

Briefing paper

Childcare

Why might parents need childcare?

Like all parents, those with disabled children need a flexible, affordable package of quality childcare to allow them to work or train. However, looking after a disabled child can be very demanding. Childcare can provide a valuable break for parents worn out from their caring responsibilities or to allow them to do other chores, such as go to supermarket. Parents might also benefit from childcare to allow them to spend quality time with siblings or with each other.

Disabled children and young people can benefit from the opportunities that childcare, play and leisure activities offer them particularly in terms of making friends. Getting this right in the early years helps parents build up trust and confidence with services and can make inclusion into school much easier.

Why parents have problems accessing childcare?

Despite the increase in childcare places over the past ten years, childcare for disabled children remains a problem for families because it is often:

- too expensive - parents are often asked to pay a premium to cover additional support costs and the tax credit rules do not cover this
- scarce and patchy particularly in the school holidays and for older children
- not appropriate to their needs and/or is rationed where available.

Parent also struggle with childcare because

- they lack information on where to find it, or assume childcare won't be accessible to them
- they lack confidence in leaving their child with someone else or assume staff won't have the necessary skills, particularly if their child has medical needs
- they cannot find someone willing to look after their child
- transport arrangements are inflexible to their needs

How can children's centres/family information services help?

- find out about what's available locally – sitting services, crèches, short breaks, childminders, extended school services, nurseries, hospices, specialist provision and funding streams to support inclusion
- be proactive in telling parents and other professionals what is available including schemes to help them finance childcare
- understand parents may lack trust in mainstream settings with limited experience of working with disabled children
- work with parents to understand the individual needs of their child and build up confidence with crèche and childcare taster sessions
- understand local school transport arrangements
- by working together to identify and record unmet demand for childcare
- run a local campaign to attract and train people wanting to provide childcare for disabled children.

Contact a Family can provide:

- A range of factsheets to help families access childcare and funding for childcare including 'Finding and paying for childcare', 'When your child has additional needs' and Benefits, tax credits and other sources of help'.

Childcare: sources of help

Contacts	What Can Be Offered
Contact a Family Helpline Tel: 0808 808 3555 Email: helpline@cafamily.org.uk www.cafamily.org.uk/helpline	Provides information and advice for families and professionals on any aspect of caring for a disabled child including sources of funding to support childcare. They can also provide details of local organisations providing alternative care services. Telephone interpreter service is available. <i>Criteria – free to families caring for disabled children aged 0-19 years of age, living in the UK</i>
Contact a Family local support Tel: 0808 808 3555 www.cafamily.org.uk/cafiya	Contact a Family have offices, family support workers and volunteer parent representatives in some areas of the UK . They can signpost families to local support including parent groups. <i>Criteria – free to families caring for disabled children aged 0-19 years of age living in some area of UK</i>
Early Support www.earlysupport.org.uk	Their background information factsheet on childcare describes the different types of childcare and support for disabled children aged 0-5. <i>Criteria – free to families with disabled children & professionals in England</i>
Family Information Services www.childcarelink.gov.uk	Help families find suitable childcare and provide additional assistance to families struggling to access childcare, including families with disabled children. Have responsibility for recording gaps in childcare provision.

Steps to sufficient childcare

The Childcare Act 2006 recognises that for too long parents with disabled children have had a limited choice of childcare options available to them. Family information services have an important role to play and need to be proactive about identifying local families, understanding their needs, helping them navigate the different options available, identifying gaps including skills of the workforce and have a have clear plan which involves parents in how current and future provision will be developed.

This is one of a series of briefing papers to help children's centres and family information services begin to support families of disabled children on specific issues. You can browse all of these at <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/childcentres.html>

To find out more about how the children's centre team at Contact can help please contact:

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