

Caring for a Child

Introduction

If your child has a disability, a chronic health condition or special educational needs (SEN), there are a number of organisations that can help you. This factsheet has general information about local support organisations, social care, education, health, work, specialist equipment, getting a break and leisure activities. Please note that any organisations listed are included for information only and listing does not mean recommendation.

Glossary of professionals:

Advocate:

Someone who can help you or your child share your views. Some advocates can speak or act on your or your child's behalf at meetings with the school or local authority.

Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS):

CAMHS is the name for the NHS services that assess and treat young people with emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties. You might also see CYPMHS used which stands for Children and Young People's Mental Health Services.

Clinical Psychologist:

A psychologist is a professional concerned with the mind and how people think, learn and behave. A clinical psychologist can work with your child, you and others to help everyone better understand, assess, and treat your child if they have a mental or physical health issue.

Educational Psychologist (EP):

An educational psychologist can work with your child, you and others to help everyone better understand, assess and support your child in their learning and development. They have a wide range of duties that can include helping the local authority assess your child's additional support needs. They can also advise and support schools and nurseries to develop strategies to better support your child's learning.

Health visitor:

Health visitors are **specialist community public health nurses**, (SCPHN) registered midwives or nurses. They specialise in working with families with a child aged 0 to five to identify health needs as early as possible and improve health and wellbeing by promoting health, preventing ill health and reducing inequalities.

Learning Support Assistant:

A Learning Support Assistant works with a teacher to provide individualized assistance to students who have specific learning needs or difficulties. This could include helping them understand assignments, providing emotional support, or adapting teaching methods to suit their learning style.



Occupational Therapist (OT):

A healthcare professional who can work with your child, you and others if your child has difficulties with the practical and social skills necessary for everyday life. They will try to help your child be as physically, psychologically and socially independent as possible. That includes helping your child get the right support and equipment to join in fully in school or nursery life.

Paediatrician:

A paediatric doctor, or paediatrician, is a medical doctor that specializes in conditions that affect babies, infants, adolescents, and young adults.

Physiotherapist:

Paediatric physiotherapy is the treatment and care of babies, children and young people from birth to 19 years. Paediatric (children's) physiotherapists bring their specialist skills as physiotherapists and have additional expert knowledge and experience of child development and of childhood conditions.

Speech and Language Therapist (SALT):

A healthcare professional who can work with your child, you and others if your child has difficulties with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing. Speech and language therapists can be involved in supporting your child with language delay, stammering, social interaction difficulties, selective mutism and more.

They have a wide range of duties like helping the local authority assess children's additional support needs, providing advice and training to you and others including school or nursery staff, and in some instances providing specialist therapy directly to your child.

[Chatterbox groups](#) can be used for families with children aged 4 and under who have concerns about their child's talking or interaction.

Chatterbox offers targeted groups in children's centres to promote, support and encourage children's speech, language, and communication development in pre-school aged children.

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO):

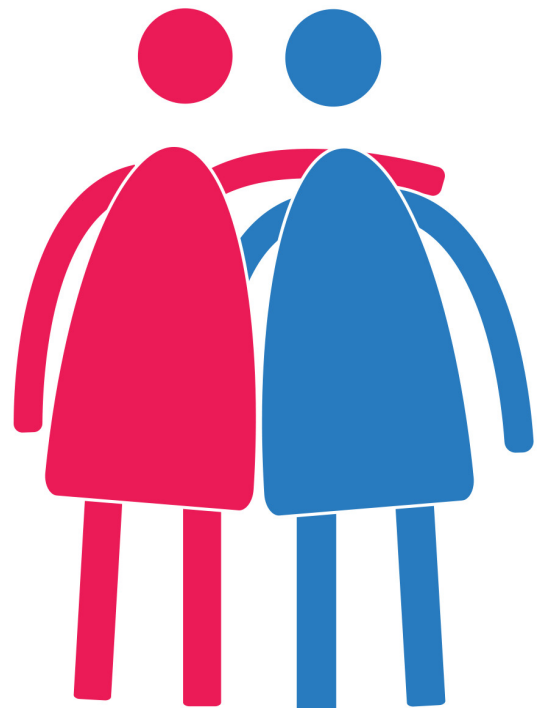
A SENCO is a **qualified teacher** who is responsible for leading the school's provision for special educational needs and the support offered to students with special educational needs (SEN).

Social Care

As the parent of a child with a disability or SEN, it's important to get the right support. If you feel you need a break, you can access short breaks, such as after-school clubs and holiday clubs. You can use some short break and play services without having an assessment. The Local Offer has a list of available short breaks and leisure activities: localoffer.croydon.gov.uk.

For children with more complex needs, you may receive more ongoing support from children's social care. In Croydon, the SEND Social Care Team supports children and young people with a permanent and substantial disability.

As you will know your child's support needs best, it will help to discuss these needs with key members of staff to get the right support in place.



Ask for an assessment

Under the Children Act 1989 (section 17), local authorities have a legal duty to assess every child who is or may be 'in need', including disabled children.

However, having an assessment does not necessarily mean that you will receive support services; you will only receive support services if your child's needs are assessed as meeting the eligibility criteria. If you feel your child needs an assessment, contact Croydon Council's SEND Social Care Team on 020 8726 6500 and ask for an assessment of your child's needs and your needs as a family.

If your child is refused an assessment and you feel they should have received one, you may wish to make a formal complaint. Contact has a template letter which you can adapt:

www.contact.org.uk.

Preparing for your assessment

An assessment will usually be conducted by a social worker, taking a comprehensive look at your child's needs and your situation as a family. Prepare for your assessment by thinking of the extra support you provide your child on a daily basis. Be clear what your child struggles with as well as their strengths and take copies of any letters from professionals with you. You can ask a friend or relative to come with you to support you.

Support for yourself and for siblings

The person conducting your child's assessment should also consider your needs as a family. If you are a parent carer and feel your needs have not been taken into consideration during your child's assessment, you can also request a parent carer needs assessment under the Children and Families Act 2014. This is separate to your child's assessment. To request a parent carer needs assessment, contact the 0-25 SEND Team (020 8726 6400).

Off The Record- Young Carers Service



07522046395



<https://www.talkofftherecord.org/croydon/young-carers-service/>

Sibs



01535 645453



<https://www.sibs.org.uk/>

Sibs exists to support people who grow up with or have grown up with a disabled brother or sister. It is the only UK charity representing the needs of over half a million siblings.

After your assessment

After your child's assessment, the social care team will decide if your child is eligible for support. If your child is eligible, they will agree a support plan with you, explaining how they will meet your child's eligible needs. If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), any support provided by social care should also be included in their EHCP.

Direct payments/personal budgets

If you are eligible for support from social care and want to arrange support yourself, you can receive direct payments. A direct payment is money directly paid to you to meet your child's eligible needs. This is often to directly pay a personal assistant, but could also be for equipment, travel to activities, etc. Direct payments are not counted as income and will not affect your entitlement to benefits. If your child is assessed as being eligible for support, you must be offered direct payments, but you do not have to take up the option. If you are already receiving support from social care, you can ask to be transferred to direct payments. See the Useful Contacts section for more information.

Early Years

Finding out that your child has a disability or SEN can have a big impact on you and the rest of your family. You may have a mixture of emotions and wonder how you will cope. It's important to remember that these feelings are normal, and you aren't alone. Some families find it helpful to talk to other families via online forums or by joining a local support group. More information on these can be found at our Support Centre or on our website, carersinfo.org.uk.

Health

In the early years, your main points of contact for your child's health will most likely be your health visitor and your GP. Your child may need to have regular hospital visits or appointments with consultants or specialists depending on their condition and health needs. Your GP will be able to refer your child to any specialists they may need.

Development

You may notice that your child is slower to develop certain skills than other children of their age. This is called developmental delay. Professionals may mention the term 'development milestones'. These are key areas of development, including physical, learning, social and communication skills. If you are concerned about your child's development or your child is not meeting developmental milestones, talk to your GP or health visitor.

Childcare and early years' education

There are a number of early years settings your child may attend, including nursery, pre-school, holiday play schemes and childminding. You can also access support from children's centres.

The government runs several schemes to assist with childcare costs. You can get help with childcare costs for two-year-olds if you receive certain income-related benefits. Three to four-year olds can receive 30 hours a week of childcare. You may also be entitled to Tax-Free Childcare support from the government, as long as you or your partner are working for 16 hours a week or more. For more information, visit: www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator.

All early years settings should have arrangements in place to support children with SEN. If your setting cannot meet your child's needs, your child may need an Education, Health and Care Plan. Ask your setting's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) for more information. Many disabled children attend a mainstream nursery or preschool, but some children with high levels of need find a specialist setting more suitable. For more information on specialist nurseries and pre-schools, please call the Early Years SEND team via email at earlyyearsrendteam@croydon.gov.uk.

Disabled Children's Register

Every local authority must have a disabled children's register. Croydon Council is now working in partnership with Nimbus Disability to provide an Access Card for children and young people on the register. See the Leisure section for more information.

Local Support

Best Start Croydon



0208 684 3777 (option 1)



www.croydon.gov.uk

Best Start children's centres offer services, activities, support and peer-to-peer parent training courses for families with children under 5. Local participating centres include:

- Aerodrome Children's Centre
- Byron Children's Centre
- Kensington Avenue Children's Centre
- New Addington Children's Centres
- Purley Oaks Children's Centre
- Selhurst Children's Centre

Education

Your child may need more support at school. Mainstream nurseries and schools support school children with a wide range of special educational needs (SEN) and your child should be properly included.

Education, Health and Care Plans

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled children enjoy an inclusive education. If the school can't meet your child's needs out of their own resources, your child may need an assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

An EHCP is a legal document which describes a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need and the outcomes they would like to achieve. They should cover educational needs but also include health and social care needs and it can run up to the age of 25.

In Croydon, KIDS SENDIASS (020 8152 4558, or croydon@kids.org.uk) provides information and support to families with a disabled child or child with SEN on education issues. SEN mediation is provided by Global Mediation (020 8441 1355). Mediation is only required when you have a dispute or go through the appeal process.

Preparing for adulthood

If your child has a statement or EHCP, they should have a transition meeting in Year 9. The transition meeting looks at the young person's ambitions for the future and considers what support will be put in place to help them prepare for adulthood. The head teacher, the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) and any other relevant professionals should be involved. After the meeting, a transition plan should be created and reviewed annually until the young person leaves school. In Croydon, the Post 16 SEND Team is responsible for planning transition in education for young people with SEN. They can be contacted through the 0-25 SEND Team on 020 8726 6400.

Local Support

KIDS SENDIASS hold weekly drop-ins with an advice worker at the Carer's Support Centre found on George Street. Drop-ins take place on Tuesday mornings between 10am and 12pm, during term time. The drop-ins are first come first serve, so be sure to arrive on time.

Working

Juggling work and care can be a difficult balancing act. As a parent or carer of a disabled child, you have certain rights and protection in law to help you manage paid employment and your caring role.

Telling your employer

It's your decision whether or not to tell your employer that you are a carer. Some people find it helpful as their employer may be more understanding about their situation.

Your employer may also have additional policies which go above and beyond legal requirements.



Childcare

Under the Equality Act 2010, childcare providers cannot discriminate against disabled children and must make reasonable adjustments. They can charge more for a disabled child but only for any extra costs such as employing more staff. Make sure your childcare provider is registered with OFSTED: (0300 123 1231). Contact has more information on finding good childcare: www.contact.org.uk.

The Equality Advisory and Support Service can be contacted to provide advice and support regarding disability discrimination: (0808 800 0082).

Time off for dependants

Every employee has the right to take a 'reasonable' amount of time off work for an unexpected event that affects a dependant. The legal right to time off for dependants only applies to unforeseen events. So for example, if your child was suddenly ill and needed to come home from school and there was no other childcare, you could use this right.

Parental Leave

As a parent, you have the right to take up to 18 weeks in total (not per annum) unpaid parental leave to take care of your child until they are 18, within certain rules and restrictions. The rules are:

- You must be an employee and have worked for your current employer for one year or more.
- You must give 21 days' notice.
- Leave must be taken one week at a time unless your child receives Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP), in which case you can take a day off at a time.
- You can take up to four weeks of your leave in one year, unless agreed otherwise by your employer.
- Your employer can delay leave by up to six months if the leave would particularly disrupt the business. However, they must follow certain procedures to do this.

Flexible Working

If you have been in your current job for 26 weeks or more (unless you are an agency worker or office holder), you have the right to ask for flexible working. Your request can be turned down, but only once the correct process has been followed. You can only make one request every 12 months. Your request must be in writing and include certain information, such as:

- The nature of the flexibility you are asking for, e.g. flexi-time, working from home, etc.
- When you wish to start flexible working.
- If you have made any previous requests (and if so, when).
- The impact your request, if any, would have on your work and how this impact could be resolved.

Your employer has up to three months to respond to your request. Flexible working requests can only be turned down for a good business reason; for example, because it would be too costly to the business, or it would not be possible to reorganise work amongst existing staff. Some employers have an appeals system if you are turned down, but there is no legal requirement to have one.

Carer's Leave Act, 2023

Regardless of the dependant's age, the Carer's Leave Act of 2023 permits employees one week's unpaid care leave per year. The Act introduces this as a day-one right, meaning that the employee is entitled to it from the very first day of their employment. The employee must give notice of twice the length of time being requested as leave, plus one day for the employer to accept leave.

Useful contacts

ACAS



0300 123 1100



www.acas.org.uk

Provides employment information, advice and early conciliation service (early resolution support before cases reach tribunal).

Working Families



0300 012 0312



www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Information on employment rights for parents of disabled children. 'Waving not Drowning' project provides information and support to parent carers who work or want to work.

Advocacy

We always recommend you bring someone to support you in meetings with you when discussing your child's support needs. It can be emotionally overwhelming, and it is always good to have an extra pair of ears in situations such as these.

It may be that you feel you need professional support in meetings to have your voice heard. Professional advocacy is available.

Croydon Mencap



020 8684 5890



www.croydonmencap.org.uk/



info@croydonmencap.org.uk

Offers advocacy services, preparation for meetings, support with navigating SEND systems for education, health and social care, and self-advocacy training.

National Youth Advocacy Service



0808 808 1001



www.nyas.net/

Provide mental health advocates to support children to express their views, wishes and feelings, making sure their voice is heard when important decisions are being made that will impact their care and lives.

Hospice

Shooting Stars



01483 230 974



familysupport@shootingstar.org.uk

Shooting Star Children's Hospices cares for babies, children and young people with life-limiting conditions, and their families, across south-west London, north-west London and Surrey. Shooting Stars support families from diagnosis to end of life and throughout bereavement with a range of nursing, practical, emotional, and medical care. Their specialist care and support is free of charge and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Shooting Stars support around 500 babies, children, or young adults who have a life-limiting condition and their families, as well as around 200 bereaved families.

Equipment

The right equipment can help you and your child get the most out of life and make daily tasks a lot easier. The services listed below can advise on the most appropriate equipment for a child, and in some cases provide the equipment directly – although some organisations will charge for this.

Local Support

Children's Occupational Therapy Service



020 8274 6850/54



[www.croydonhealthservices.nhs.uk/
childrens-occupational-therapy](http://www.croydonhealthservices.nhs.uk/childrens-occupational-therapy)

Provides advice, equipment and assessments for re-housing if your current property is unsuitable. Referrals can be made for adaptations to an existing property and help with funding applications to pay for major adaptations.

Croydon Wheelchair Service



020 8665 9313



www.croydonhealthservices.nhs.uk

Provides specialised buggies and wheelchairs to disabled children with mobility problems. A referral is required from a GP, physiotherapist or occupational therapist.

National Support

Cerebra



0800 328 1159



www.cerebra.org.uk



enquires@cerebra.org.uk

Innovation Centre designs and sells equipment for disabled children and website lists second-hand equipment available to collect. Also offers a lending library, sleep service, research team and a holiday home for parents.

Fledglings



0203 319 9772



www.fledglings.org.uk



fledglings@contact.org.uk

Helps parents and carers of disabled children to find solutions to practical problems by providing advice and information, as well as sourcing and supplying equipment. They specialise in finding unusual items not readily available elsewhere.