

Anybody out there?

Making Contact – Family Linking

"It was so frustrating not being able to talk to another mother whose child had the same condition so we could share things, the way you do if your child gets measles."

Mother, Northern Ireland



Contact a Family is a UK wide charity which aims to strengthen families with disabled children. A key way of doing that is to reduce isolation and help parents to find the support they need. Many families tell us of their desire to speak to someone who understands what they are going through. Some may want to meet up in groups, others prefer a one-off phone call and others prefer to chat by email or online.

How can Contact a Family help you share your experiences with other parents?

UK wide support groups

Many parents feel isolated and anxious when they are told for the first time that their child has a disability. The isolation can be particularly acute if your child has a rare disorder.

There are many, many support groups in the UK who provide support for a specific condition. These range from large organisations supporting well known conditions, for example, autistic spectrum disorders, to small informal groups supporting a handful of families affected by a rare disorder.

Groups offer support in a range of ways which may include providing medical information, running family events, producing a newsletter, offering a listening ear or holding an annual meeting. Their services may be by telephone, email, website or an online forum.

If a national support group exists that offers support for families affected by your child's condition this is a key way for you to find other parents who understand the issues you face with that particular condition.

We hold information on over 440 specific condition support groups.

Call the Contact a Family freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 to find out what groups are available to support you and your family.



"... we all have the same problems ... the feelings and emotions that you have as a parent don't differ because your child has autism or is physically disabled..."

Mother, Wales

Local support groups

Many areas in the UK have local parents' support groups where families of children with different disabilities come together for mutual support and contact.

The advantage of attending a local group is that they usually meet fairly regularly and you can share information and knowledge about the services and events in your area.

We hold information about over 500 local support groups across the UK.

Call the Contact a Family freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 to find out what groups are available to support you and your family.

Group development

If you find that there is no national support group for your child's condition or no local support group in your area, you might decide to set one up yourself. Contact a Family would be happy to discuss the options and help you consider the best way forward for you.

For information about starting and running a support group, look at the Group Action Pack guides on our website at www.cafamily.org.uk or call Contact a Family on 020 7608 8700 and speak to a group development officer.

MakingContact.org

MakingContact.org is Contact a Family's online linking service.

You can look for parents who either have the same condition as your child or live in the same area as you. If you wish to contact someone you need to register and create a profile. This service allows you to send private messages to others and is now free to use.

Visit www.makingcontact.org to search for families today.

If you do not have internet access call our freephone helpline to find out how we can support you to use this service.

One-to-one linking

If there is no national support group for your child's condition, Contact a Family will try to find a one to one link for you.

We ask parents interested in linking this way to complete a 'Request for Link' form which we will then use to help us link you with others registered for the service. If we do not currently have any-one registered we will hold your details on file until a suitable link becomes available. When someone else registers and a link looks suitable we will always contact you before giving out any information to make sure that it is a good time and you are still interested.

Call the Contact a Family freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 if you wish to find out more about linking in this way or to obtain a copy of the 'Request for Link' form.



Facebook

Contact a Family has a profile on Facebook – this is another way for you to ask questions and share experiences. Our helpline staff check the site regularly to pick up on specific issues.

www.facebook.com/contactafamily

"Thank you for your support and help in arranging contact between me and Liz with whom I could share issues around similar experiences. I really did feel all alone – it was amazing to find another family who are so kind and understanding."

Mother, Midlands

IMPORTANT: Remember some conditions are very rare and it may be difficult to find someone in the same geographical area, or with the same age of child. Children can be affected quite differently by the same condition. Other parents that you link with may come from a different cultural background to you or have a different level of understanding of their child's disability. Some parents may only want a one-off contact, others may wish to continue to keep in touch – there is no obligation on anyone to do so.

About Contact a Family

Campaigning

We campaign for rights and justice for all families with disabled children.

Freephone helpline

Our freephone helpline for parents and professionals across the UK is staffed by trained parent advisors. It provides information and advice on a wide range of issues including welfare rights, education, short breaks, local services and local support.

Publications

We produce a wide range of publications including newsletters, parent guides and research reports, helping parents and professionals to stay informed.

Linking families

We put families in contact with others whose child has the same condition for support. We link them through existing support groups, our online social networking site or using our one-to-one linking service.

Medical information

We produce the Contact a Family Directory – the essential guide to medical conditions and disabilities with information on over 440 conditions and related support. Each entry provides an overview of the condition with details of support groups where available.

One-to-one support

We offer both practical and emotional support on a one-to-one basis to families with disabled children, through our family support service, volunteer parent representatives and through our local offices.

Local, regional and national offices

Contact a Family has a number of offices around the UK providing local newsletters, information, workshops and support.

Getting in contact with us

Helpline 0808 808 3555

www.cafamily.org.uk

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