use of disabled people. It is not enough to show that a piece of equipment is one that is often used by disabled people – it must be specifically designed for their use. For example, an orthopaedic bed would not be zero-rated because it is designed for use by both disabled and non-disabled people alike. Ultimately, it is the designer or manufacturer of a product who determines whether goods qualify for zero-rating.

You also don't have to pay VAT on any charges made for the installation, repair and maintenance of these goods, or for any spare parts or accessories they need.

Certain building work may also be zero-rated. This includes work on ramps, doorways and passages, bathrooms, shower rooms, washrooms and toilets and the installation and repair of a lift. However, the services of an architect, surveyor or consultant cannot be zero-rated even if they are providing services in connection with building work that does qualify.

If you need to have any general purpose goods adapted for a disabled child's use, the extra you pay for the adaptation should be VAT free, although not the actual goods themselves.

If you import equipment from abroad to meet a disabled person's needs, there are specific rules allowing VAT exemptions in certain circumstances. More information can be found in VAT Notice 371, available

from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), via the link below.

### **How to make sure you do not pay VAT**

To avoid paying VAT on the above goods or services, you will need to provide your supplier with a written declaration that you are entitled to buy these goods without paying VAT. A parent can sign a declaration on behalf of a disabled child. While there is no official form for making a declaration, a suggested declaration can be found at section 10 of VAT Notice 701/7 – VAT reliefs for people with disabilities. This can be downloaded from HMRC's website at [www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/sectors/consumers/disabled.htm](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/sectors/consumers/disabled.htm)

It is the supplier's responsibility to check that all the conditions for zero-rating are met. If you have been charged VAT incorrectly, your supplier may be able to make an adjustment to their VAT records and refund you this money. You cannot obtain a refund of VAT from HMRC.

For further advice on zero-rating of VAT, you can contact our freephone helpline. Alternatively, you can contact HMRC on 0845 302 0203.

## **Commercial suppliers**

Many companies that sell aids and equipment also operate mail order services. Because of the vast range available, it is important to seek independent advice. The following is a list of some of those suppliers. Please note that their appearance on this list should not be seen as an endorsement by Contact a Family of their products.

## Daily living equipment and products

### DCS Joncare Ltd

Tel: 01235 523 353

Web: [www.dcsjoncare.com](http://www.dcsjoncare.com)

### Lisclare Ltd

Tel: 028 9079 4000

Web: [www.lisclare.com](http://www.lisclare.com)

### Nottingham Rehab Supplies

Tel: 0845 120 4522

Web: [www.nrs-uk.co.uk](http://www.nrs-uk.co.uk)

Some of the Disabled Living Foundation's factsheets also list commercial suppliers, (see 'Other suppliers' below for contact details).

## Play and sensory resources

### Sensory Toy Warehouse

Web: [www.sensorytoywarehouse.com](http://www.sensorytoywarehouse.com)

### TFH Special Needs Toys

Tel: 01299 827 820

Web: [www.specialneedstoys.com/uk](http://www.specialneedstoys.com/uk)

### SpaceKraft Ltd

Tel: 01274 581 007

Web: [www.spacekraft.co.uk](http://www.spacekraft.co.uk)

### Rompa International

Tel: 0845 230 1177

Web: [www.rompa.com](http://www.rompa.com)

### Mike Ayres Design & Development Ltd

Tel: 0114 235 6880

Web: [www.mike-ayres.co.uk](http://www.mike-ayres.co.uk)



## Other suppliers

### Bag Books

Tel: 020 7627 0444

Web: [www.bagbooks.org](http://www.bagbooks.org)

Design and produce multi-sensory story packs for people with learning disabilities.

### Bikedock

Tel: 0845 062 5500

Web: [www.bikedock.com](http://www.bikedock.com)

A bike retail and mail order company. Also specialise in trikes for cyclists with special needs.

The Disabled Living Foundation have a list called *Some suppliers of a range of children's equipment* on their website at <http://preview.tinyurl.com/cnalokh>

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**

Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

**The Challenging Behaviour Foundation**  
Tel: 0845 602 7885  
Web: [www.thecbf.org.uk](http://www.thecbf.org.uk)

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation supply information about specialist equipment and safety adaptations. This includes suppliers of items such as toughened furniture, special flooring, beds and bedding.

## Consumer rights

When buying goods you have a right to expect certain standards. This applies when you buy in person or by mail order. If something goes wrong and/or you're not satisfied with the service or goods, try contacting the supplier first. If this fails, then seek further specialist advice. It is important to do this as soon as possible as your rights may depend on when the transaction took place, otherwise you could find that you're out of time.

Your local advice service or trading standards service can provide further advice. Information on your rights,

produced by Trading Standards Central, which is a government department, can be downloaded from the website at [www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/index.cfm](http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/index.cfm)

People in Northern Ireland can get further information from the Consumer Council at [www.consumerline.org](http://www.consumerline.org) or by phone on 0300 123 62 62.

People in England, Scotland and Wales can visit the Citizens Advice website for information at [www.adviceguide.org.uk/consumer](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/consumer) or call 08454 04 05 06 (08454 04 05 05 Welsh language)

## Adapting your home

If you need to adapt your home to make it easier for you or your child to manage, then you may be entitled to a Disabled Facilities Grant (or Home Improvement Grant if you live in Scotland). For anyone considering an application for a grant, it is advisable to seek further help and advice as the system can be quite complex.

### Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) (England and Wales)

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are usually paid by your local housing authority. To be eligible you must be an owner occupier, a tenant (private, local authority or housing association) or a landlord with a disabled tenant.

A DFG can help with the cost of, for example:

- building a safe play area
- installing a stair-lift
- adapting a lighting or heating system



- building a suitable bathroom, or
- kitchen facilities, or
- to enable access to a garden, and other works.

A DFG is a mandatory grant, this means you must be given a grant if your local council are satisfied that works are both 'necessary and appropriate' to meet the disabled person's needs and 'reasonable and practicable' taking into account the age and condition of the property.

If a grant is made to meet the needs of a disabled child or young person under 19 years old, the parent's financial circumstances should not be taken into account, except where a young person is getting certain means-tested benefits in their own right or is in advanced education.

Your local council must decide if you are entitled to a DFG within six months after receiving your valid application.

An application for a DFG would only be valid if all the following information is provided:

- details of the property
- details of the work needed
- at least two estimates of the cost from two different contractors, (unless the local authority specifies otherwise)
- details of other services and charges needed, for example, supervision of the work, disconnection of electricity, water or other utilities. To help them decide if your request is necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant most local authorities will routinely ask for an assessment from an occupational therapist (OT) or from social services.

However, nowhere in the legislation does it say that an OT assessment is a requirement of a valid application.

It is important to be aware that contacting social services or an occupational therapist (OT) to ask for an assessment is not the same as making a formal application. There are no specific time-limits on how long you may have to wait to see an OT. Because of this, some families have endured lengthy delays before their formal application is even submitted.

To help them decide if your request is 'reasonable and practicable' your local authority will ask for an assessment from an environmental health officer or a building surveyor (local authorities tend to use members of their own staff where possible). You may also need to get approval for building regulations, planning, listed buildings or conservation areas purposes. Your local authority has the right to ask for these but it should not use these to exceed the six month time limit for assessing a claim.

To minimise delays, you should make a formal application to your local council for a grant as soon as you can. You can do this even if you are still waiting for an OT to visit to do an assessment. A formal application can be made on a special form available from the local authority or in a letter. Your local authority cannot refuse to

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
 Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

allow you to make a formal application, or refuse to give you a grant application form. Seek advice from our freephone helpline if they do refuse, or if you are experiencing long delays in the grant process.

It is important to remember that you cannot get a grant for work that you have already started.

The maximum grant is £30,000 in England, £36,000 in Wales. However, if costs are over this limit, the council has the discretion to give a further grant covering the full costs of the mandatory works. Local authorities also have discretionary powers to provide financial and other assistance for improvements or repairs to the home. This can be in the form of a grant, loan, labour, relocation expenses, materials or advice. Contact your local housing authority to find out how these powers apply in your area.

If your application is successful then the grant will usually only be paid if the work is carried out within 12 months of the date the application is approved.

If your application fails you can make a complaint. If you are unable to get enough financial help from your local council you could apply to charitable trusts for assistance. Please contact our helpline for further information.

### **Disabled Facilities Grants (Northern Ireland)**

The system for getting help with adaptations in Northern Ireland is similar to that for Wales and England.

If a Disability Facilities Grant (DFG) is awarded for adaptations for a dependent child, the parents/guardians will not be means tested.

You can get up to £25,000 for a DFG. In some circumstances, this award can be increased by a further £25,000 at the discretion of the Housing Executive and with approval from the Department for Social Development.

It will be necessary for an occupational therapist to recommend that the adaptations are 'necessary and appropriate' for the disabled child. These rules only apply to home owners or those who rent in the private sector. Different arrangements exist for families who live in public sector housing, housing executive or housing association tenants.

Applicants in Northern Ireland should contact their local housing executive office for a preliminary enquiry form.

### **Grants for improvements and adaptations in Scotland**

Each local authority in Scotland must have a 'Scheme of Assistance' statement which explains how they will support home owners and tenants in their area who have to carry out repairs, improvements and maintenance to their houses. Under the scheme of assistance local authorities are obliged to provide grants for work to meet the needs of disabled people in certain circumstances.

Councils must provide a grant to adapt a house to enable a disabled person to have access to standard amenities. Standard amenities are:

- a toilet
- bath or shower
- wash hand basin and sink (in each case with hot and cold water supply).

Councils must also provide grants for other work that is deemed essential to meet the needs of a disabled person. Your local council will decide whether or not an adaptation is essential during their assessment of the disabled child's needs.

A grant cannot be made for an extension that provides additional living accommodation. If an extension provides a standard amenity (for example, a downstairs bathroom) alongside additional living accommodation, a grant is only awarded for the portion of the work providing the standard amenity. If an extension only makes space for a standard amenity and no additional living space is created, then a mandatory grant should meet these costs.

If you are refused a mandatory grant, (for example, because you need an extension that does not qualify), you should ask your local authority about a discretionary grant instead.

The minimum level of a mandatory grant awarded due to disability is 80 per cent of the eligible cost. It should be 100 per cent if the applicant is in receipt of certain means tested benefits. Each local authority decides when it will make grants of more than 80 per cent in other circumstances.

It is unlawful for a local authority to apply a fixed upper limit on the cost

If you need to adapt your home to make it easier for you or your child to manage then you may be entitled to a Disabled Facilities Grant

of adaptations work covered by grant. The only limit is that provided by the assessment of need, which will set out what work is required to meet the applicant's need.

An application will be refused if the work has already started, unless you can satisfy the local authority that there was good reason why the work had to be carried out in advance of an application being made.

Grants are usually only made to owner-occupiers and private tenants. If you rent from a council or housing association you are expected to approach your landlord for help with adaptations, and can only apply for a grant under the scheme of assistance in exceptional circumstances.

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

## Challenging decisions

If you're unhappy about the outcome of an application for a grant, or the length of time it has taken to reach a decision, then seek further advice. Ways of challenging decisions include talking to your local council, complaining using the local authority complaints procedure, or asking the local government ombudsman to investigate. A local citizen's advice bureau or home improvement agency may be able to give additional advice.

### Getting further help and advice

Home improvement agencies, sometimes called 'care and repair agencies', exist to help home owners or private tenants improve their living conditions. This involves giving technical and financial advice as well as help and guidance through the application process for grants. They may also be able to identify other sources of financial help if the grant isn't enough.

For information about local agencies in England, contact:

#### **Foundations**

Tel: 0845 864 5210

Web: [www.foundations.uk.com](http://www.foundations.uk.com)

For Scotland contact:

#### **Care and Repair Forum Scotland**

Tel: 0141 221 9879

Web: [www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk)

For Wales contact:

#### **Care and Repair Cymru**

Tel: 029 2067 4830

Web: [www.careandrepair.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair.org.uk)

Or phone 030 111 333 to contact your local care and repair agency (calls charged at your cheapest rate).

If you live in Northern Ireland, a local



disability advice project should be able to help. You can also visit the website of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive at [www.nihe.gov.uk/index/advice/disability](http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/advice/disability)

You can also contact our office in Northern Ireland on 028 9262 7552 or email: [nireland.office@cafamilly.org.uk](mailto:nireland.office@cafamilly.org.uk)

For families in Scotland, more detailed information can be found in the Guidance for Local Authorities called *Guidance on the provision of equipment and adaptations* available here: [www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/publications/CC2009\\_05.pdf](http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/publications/CC2009_05.pdf)

You can contact our Scotland office on 0131 659 2930 or email us at [scotland.office@cafamilly.org.uk](mailto:scotland.office@cafamilly.org.uk)

People in England and Wales can find further information in the good practice guide, *Delivering Housing Adaptations, for Disabled People*, at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

It is important to remember that you cannot get a grant for work that you have already carried out.

## Further sources of help and advice

### Ace Centre

Tel: 0161 358 0151

Web: [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

Work alongside young people with communication difficulties to design software that enables, rather than restricts, the user.

### Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

Tel: 0845 130 9177

Web: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

DLF produces a comprehensive range of factsheets on choosing daily living equipment. This includes advice on equipment for children who need help to dress, personal care (toileting, bathing, washing) and beds and bed accessories. The factsheets can be downloaded from their website or you can ring the equipment helpline where up-to-date product and supplier information can be given.

They also have a website SARA (Self Assessment, Rapid Access), you can visit at [www.asksara.org.uk](http://www.asksara.org.uk) with information on products that may help.

### Assist UK

Tel: 0161 832 9757

Web: [www.assist-uk.org](http://www.assist-uk.org)

Assist UK leads a UK-wide network of locally-situated Disabled Living Centres. Each centre includes a permanent exhibition of products and equipment that give people opportunities to see and try products.

### LiveNet (Northern Ireland)

Tel: 028 9049 4907

Web: [www.livenet.org.uk](http://www.livenet.org.uk)

The LiveNet assistive technology loan scheme provides an opportunity for people in Northern Ireland to preview a variety of items of software or hardware that have been specially designed to help improve access to a computer.

The loan scheme is available to any member of the learning disability community free of charge. This includes:

- children, young people or adults with a learning disability (under 18s must get a responsible adult to sign the agreement)
- family carers
- staff or volunteers who support people with a learning disability.

### MERU

Tel: 01372 725203

Web: [www.meru.org.uk](http://www.meru.org.uk)

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

MERU aims to improve life for children and young people with disabilities by designing custom-made specialist equipment when no ready-made solution exists to meet a child or young person's needs. MERU also has an information and advice service for parents and therapists worldwide.

### **Remap**

Tel: 0845 130 0456

Web: [www.remap.org.uk](http://www.remap.org.uk)

Design, manufacture and supply appliances to meet the individual needs of disabled people where they cannot be sourced commercially.

### **Ricability (Research Institute for Consumer Affairs)**

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Web: [www.ricability.org.uk](http://www.ricability.org.uk)

Ricability is an independent research charity that provides consumer information for disabled and older people. Guides are available on request or through their website.

### **Abilitynet**

Tel: 0800 269 545

Web: [www.abilitynet.co.uk](http://www.abilitynet.co.uk)

Offer advice and information on information and communications technology (ICT). Also supply a range of factsheets and skillsheets (available on their website) that give detailed information on a wide range of assistive technology.

### **British Red Cross**

Tel: 0844 412 2804

Web: [www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)

Has a volunteer-led medical equipment service that provides wheelchair hire and short-term loans of equipment in almost 1,000 outlets in the UK.

### **Other useful websites**

There are numerous suppliers of disability equipment, mobility products and daily living aids in the UK. It can be difficult to find a suitable company. Below is a small number. Again, please note that their appearance on this list should not be seen as an endorsement by Contact a Family of their products.

#### **Youreable**

Web: [www.youreable.com](http://www.youreable.com)

A community based website that has information on products and services for disabled people.

#### **Independent Living**

Web: [www.independentliving.co.uk](http://www.independentliving.co.uk)

A site providing news, views and product information designed to assist with living independently.

## **Frequently asked questions**

**I bought a trike for my disabled son and was told by the supplier that I have to claim back the VAT. How can I do this?**

First of all, you need to establish whether or not the trike should be zero-rated (see

'Value Added Tax (VAT)' on page 15). To reiterate this advice, VAT relief does not apply to general purpose goods which are of benefit to disabled people. So you will have to pay VAT, unless the trike has been solely designed to be used by your disabled son. You should also be aware that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs do not refund VAT to customers. Instead it is the responsibility of the supplier to determine whether or not the item in question is subject to VAT. If you have been charged VAT incorrectly, your supplier may be able to make an adjustment to their VAT records and refund you the VAT.

**With help from the Disabled Facilities Grants Scheme (Disabled Persons Allowance in Northern Ireland), I've just turned one of my reception rooms into a special playroom for my disabled child. I've been told I can get some help with the Council Tax because of this. Is this true?**

This is possible under the Disability Reduction Scheme. When a property has been altered in a certain way to accommodate the needs of a disabled person, then the 'band' for your property can be lowered. The lower the band, the smaller the bill. In your case, you qualify because you have a room which is needed by and predominantly used by your disabled son. It is worth noting that if the dwelling is in band 'A', then you can get a reduction of one-sixth of your bill. And also that the reduction can be fully backdated. Properties in the lowest band already, (A), only have the right to backdate to 1 April 2000.



**I've just enquired about applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant and I've been told by the occupational therapist (OT) that there's a waiting list for the assessment. It could be months before I'm seen by the OT and two years before I get a grant. What are my rights?**

The assessment by the OT is a crucial part of the grants process. Following on from the OT's recommendations, a formal application is often submitted to the housing authority. But you can still make a formal application to the housing authority for the grant before the OT's assessment. This can help speed up the process as the authority is then required to make a decision within six months of receiving the application. Within that time, the OT will hopefully visit your home to carry out the assessment.

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

If you don't get a decision within the time limit, you should write to them asking why you haven't heard anything and asking for a decision to be made. If there is still no decision, then seek advice on other possible remedies; such as making a complaint using the local authority's complaints procedure or the local government ombudsman. See 'Adapting your home' on page 21 for more information.

**I bought a second hand wheelchair from a trader, but I've been told I don't have the same rights as if I'd bought**

**it brand new, and I can't return it if there's a fault. Is this true?**

No, you have the same rights as if you'd bought a new one, and the trader is also obliged to point out any faults before you pay for it. If any faults have been pointed out, then this may affect your rights. Contact your nearest advice service or trading standards office for further advice. See 'Consumer rights' on page 20.

## Explanation of terms

### Health services

Throughout this guide, we refer to the 'health service'. In your area, this might also be known as the Primary Care Trust (or Health and Social Services Trust if you live in Northern Ireland). In England, local Clinical Commissioning Groups, led by groups of local GPs, buy local hospital and community health services, including wheelchair services. However, some equipment services are provided by the local authority.

In England, services for adults and children from the local authority are usually provided separately. Previously known as social services, it is likely that the office in your area responsible for children will be called 'children's services'. They will be responsible for delivering education and practical help for disabled children, in addition to that available from the health service.

In Wales, Local Health Boards assess health needs.

In Scotland, the department of your local authority involved in providing equipment services is usually called 'social work'.

In Northern Ireland, equipment services will be part of the Health and Social Services Trust.

### Local authority

Please also note that throughout the guide, we use the term local authority, or LA, when referring to the part of the local authority that's responsible for education, which used to be known as the Local Education Authority (LEA). In your area, it may now be called 'Education and Learning' or 'Children's Services'.

Note: The Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs still refers to Local Education Authority (LEA).

Written by Sean Meaney, John Ball  
and Jesslyn Parkes.

### **Social networking**

Contact a Family is on Facebook and  
Twitter. Join us at:

#### **Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/contactafamily](http://www.facebook.com/contactafamily)

#### **Twitter**

[www.twitter.com/contactafamily](http://www.twitter.com/contactafamily)

#### **Podcasts**

iTunes users can listen to our  
podcasts at:

[www.cafamily.org.uk/itunes](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/itunes)

#### **Videos**

You can watch videos on our

**YouTube** channel at:

[www.youtube.com/cafamily](http://www.youtube.com/cafamily)

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**

Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

## Getting in contact with us

Free helpline for parents and families  
**0808 808 3555**

Open Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm

Access to over 170 languages

**www.cafamily.org.uk**  
**www.makingcontact.org**

Contact a Family Head Office:

**209-211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN**

Tel **020 7608 8700**

Fax **020 7608 8701**

e-mail **info@cafamily.org.uk**

Web **www.cafamily.org.uk**



Language Line  
services

## Other information booklets available

This guide is one of a series produced for parents and groups concerned with the care of disabled children, including:

- *Concerned about your child?* (UK)
- *Understanding your child's behaviour* (UK)
- *The tax credits guide* (UK)
- *Disabled children's services*
- *Getting direct payments for your disabled child*
- *Holidays, play and leisure* (UK)

Parent carers can call our freephone helpline and ask for a copy of any of our guides.

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