



contact a family
for families with disabled children



- Speech
- Feeding
- Coordination
- Teeth
- Toilet training
- Learning
- Behaviour
- Sleep

Concerned about your child? UK

These people may be able to help

Parents & Paediatricians together

Contact a Family working with The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

Is your child having difficulty meeting certain milestones?

It is never too early to seek help or advice.

It can be very difficult to decide whether your child is just slow in developing and will catch up or whether you need to ask for help.

For some children, getting help early can make a real difference and there are lots of different people who can help.

You can talk about any worries you have about your child with your **family doctor (GP), health visitor** or **nurse**. A doctor or nurse might suggest your child see a **paediatrician** who will try to identify anything that could be causing your child to have a problem or they might suggest you see a specialist.

If your child is being seen at a hospital or clinic you can always ask the nurse or doctor for their advice.

Local **children's centres** can also provide advice and help your child's development through play and learning experiences. In Scotland these are called family centres or early years centres.

You are given a Personal Child Health Record when your child is born. It can help you decide whether your child is slow in their development. Try to keep it up to date and take it with you when you go to see your doctor or health visitor.



Any word that appears in **bold** is described more fully at the end of this document.



Speech and communication

If compared to other children of their age your child is slow to understand simple words, uses few words, or has difficulty in making certain sounds.

A doctor or health visitor might refer you to:

- an **audiologist** who works with children who have hearing difficulties and can advise on aids to improve hearing
- a **speech and language therapist** who can work with you and your child to develop communication skills. If a child cannot talk they can help them find other ways to communicate.

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If your child is under five, a doctor or **health visitor** might suggest:

- a **pre-school home visiting/service** which helps children with early communication and pre-school learning skills
- a **nursery** or **play school/group** who have people trained to help your child develop social skills.



Feeding and eating

If your child has difficulty swallowing, eating, drinking or is reluctant to eat.

Your **health visitor** can give advice on feeding including breast feeding, bottle feeding and weaning onto solid food.

A doctor or health visitor might refer you to:

- a **speech and language therapist** who can provide help where there are physical problems with swallowing
- a **dietician** who can provide advice on food, diet and nutrition
- a **clinical psychologist** who can offer support and advice on how to encourage your child to eat.



Movement and coordination

If compared to other children of their age your child has difficulty sitting up, walking, handling objects, or using certain parts of their body.

A doctor or **health visitor** might refer you to:

- a **physiotherapist** who can advise you and help with exercises to improve your child's mobility and coordination
- an **occupational therapist** to assess your child's coordination and mobility, provide advice and recommend aids/equipment to help with everyday activities.

As your child grows or their condition changes they might need further help. Do not hesitate to go back and ask for further help.



Teeth

If your child has difficulty cleaning their teeth or finds visiting the dentist difficult.

A doctor or **health visitor** or local dentist might suggest you take your child to see:

- a **community dentist** who has been trained to work with children and has special equipment for working with children with disabilities.



Toilet training or incontinence

If your child is slow in developing control of their bladder or bowel.

Your **health visitor** can give advice on toilet training. They might refer you to:

- a **continence advisor** to give you advice and practical help if your child is incontinent
- a **paediatrician** to check for medical reasons why your child might be finding this difficult
- a **clinical psychologist** to give advice on how to encourage your child to use the toilet.

If your child requires nappies over the age of three the NHS can sometimes help by providing nappies and incontinence equipment. Your **health visitor** or **GP** can tell you more about this service.



Difficulties learning or poor attention skills

If your child has problems remembering information, learning early educational skills, or responding to requests.

A doctor or **health visitor** might refer you to:

- a **nursery** or **play school/group** for children under five who have people trained to help your child learn new skills
 - a **pre-school home visiting service** to help your child with early communication and learning skills, long before they start school.
- a **Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)** is a teacher responsible for coordinating any extra support a child needs in England and Wales. In Scotland the home visiting teacher, the child's class teacher or another member of school staff takes on this role
 - an **educational psychologist** might observe your child and advise on which teaching or behaviour programmes will be of most benefit.

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Behaviour

If your child's behaviour seriously impacts on family life and his or her ability to learn.

Challenging behaviour can be the result of certain medical conditions. Difficult behaviour can sometimes be resolved using simple strategies. Parents should not feel embarrassed asking for help.

A doctor, **health visitor** or your child's school might refer you to:

- a **social worker** to support you, help you access a **parenting skills class** or find strategies to manage your child's behaviour
- an **educational psychologist** or clinical psychologist for help with managing the problem
- a **paediatrician** or **psychiatrist** for assessment and advice on how best to manage your child's behaviour.



Sleeping at night

If your child takes a long time going to sleep or wakes frequently during the night.

A child that does not sleep creates exhausted parents yet solutions can sometimes be found:

- a **health visitor** can suggest strategies to promote a good sleep pattern
- your doctor might refer you to a **paediatrician** or **psychiatrist** who can assess your child's needs and suggest various treatments or behaviour plans to help your child's sleep.

Description of specialist terms in alphabetical order

An **audiologist** carries out hearing tests and can help a child obtain hearing aids should they need them.

A **clinical psychologist** can offer advice on eating, toileting and behavioural difficulties. Parents may also find it helpful to talk to them about how their child's difficulties affect the whole family.

A **community dentist** can provide advice on diet and planning for healthy teeth as well as dental services to children who find mainstream dental services difficult.

A **continence advisor** can provide advice and practical help if a child is incontinent. If the child is over three they can also help you find appropriate nappies or equipment if needed.

A **dietician** can advise on food, diet and nutrition where a child is reluctant to eat, needs to be on a special diet or has difficulties in chewing and/or swallowing.

An **educational psychologist** can assess a child's development and provide support and advice on learning and behaviour to the child's parents and teachers.

A **family doctor (GP)** will be the first person to ask for medical help and advice. They can ask for your child to be seen by another specialist.

A **health visitor** is a nurse who has undertaken extra training to work with families in the community. They can give practical advice on day to day matters such as feeding, sleep, teething,



development and behaviour. Some health visitors have specialist roles such as involvement with children with disabilities.

A **nursery** or **play school** /**group** provides opportunities for pre-school children, usually aged 3-5 to take part in educational and fun activities. Some places have staff specifically trained to work with children with additional needs to stimulate and help their development.

An **occupational therapist** pays particular attention to hand-eye coordination, perception and manipulative skills. They can advise and provide suitable aids to help with everyday activities such as feeding, dressing, toileting, bathing and play in younger children and writing skills in older children.

A **paediatrician** is a doctor who specialises in looking after babies, children and young people. A paediatrician can coordinate and liaise with other agencies involved in the management, care and education of the child and family.

Parenting skills classes are sometimes run locally to help parents improve their relationship with their children and find strategies to deal with common problems faced by parents.

A **physiotherapist** helps in the management and development of movement skills. There are a number of ways in which children can be helped. These may include exercises to strengthen weak muscles and games to improve coordination and motor skills.



A **pre-school home visiting service** is sometimes available for children with delayed development. In England this is called Portage. A teacher or portage home visitor works alongside parents in the home offering practical help and ideas to assist with the development of play, communication, relationships and learning for young children.

A **psychiatrist** is a doctor who specialises in problems that affect the ways a person thinks, feels or behaves. A child and adolescent psychiatrist specialises in working with children and young people. The psychiatrist might want to meet the whole family before deciding what help is appropriate. They can prescribe medication and might suggest a child be seen by a clinical psychologist.

A **social worker** supports children and families by advising them on practical and financial issues, telling them about local services and sometimes helping to arrange the support they need.

A **special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)** is responsible for coordinating support for children with special educational needs in England and Wales. This can begin at an early age well before the child starts school and continues while they attend school. In Scotland the preschool home visiting teacher takes on this role before they start school. Once they attend school either the child's class teacher or a member of the Additional Support Learning staff is responsible.

Further information and advice

If you have a disabled child, Contact a Family can help you access further information and advice, including:

- organisations who provide advice on dealing with communication, continence or behaviour problems

- support groups for specific medical conditions
- advice on your rights and entitlements.

A **speech and language therapist** helps children learn to communicate, either through speech or other methods. They can also help if there are problems with eating, drinking and swallowing.

In some areas **local children's centres** give advice and support on education, health and childcare to children under five and their families. In Scotland these are called family centres or early years centres.

Social networking

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

Facebook

www.facebook.com/contactafamily

Twitter

www.twitter.com/contactafamily

Podcasts

You can download podcasts from our website at:

www.cafamily.org.uk/news/podcasts.html

iTunes users can listen to our podcasts at:

www.cafamily.org.uk/itunes

Videos

You can watch videos on our YouTube channel at:

www.youtube.com/cafamily

Getting in contact with us

Telephone:

0808 808 3555

Open Monday – Friday

This call is free

We are happy to give information to family, friends or anyone who knows the family well.

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

This leaflet is available from Contact a Family, translated in various languages.



Telephone interpreter service

You can telephone Contact a Family and access qualified interpreters in over 170 languages who can assist in providing information.

To use this service:

- telephone Contact a Family on **0808 808 3555**
- give them your telephone number
- tell them which language you need
- if you can, let them know in English what type of help you are looking for
- within a few minutes someone will ring you back with an interpreter to assist your call.

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Concerned about your child? – English language version