

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 severe disabilities 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 enjoy building 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.
- Contact your local Family Information Service (see 'Ask about' section later). They hold details of all the registered childcarers and childcare settings in your area and can offer advice on getting help with childcare costs. They can also offer additional support and advice on choosing childcare to parents of children with additional needs/disabilities.
- Ask for leaflets and brochures but don't rely on them. Make sure you visit settings so you can gauge whether they can meet your child's needs.
- 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 child care setting must have an SEN Policy and Inclusion Statement and a member of staff in charge of ensuring that children with additional needs get the support they need to thrive.

What to consider when visiting childcare providers

- Is the setting homely, bright and cheery? Are the toys and equipment clean and well maintained? Is it accessible? Is it secure if your child is a 'runner'? Do carers eat with the children? Is there a relaxed and happy atmosphere? Are children included in conversations?
- What does your child have in common with the other children? Do they have similar needs or interests? Is your child likely to feel isolated or different in the setting?
- Have they looked after a child with similar needs to yours?
- 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 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 make choices about 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 activities are planned. What's in place to support a child if things don't go as expected?

What to consider when looking for a carer

- 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 behaviour 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 from time to time. 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

- **Childcare Inclusion Funding** – Funding can be awarded to support the inclusion and participation of children with severe/complex needs and/or a disability that are accessing a Free Entitlement place with an Early Years provider. Your childcare provider can apply.
- **Childminders, nannies and babysitters** – for a list of OFSTED registered childminders go to: www.childcare.co.uk, or alternatively go to the Family Information Service (see below).





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- **Direct payments** – if you qualify for short breaks services, you can get direct payments to pay for and arrange those services yourself. Independent Lives can also help with Direct Payments. It has a directory of personal assistants (PAs) looking for work, as well as a page for employers seeking PAs. Visit: www.independentlives.org or call: **01903 219482**.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – your child may qualify for DLA, a state benefit that will help with their care. For further information visit www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children.
- **Family Hubs** – can provide information and advice on accessing childcare. For more go to: www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/find-a-family-hub.
- **Family Information Service (FIS)** – go to: www.westsussex.gov.uk/fis, call: **01243 777807**, or email: family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk for information on childcare in the county.
- **Free childcare for 2 year olds** – children who get DLA or have an EHC Plan are entitled to 15 hours free childcare per week from the term after their 2nd birthday. Contact the Family Information Service (see above) for more information.
- **Reaching Families** – provides training, information & other fact sheets related to this topic. (See especially our fact sheet on *Short Breaks*). We also offer benefits advice, peer support, a Facebook group & handbook (see below) for parent carers of children & young people with SEND in West Sussex. See: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- **Short Breaks for Disabled Children** – fun, leisure and social activities for disabled children and young people outside school: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/82-1-short-breaks>. Tel: **0330 222 2562** or email: SENDCommissioningTeam@westsussex.gov.uk.
- **Specialist provision** – Chailey Heritage School works with children from the age of three who have complex physical disabilities, communication difficulties and high health needs. To find out more, call: **01825 724444**, or go to: www.chf.org.uk/becoming-a-pupil.html. Ingfield Manor School works with children aged over three who have a neurological motor impairment such as cerebral palsy. For more information go to: www.ingfieldmanorschool.co.uk, call: **01403 782294**, or email: ingfield.manor@ambitoeducation.co.uk.
- **West Sussex Children's Services** – support from health and social care. If your child is under 18, contact the Integrated Front Door (IFD) for West Sussex Children's Services. Tel: **01403 229900** or email: WSChildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk. The IFD is also an entry point for the Children with Disabilities (social care) service for children & young people with severe and/or complex disabilities. Eligibility criteria apply – See: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/265>. For over 18s call the Adults' CarePoint: **01243 642121**, or email: socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk.

Further reading and useful links

- ***Making Sense of it All: From Birth to Adulthood*** – Reaching Families' handbook for parent carers of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex. This provides essential information on money matters, including claiming DLA and PIP, as well as social care, health, leisure, travel, education and employment. Go to: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/guides.html.
- **Snap Care** – a specialist recruitment agency for nannies, buddies and carers to work with babies and children with additional needs. Go to: www.snapcare.co.uk. Call: **020 7729 2200**, or email: info@snapcare.co.uk for more information.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to <https://westsussex.local-offer.org> for local services, support and details of *Short Breaks* providers for children & young people aged 0 - 25 years with SEND.
- **Working Families** – includes a section specifically for parents and carers of disabled children. Go to: <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/articles/choosing-childcare-for-disabled-children> or call their helpline: **0300 012 0312**.

