



## Aids, equipment and adaptations

Information for families

UK



30 years of  
strengthening  
families with  
disabled children

## Introduction

Caring for a disabled child can sometimes be made easier with the use of certain aids, equipment and/or adaptations. For some families, having the right equipment can also enhance a child's ability to become more independent and help ease the process of transition into adulthood.

Some items, such as mobility aids or special beds, are expensive and the range available is vast. This guide has information on how to obtain equipment from statutory sources and where to go for further advice. It also has sources of information on equipment for play and leisure, second hand equipment, financial help, VAT relief on equipment, help adapting your home, and useful contacts.

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## Who provides equipment?

### Health and local authority responsibilities

Both the health service and your local authority provide aids and equipment to disabled people. Under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (England & Wales), and the equivalent legislation for Scotland and Northern Ireland, a local authority has a duty to provide practical assistance and additional facilities designed to secure greater safety, comfort or convenience to those people assessed as needing them. This often means providing equipment as well as other forms of practical assistance. In your area there may be a local agreement which clarifies who is responsible for different types of equipment.

### Who does what?

In general, your local authority's children's services are responsible for providing equipment for daily living and non-medical needs of disabled children and young people, and your health authority is responsible for providing equipment to meet nursing or medical needs.

Equipment needed to help independence or meet any social care need is usually the responsibility of your local authority (social work department in Scotland or health and social services trust in Northern Ireland). This includes help with arranging adaptations to the home or

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any additional facilities for greater safety, comfort and convenience. It can lead to aids and equipment to help with lifting and transfer, personal care, eating, bathing and washing. Equipment is usually provided on a long term loan basis.

Equipment to help a child access the curriculum may be arranged by a school or the education department of children's services.

### Community equipment services

In England, you may find there is a community equipment service (CES) - jointly funded by local health and social service departments. This is an initiative across health and social care to develop community equipment services. Further information on this initiative, funded by the Department of Health, is available on Web: <http://tinyurl.com/7vupul>

### Items which must be provided free

In general, the health service cannot charge for any of its services, including medical aids and equipment needed for health reasons. Families in England should also note that certain aids and equipment provided by the local authority cannot be charged for. These include equipment for daily living, like a shower chair, and minor adaptations costing £1,000 or less.

### Who to contact

In the first place, you should contact your social worker if you have one, or contact your GP and tell them about the kind of help you're looking for. You can also approach other healthcare or personal care professionals, such as a district nurse, physiotherapist or school nurse.

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### Assessing you and your child's needs

An occupational therapist (OT) or social worker will usually visit you in your home to discuss the situation further and carry out the assessment. An OT is a professional who can advise on equipment for daily living and managing more easily in the home. When you're visited by the OT or social worker, it is important that your needs as a carer and those of other family members are taken into account. This includes any health and safety concerns. If your child also needs equipment to help with medical or health needs, then a joint assessment should be carried out and the social worker or OT may contact the community nursing service or your GP.

Where a need is identified, the social worker or OT must consider ways of meeting that need. This may include practical advice about doing things differently to make things easier, providing aids and equipment, and/or arranging alterations to the house. See 'Adapting your home' on page 21.

### Making a complaint

If you're unhappy with the outcome of

the assessment, then you can make a complaint using the local authority's complaints procedure. When making a complaint, it may be useful to get help from a local disability or carers organisation. The Contact a Family helpline can provide further advice and tell you about any local organisations which can help further.

Contact a Family's guide on 'Disabled children's services in England and Wales' and 'A guide to assessments and services in Scotland' has further advice about making a complaint. Families in Northern Ireland can contact the helpline for further information about the complaints process.

## Health

Aids and equipment needed for nursing and medical care at home are usually the responsibility of the local health authority. Equipment can be supplied through the NHS on a free loan basis, with certain items being prescribed by the GP or a consultant. This might include special beds and bed equipment, hoists, incontinence aids, feeding aids, mobility aids and aids for hearing.

### Complaints

If there is any aspect of health provision that you're unhappy with, then you should raise this with the person responsible. Families in England can also ask their local patient advice and liaison service (PALS). Community health councils in Wales can also offer support and guidance on how to make a complaint. Families in Scotland and Northern Ireland can make a complaint



with the help of their local health council or health and social services council respectively. See your local telephone directory for contact details.

### Hearing

Your GP can make a referral to an audiologist for an examination and hearing test. If a hearing aid is necessary, another referral is made to a hearing aid department where an appliance will be supplied and fitted. NHS hearing aids are serviced, maintained and supplied with batteries free of charge. Hearing aids can also be bought privately. For further information please contact:

### NDCS (The National Deaf Children's Society)

15 Dufferin Street, London EC1Y 8UR  
Helpline: 0808 800 8880  
Textphone: 0808 800 8880  
Web: <http://www.ndcs.org.uk>

Provides information about all aspects of deafness.

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

## **RNID (The Royal National Institute for Deaf People)**

19-23 Featherstone Street,  
London EC1Y 8SL

Information line: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

Web: <http://www.rnid.org.uk>

Offers information on any aspect of deafness, hearing loss or tinnitus.

## **Vision impairment**

Low vision aids such as hand and stand magnifiers can be prescribed under the NHS through the hospital eye service, along with more complex appliances.

The following organisations can provide further information on aids for visually impaired children:

## **RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind)**

105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0845 766 9999

Web: <http://www.rnib.org.uk>

Offers information, support and advice to people with sight loss.

## **Vision Aid**

106 Junction Road, Deane,

Bolton BL3 4NE

Tel: 01204 64265 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm)

Web: <http://www.visionaid.org.uk/>

Vision Aid can loan toys, hi-tech equipment, and visual stimulation equipment to registered blind and partially sighted children and students.

## **Communication**

Any concerns about your child's communication should be discussed with a speech and language therapist. You can either contact the therapist directly or ask your GP to refer you. Therapists are usually based in hospitals or clinics in the community. Following an assessment of your child's needs, the therapist may be able to loan the required equipment.

Please note that speech and language therapy for children is often an educational provision. This means that funding for it can be provided by the local authority (LA) as well as by a health trust. This provision should be identified in your child's statement of special educational needs, or co-ordinated support plan if you live in Scotland.

Parents can also visit their nearest communication aid centre for further information. The therapist or social worker should be able to tell you where your nearest centre is. The following organisations can also provide further information:

## **Afasic**

1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 20 Bowling Green Lane,

London EC1R 0BD

Helpline: 0845 355 5577 (Mon-Fri 10.30am-2.30pm)

Web: <http://www.afasic.org.uk>

A parent led charity that helps children and young people with speech and language impairments. Also provides information and training for parents and professionals.

## **I CAN**

8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

Tel: 0845 225 4071

Web: <http://www.ican.org.uk>

I CAN supports the development of speech, language and communication skills in all children, with a special focus on those who find this hard.

## **Aidis Trust**

3 Gunthorpe Street, London E1 7RQ

Tel: 020 7426 2130

Web: <http://www.aidis.org>

Helps disabled people make best use of information and communication technology by giving information, help and support on all aspects of disability computing.

## **The Sequal Trust**

3 Ploughmans Corner, Wharf Road,

Ellesmere SY12 0EJ

Tel: 01691 624 222

Web: <http://www.the-sequal-trust.org.uk>

The Sequal Trust fundraises on behalf of its members with speech and/or movement difficulties to provide communication equipment. They also provide equipment on a 'life long free loan basis'.

## **Incontinence**

Advice on incontinence matters can be sought from health visitors, district nurses or social workers. Most health authorities will also have a designated continence advisor for specialist help and advice. Once your child is over the age of infancy, incontinence aids can be supplied by your local health authority, provided your child's difficulties with continence are due to a disability. These may be charged for, depending on where you live. Aids such as bedding protection, disposable nappies, catheters, pants and odour controls may be provided by the health authority or can be bought privately.

The Department of Health document on 'Good Practice in Continence Services' also states that 'In most cases it will not be appropriate to provide free pads before the age of four, but flexibility should be allowed for special cases such as children with multiple handicaps and decisions should be made in liaison with the designated paediatrician.' The full document can be viewed at  
Web: <http://tinyurl.com/33ojne>

Further help may be available with water charges. If your water supply is metered, then you may be able to get your bill capped. Please contact the helpline for further advice. Other help for families dealing with continence difficulties is the laundry service, although not all local authorities offer this. Where available, it is

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usually attached to the home help service of the social services department. In other areas, it is operated by the NHS.

Families with severely disabled children can apply for help with washing, such as a washing machine, from the Family Fund. See 'Financial help' on page 15.

Additionally, you may live in an area where you can get a donated or recycled machine. The **Furniture Re-use Network** is the national co-ordinating body for 400 furniture and appliance re-use and recycling organisations in the UK. They collect a wide range of household items to pass onto people in need. For information about a project in your area, visit Web: <http://www.frn.org.uk>

The following organisations provide practical information and advice on continence issues:

#### **ERIC (Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence)**

36 Old School House, Britannia Road, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DB  
Helpline: 0845 370 8008 (Mon-Fri 10am-4pm, Tues and Sun, 6.30pm-9.30pm)

Web: <http://www.eric.org.uk>

Provides information, support and resources to children and young people, their families and health professionals.

#### **The Bladder and Bowel Foundation**

SATRA Innovation Park, Rockingham Road  
Kettering, Northants NN16 9JH

Tel: 01536 533255

Nurse helpline: 0845 345 0165 (24 hour answerphone)

Web: <http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org>

Formerly Incontact and the Continence Foundation. They provide information and support for all types of bladder and bowel related problems. Run a specialist nurse helpline, providing clinical support for patients and carers alongside its general enquiry line.

#### **Information on local health services**

##### **Northern Ireland**

Web: <http://www.n-i.nhs.uk>

##### **Scotland**

Web: <http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk>

##### **England**

Web: <http://www.nhs.uk>

##### **Wales**

Web: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk>



## **Mobility**

Any concerns about your child's mobility should be discussed with your GP first, who can then make a referral to the physiotherapist at your local hospital. There your child's mobility needs will be assessed. Basic walking aids can be provided on loan from the local hospital or community health service, usually on the recommendation of the physiotherapist.

Assessment and provision of a wheelchair (powered, attendant-controlled powered or manual wheelchairs) is carried out by your local NHS wheelchair service. In Wales, the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service (ALAS) is responsible for providing the wheelchair service.

Children's buggies can also be supplied through the wheelchair service.

The service should help you to choose a wheelchair that meets your child's needs. This includes extras such as cushions, armrests or trays. Your GP, local health centre, physiotherapist or occupational therapist should be able to tell you where your local wheelchair service is. Families in Wales, England and Northern Ireland can ring NHS Direct on Tel: 0845 4647 and in Scotland, families can ring NHS 24 on Tel: 08454 242424.

Alternatively the Directory of Wheelchair Services is available at Web: <http://www.wheelchairmanagers.nhs.uk/services.asp>

The wheelchair is supplied to someone whose need for a chair is permanent. The service will also be responsible for

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its maintenance, provided any problems are not caused by misuse or neglect. You should be given the number for a local approved repairer who will be responsible for repairs.

Theoretically any wheelchair can be supplied by the NHS wheelchair service. However, this will depend on local criteria, resources available and the circumstances of the individual. In Scotland, there are national criteria for the provision of powered wheelchairs.

Usually you have to buy outdoor electric wheelchairs, scooters or specialist sports chairs. If you're unhappy with the choice available and need something other than a standard chair, then you could consider the wheelchair voucher scheme (England only). This allows you to pay the difference between the costs of a basic manual wheelchair, provided by the wheelchair service, to a more expensive wheelchair of your choice.

Additional sources of help with wheelchairs include:

#### **Whizz-Kidz**

Elliot House, 10-12 Allington Street,  
London SW1E 5EH  
Tel: 020 7233 6600  
Web: <http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk>

Whizz-Kidz can provide essential mobility equipment for children up to 18 that are not available from the NHS. Also provide wheelchair skills training.

#### **Association of Wheelchair Children (AWC)**

6 Woodman Parade, North Woolwich,  
London E16 2LL  
Tel: 0844 544 1050  
Web: <http://www.wheelchairchildren.org.uk>

AWC provides practical wheelchair skills training, assessment and support to young wheelchair-users and their families.

#### **Mobility schemes**

If your child receives the high rate of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component, and has at least twelve months award length remaining, then you can join the Motability Scheme. The scheme can help disabled people hire or buy a car or a powered wheelchair or a buggy. The Wheelchair and Scooter Scheme is operated by Route2mobility, a limited company, under contract to Motability. You can only be on the Car Scheme or the Wheelchair and Scooter Scheme, not both at the same time.

For further information on the Motability Powered Wheelchair and Scooter Scheme contact:

#### **Route2mobility**

Montgomery House, Newbury Road,  
Enham Alamein, Andover, Hampshire  
SP11 6JS  
Tel: 0845 607 6260  
Web: <http://www.motability.co.uk>

For enquiries about the car scheme contact:

#### **Motability Operations**

City Gate House, 22 Southwark Bridge  
Road, London SE1 9HB  
Tel: 0845 456 4566  
Textphone: 0845 675 0009  
Web: <http://www.motability.co.uk>

Other mobility services:

#### **The Mobility Information Service**

20 Burton Close, Dawley, Telford TF4 2BX  
Tel: 01743 340 269  
Web: <http://www.mis.org.uk>

Provides advice for people with disabilities that restrict their mobility.

#### **Forum of Mobility Centres**

c/o Providence Chapel, Warehorne,  
Ashford, Kent, TN26 2JX  
Tel: 0800 559 3636  
Web: <http://www.mobility-centres.org.uk>

The Forum of Mobility Centres is a network of 17 independent organisations covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, who offer information, advice and assessment to individuals who have a medical condition or are recovering from an accident or injury which may affect their ability to drive, access or exit a motor vehicle.

If your child gets the highest rate of the DLA mobility component, you can apply for road tax exemption and for a Blue Badge for disabled parking. The Blue Badge may also be awarded where a child is aged two or over and has a permanent disability which makes walking difficult, or where they are aged under two and either need to be accompanied by bulky medical equipment or kept near a vehicle so that they can receive medical treatment at short notice.

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## Education

Aids connected to education may be supplied by local authorities or the school themselves for use in schools and colleges. The school may arrange for an occupational therapist to assess your child and may provide aids for use in school and at home. Contact the head teacher for further information.

If your child has a statement of special educational needs, then details of specific equipment required to help your child at school should be included. If you have concerns about your child's needs, then these should be raised with the school.

In Scotland, a child's co-ordinated support plan should detail any equipment necessary to meet a child's educational needs.

Contact a Family's guides on special educational needs for Wales, England and Scotland include further advice about your rights and lists other relevant organisations for further help. At the time of writing, Contact a Family is in the process of producing a guide on special educational needs for Northern Ireland. In the meantime, families in Northern Ireland can find further advice at Web: <http://www.deni.gov.uk>

As mentioned earlier, speech and language therapy for children is often regarded as an educational provision. Parents should also refer to the 'communication' section of this guide.

### Further and higher education

For young disabled people in further and higher education, additional help may be available. This can be in the

form of specialist aids and equipment or allowances to help pay for equipment or practical help. To determine what help is necessary, your child will need a special assessment.

The organisation Skill can provide further information and advice. They produce a range of information booklets including the information sheet 'Assistive technology: sources of help and information'. This has an A to Z list of assistive technology that is commonly used, organisations that provide assessments or advice and sources of financial help. Download it for free at Web: [http://www.skill.org.uk/uploads/assistive\\_tech.doc](http://www.skill.org.uk/uploads/assistive_tech.doc) or contact:

### Skill – National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Unit 3, Floor 3, Radisson Court,  
219 Long Lane, London SE1 4PR  
Tel: 020 7450 0620 (Tues, 11.30am-  
1.30pm & Thurs, 1.30pm-3.30pm)  
Web: <http://www.skill.org.uk>

## Play and leisure

All children, including disabled children, have the right to play, have fun and take part in recreational activities. This is important as play has a very important role in a child's development. Play can help develop speech, sensory skills, imagination, independence and social skills. Toys and play can be fun as well as educational and therapeutic. It is crucial that all children, whatever their abilities, are given the opportunity to play and access leisure facilities.

For further advice and information on suitable toys, you can speak to a paediatric occupational therapist. Through activity and play, the paediatric occupational therapist works with children to help them attain the highest possible quality of life. The paediatric occupational therapist can work in a variety of settings including the NHS, social services, educational or charitable organisations.

There may also be a local play scheme or parent support group in your area where toys and ideas can be exchanged. Contact our helpline for local information.

There are a number of commercial outlets and specialist suppliers. Some of these are listed under 'Commercial suppliers' on page 19. Because there are so many, it is important for parents to get the right advice to ensure they get value for

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money. The following organisations can provide further specialist information.

### **National Association of Toy & Leisure Libraries (NATLL)**

1A Harwood Street, London NW1 8DN  
Tel: 020 7428 2286  
Web: <http://www.natll.org.uk>

Produce the 'Good Toy Guide', available on their website. Also publish a 'Special Needs Suppliers List' of companies providing toys and equipment. They can also provide details of local toy and leisure libraries in your area.

### **Listening Books**

12 Lant Street, London SE1 1QH  
Tel: 020 7407 9417  
Web: <http://www.listening-books.org.uk>

Provide audio books for leisure and learning on MP3, CD, and via internet streaming for anyone who has difficulty reading.

Contact a Family also produces a parent guide, 'Holidays, play and leisure' available free from our helpline.

## **Second hand equipment**

The Spinal Injuries Association and Disabled Living Foundation have helpful factsheets on buying and selling second hand equipment. They include details of publications to advertise in and other helpful organisations. Information from the Spinal Injuries Association also lists dealers in second hand wheelchairs and adapted vehicles.

### **Spinal Injuries Association**

SIA House, 2 Trueman Place, Oldbrook, Milton Keynes MK6 2HH  
Tel: 0800 980 0501 (Mon-Fri, 9.30-4.30, closed 1-2pm)  
Web: <http://www.spinal.co.uk>

### **Disabled Living Foundation**

see page 26.

### **Disability Equipment Register**

Tel: 01454 318818  
Web: <http://www.disabilityequipment.org.uk>

A not-for-profit organisation providing a service for disabled people and their families to enable them to buy and sell items of used disability equipment on a direct basis.

### **Mobility Market**

<http://www.themobilitymarket.co.uk>

A website where you can buy or sell used mobility aids and equipment.

### **Furniture Re-use Network**

See page 8.

For more companies selling equipment see also 'Useful websites' on page 27.



## **Financial help**

### **Charities and benevolent funds**

#### **Family Fund**

Unit 4, Alpha Court, Monks Cross Drive  
York YO32 9WN  
Tel: 0845 130 45 42  
Textphone: 01904 658 085  
Web: <http://www.familyfund.org.uk>

The Family Fund gives grants to low-income families to meet the additional needs of caring for a severely disabled child. In England and Wales, the age limit of children and young people they can help is aged 17 and under. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the age limit is 16 and under.

The Fund will not help in areas that are the responsibility of the local authority or health services.

#### **Association of Charity Officers (ACO)**

Five Ways, 57/59 Hatfield Road,  
Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 1HS  
Tel: 01707 651 777 (Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm)  
Web: <http://www.aco.uk.net>

ACO can identify other relevant charities which may be able to help.

#### **Turn2us**

Web: <http://www.turn2us.org.uk>

Online service to help people access information on all benefits and grants available to them from both statutory and voluntary organisations in the UK.

The Contact a Family helpline can also provide information about grant giving trusts.

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### Benefits and tax credits

The following is a summary of some of the main benefits and tax credits which may be available to families with disabled children:

#### Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

This is a tax free benefit for disabled people including children affected by learning or behavioural conditions. It is also non means-tested which means that finances are not taken into account. It includes an amount for children with extra care needs and an amount for children with mobility problems.

#### Carers Allowance

Paid to claimants providing at least 35 hours care each week to someone receiving the middle or high rate of DLA care component. In addition, the carer must not be a full-time student and must not earn more than an earnings limit. At the time of writing, this is £95 per week (after certain expenses).

#### Child Tax Credit

A means-tested tax credit for people with dependent children.

#### Working Tax Credit

Available to top up the earnings of working people. Also means-tested.

#### Income Support

An income related benefit available to people who cannot work, or work reduced hours due to caring responsibilities.

#### Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

A benefit for those who cannot work, or

who have a limited capacity for work, due to health problems.

#### Social Fund payments

The Social Fund gives various payments to help people on a low income with specific costs. Claims for any of the payments are dealt with by your local benefit office or Jobcentre Plus office. There are different types of payments you can get including maternity grants, funeral payments, community care grants and crisis loans. For more information, see our free guide 'Help from the Social Fund', available from the helpline or our website at Web: <http://tinyurl.com/mjoe8>

#### Council Tax

Help is available in the form of Council Tax Benefit for families on a low income. There are also schemes to help specific groups with their council tax by reducing their actual bill. This includes the disability reduction scheme, which reduces your council tax bill if someone in your household is disabled and you have a second bathroom or kitchen they need. You can also qualify for a reduction if you have a room in your house that a disabled person needs other than a bathroom, kitchen or toilet. Or, if you have enough space in your home for a wheelchair user who lives there.

There is also a discount scheme which reduces your council tax bill if there are less than two adults in the property. Children and some adults are ignored when counting the number of people who live with you. More information is available in our guide 'Help with council tax bills', free from our helpline.

To ensure you get everything you're entitled to and you're not losing out, contact your nearest advice service for a full benefits check. They may also be able to supply information on local trusts. For information on benefits and local advice agencies, call the Contact a Family helpline. Our free guides 'Benefits, Tax Credits and other financial help' and 'The Tax Credits guide' give further detailed advice. The 'Checklist for parents' also contains a brief summary of entitlements.

#### Using direct payments to buy equipment

Families from all over the UK can use direct payments to buy equipment. Our guide 'Getting direct payments for your disabled child in England and Wales' and 'A parents' guide to direct payments in Scotland' looks at how to ask for them and how they work in practice. For a copy and more information about direct payments, ring our helpline. Families in Northern Ireland can also contact the helpline for advice.



### Value Added Tax (VAT)

Certain aids and equipment for disabled people are zero-rated for VAT purposes. This means that you do not have to pay any VAT when you buy these goods for the personal use of your disabled child.

#### Not all goods and services for disabled people are zero-rated

Zero-rating applies to:

- adjustable beds, chair lifts, hoists and sanitary devices
- auditory training aids
- low vision aids
- certain medical and surgical appliances
- emergency alarm call systems

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- motor vehicles and boats adapted to meet a disabled person's condition. However, not every vehicle or adaptation will qualify, so seek further advice
- any other equipment or appliances designed solely for the use of disabled people. It is not enough to show that a piece of equipment is one that is often used by disabled people – it must be specifically designed for their use. For example, an orthopedic bed would not be zero-rated because it is designed for use by both disabled and non-disabled people alike. Ultimately it is the designer or manufacturer of a product who determines whether goods qualify for zero-rating.

You also don't have to pay VAT on any charges made for the installation, repair and maintenance of these goods, or for any spare parts or accessories they need.



Certain building work may also be zero-rated. This includes work on ramps, doorways and passages, bathrooms, shower rooms, washrooms and toilets and the installation and repair of a lift. However, the services of an architect, surveyor or consultant cannot be zero-rated even if they are providing services in connection with building work that does qualify.

If you need to have any general purpose goods adapted for a disabled child's use, the extra you pay for the adaptation should be VAT free, although not the actual goods themselves.

If you import equipment from abroad to meet a disabled person's needs, there are specific rules allowing VAT exemptions in certain circumstances. More information can be found in VAT Notice 371, available from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), see link below.

### How to make sure you do not pay VAT

To avoid paying VAT on the above goods or services, you will need to provide your supplier with a written declaration that you are entitled to buy these goods without paying VAT. A parent can sign a declaration on behalf of a disabled child. While there is no official form for making a declaration, a suggested declaration can be found at section 10 of VAT Notice 701/7 - VAT reliefs for people with disabilities. This can be downloaded from HMRC, Web: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/consumers-disabled.htm>

It is the supplier's responsibility to check that all the conditions for zero-rating are met. If you have been charged VAT incorrectly, your supplier may be able to make an adjustment to their VAT records and refund you this money. You cannot obtain a refund of VAT from HMRC.

For further advice on zero-rating of VAT, you can contact our free helpline. Alternatively you can contact HMRC on Tel: 0845 302 0203, Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm.

## Commercial suppliers

There are many commercial suppliers of aids and equipment which also operate mail order services. Because of the vast range it is important to seek independent advice. The following is a list of some of those suppliers. Please note that their appearance on this list should not be seen as an endorsement by Contact a Family of their products.

### Daily living equipment and products

#### DCS Joncare Ltd

Tel: 01235 523 353  
Web: <http://www.dcsjoncare.com>

#### Lisclare Ltd

Tel: 028 9079 4000  
Web: <http://www.lisclare.com>

#### Nottingham Rehab Supplies

Tel: 0845 120 4522  
Web: <http://www.nrs-uk.co.uk>

Some of the Disabled Living Foundation's factsheets also list commercial suppliers, see page 26 for contact details.

### Play and sensory resources

#### TFH Special Needs Toys

Tel: 01299 827 820  
Web: <http://www.specialneedstoys.com/ukaa/index.asp>

#### SpaceKraft Ltd

Tel: 01274 581 007  
Web: <http://www.spacekraft.co.uk>

#### Rompa International

Tel: 0845 230 1177  
Web: <http://www.rompa.com>

#### Mike Ayres Design & Development Ltd

Tel: 0114 235 6880  
Web: <http://www.mike-ayres.co.uk>

#### The Novelty Warehouse

Web: <http://www.thenoveltywarehouse.com>

See the National Association of Toy & Leisure Libraries (NATLL) 'Good Toy Guide', and 'Special Needs Suppliers List'. Contact details on page 14.

### Other suppliers

#### Bag Books

Tel: 020 7627 0444  
Web: <http://www.bagbooks.org>

Design and produce multi-sensory story-packs for people with learning disabilities.

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

## **Bikedock**

Tel: 0845 062 5500

Web: <http://www.bikedock.com>

A bike retail and mail order company. Also specialise in trikes for cyclists with special needs.

Also available from The Disabled Living Foundation is their list 'Some suppliers of a range of children's equipment'. This can be viewed or downloaded from Web: <http://tinyurl.com/9lnqu>

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation also supply information about 'Specialist equipment and safety adaptations'. This includes suppliers of items such as toughened furniture, special flooring, beds and bedding.

## **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation**

c/o The Old Courthouse, New Road Avenue, Chatham, Kent ME4 6BE

Tel: 0845 602 7885

Web: <http://www.thecbf.org.uk>

## **Consumer rights**

When buying goods you have a right to expect certain standards. This applies when buying in person or by mail order. If something goes wrong and/or you're dissatisfied with the service or goods, try contacting the supplier first. If this fails, then seek further specialist advice. It is important to do so as soon as possible, as your rights may depend on when the transaction took place, otherwise you could find that you're out of time.

Your local advice service or trading standards service can provide further advice. Information on your rights, produced by Trading Standards Central, which is a government department, can be downloaded from Web: <http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/index.cfm>

Consumers in Northern Ireland can get further information from the Consumer Affairs and Trading Standards Service Web: <http://tinyurl.co.uk/8jrm>

Consumer Direct is a government-funded telephone and online service offering information and advice on consumer issues. Tel: 0845 404 05 06 Web: <http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk>

## **Adapting your home**

If you need to adapt your home to make it easier for you or your child to manage, then you may be entitled to a Disabled Facilities Grant (or Home Improvement Grant if you live in Scotland). For anyone considering an application for a grant, it is advisable to seek further help and advice as the system can be quite complex.

### **Disabled Facilities Grants (England and Wales)**

To be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), you must be an owner occupier, tenant (private, local authority or housing association) or landlord with a disabled tenant.

The grant can help with the cost of works such as building safe play areas, installing a stair-lift, adapting a lighting or heating system, or building a new bathroom facility. Grants can also be given for work which enables access to gardens.

Whatever the proposed work, it must be agreed that these are 'necessary and appropriate' to meet the disabled person's needs. Also the work must be 'reasonable and practicable' and this will take into account the age and condition of the property.

If a grant is made to meet the needs of a disabled child or young person, there should be no means-test. This means that your financial circumstances should not be taken into account. A child is someone aged 15 and under. A young person is someone who is 16 or over, but under 19, who does not get certain means-tested benefits in their own right

If you need to adapt your home to make it easier for you or your child to manage then you may be entitled to a Disabled Facilities Grant

and who is not in advanced education (for example, not in university or other courses at an advanced level).

Mandatory grants are awarded where the works are considered essential to enable better access and movement around the home, and to essential facilities in it. This includes access to the garden. The grant can also cover the costs of building essential facilities where necessary. The maximum grant is £30,000 in England and £36,000 in Wales. However, if costs exceed this limit, the council has the discretion to give a further grant covering the full costs of the mandatory works.

Local authorities also have discretionary powers to provide financial and other assistance for improvements or repairs to the home. This can be in the form of a grant, loan, labour, relocation expenses, materials or advice. Contact your local

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**



housing authority to find out how these new powers apply in your area.

The statutory time limit for assessing your entitlement to a grant is six months from receiving your formal application. But it is important to be aware that contacting social services or an occupational therapist (OT) to ask for an assessment is not the same as making a formal application. There are no specific time-limits on how long you may have to wait to see an OT. Because of this, some families have endured lengthy delays before their formal application is even submitted.

To minimise delays, you should make a formal application for a grant as soon as you can. You can do this even if you are still waiting for an OT to come and do an assessment. To make a formal

application, you will need to complete a special form available from the local authority or submit an application in writing. Your local authority cannot refuse to issue a grant application form. Seek advice from our helpline if it does refuse or if you are experiencing long delays in the grant process.

It is important to remember that you cannot get a grant for work that you have already carried out.

#### **Disabled Facilities Grants (Northern Ireland)**

The system for getting help with adaptations in Northern Ireland is similar to that for Wales and England. Since February 2004, parents or people with parental responsibilities are no longer means-tested for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

It is important to remember that you cannot get a grant for work that you have already carried out.

The maximum grant is £25,000 and it will be necessary for an occupational therapist to recommend that the adaptations are 'necessary and appropriate' for the disabled child.

These rules only apply to home owners or those who rent in the private sector. Different arrangements exist for families who live in public sector housing. These are housing executive or housing association tenants.

Applicants in Northern Ireland should contact their local housing executive office for a preliminary enquiry form.

#### **Grants for improvements and adaptations in Scotland**

The Scottish government intends to make major changes to the funding of home improvements in Scotland, including new rules on grants to meet the costs of work needed by disabled people.

#### **The current system of grants**

Until the introduction of the new system, home improvement grants are available from the housing authority to help with adaptations. Grants tend to be made only to homeowners or private tenants. Council tenants and Scottish Homes

tenants are expected to approach their landlords for help to adapt their homes. Housing associations should arrange to have the work carried out for tenants assessed as needing the adaptation. Seek further advice from the helpline if you are refused this help by your landlord.

Before any help can be considered, the social work department must carry out an assessment of the disabled person's needs, to determine if the work is necessary. It is also worth noting that grants can be awarded for work to a property that a disabled person intends to move into.

In most cases, the council can decide whether to give a home improvement grant or not. However, mandatory grants are available in certain circumstances, for example, for the installation of additional standard amenities (such as a bath, shower, sink, hand basin or toilet) required by a disabled occupant.

Councils can usually only give grants for work costing up to £20,000, although they can apply to the Scottish Executive to go above that limit if there are good reasons. The actual amount of any grant you get will depend on a means-test of your income. For certain types of work (including adaptations required to make a property suitable for a disabled occupant), a minimum grant of 50 per cent of costs is available regardless of income. If you are entitled to more than

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Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

50 per cent under the means-test, then you will get the higher figure. Most state benefits are not counted as income. Anyone in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (ibJSA) or the guarantee element of Pension Credit should be eligible to a 100 per cent grant.

You must not start work on any adaptations before your application has been approved in writing, otherwise you will not be eligible for a grant.

### The proposed new system of grants

The Scottish Government have published draft guidance outlining plans to introduce mandatory grants that will cover the provision of not only standard amenities (for example, bath, shower, sink, hand basin or toilet) but also any other work to a property that is assessed as being essential to meet the needs of a disabled person.

However, this will not cover work to 'extend the original structure of the property in order to provide additional living accommodation'. If an extension provides a standard amenity (for example, a downstairs bathroom) alongside additional living accommodation, the draft guidance says that a grant would be awarded for the appropriate portion of the work only. If an extension solely makes space for a standard amenity and no additional living space is created, then a mandatory grant should be given.

If a mandatory grant is awarded on the basis of disability, it is proposed that this will cover at least 80 per cent of costs.

People in receipt of Income Support, ibJSA, Pension Credit (guarantee credit) and Employment and Support Allowance (income-related) are expected to get 100 per cent of costs met. Everyone else will be assessed to see if they can contribute to the costs of the other 20 per cent of the work. The formula for assessing any contribution is likely to be left to the discretion of each local authority.

At the time of writing, there is no timetable for the introduction of these new housing grants and these proposals could be subject to changes. For up to date information, contact our free helpline.

## Challenging decisions

If you're unhappy about the outcome of an application for a grant, or the length of time it has taken to reach a decision, then seek further advice. Ways of challenging decisions include talking to your local council, complaining using the local authority complaints procedure, or asking the local government ombudsman to investigate. A local citizen's advice bureau or home improvement agency may be able to give additional advice.

### Getting further help and advice

Home improvement agencies, sometimes called 'care and repair agencies', exist to help home owners or private tenants improve their living conditions. This involves giving technical and financial advice as well as help and guidance through the application process for grants. They may also be able to identify other sources of financial help if the grant isn't enough.



For information about local agencies in England, contact:

### Foundations

Tel: 01457 891 909

Web: <http://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com>

For Scotland contact:

### Care and Repair Forum Scotland

Tel: 0141 221 9879

Web: <http://www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk>

For Wales contact:

### Care and Repair Cymru

Tel: 029 2057 6286

Web: <http://www.careandrepair.org.uk>

If you live in Northern Ireland, a local disability advice project should be able to help further. You can also visit the website of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive where a number of helpful publications can be downloaded,  
Web: [http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi\\_publications.htm](http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/foi_publications.htm)

This includes the booklets 'Adapting your own home — a step by step guide for people with disabilities' for private and public sector housing. You can also contact our Northern Ireland office, Tel: 028 9262 7552, e-mail: [nireland.office@cafamil.org.uk](mailto:nireland.office@cafamil.org.uk)

For families in Scotland, more detailed information can be found in the guide 'Housing Grants — An applicant's guide to improvement and repair grants for private housing' available from the Scottish Executive. This can also be downloaded from their website.

Web: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/housing/hogr.pdf>

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamil.org.uk](http://www.cafamil.org.uk)**

You can also contact our Scotland office  
Tel: 0131 659 2930,  
e-mail: [scotland.office@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:scotland.office@cafamily.org.uk)

People in England and Wales can find further information on the Communities and Local Government website, such as the good practice guide 'Delivering Housing Adaptations for Disabled People'.  
Web: <http://www.tinyurl.com/a37xz>

## Further sources of help and advice

**Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)**  
380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU  
Tel: 0845 130 9177  
Textphone: 020 7432 8009 (Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm)  
Web: <http://www.dlf.org.uk>

DLF produces a comprehensive range of factsheets on choosing daily living equipment. This includes advice on equipment for children who need help to dress, personal care (toileting, bathing, washing) and beds and bed accessories. The factsheets can be downloaded from their website or you can ring the equipment helpline where up-to-date product and supplier information can also be given.

They also have a website SARA (Self Assessment, Rapid Access), which is an online service with information on products that may help.  
Web: <http://www.asksara.org.uk/>

**Assist UK**  
Redbank House, 4 St Chad's Street,  
Manchester M8 8QA  
Tel: 0870 770 2866  
Textphone: 0870 770 5813  
Web: <http://www.assist-uk.org>

Assist UK leads a UK wide network of locally-situated Disabled Living Centres. Each centre includes a permanent exhibition of products and equipment that give people opportunities to see and try products.

**Remap**  
D9 Chaucer Business Park, Kemsing,  
Sevenoaks TN15 6YU  
Tel: 0845 130 0456  
Web: <http://www.remap.org.uk>

Design, manufacture and supply appliances to meet the individual needs of disabled people where they cannot be sourced commercially.

**Ricability (Research Institute for Consumer Affairs)**  
30 Angel Gate, City Road, London EC1V 2PT  
Tel: 020 7427 2460  
Textphone: 020 7427 2469  
Web: <http://www.ricability.org.uk>

Ricability is an independent research charity that provides consumer information for disabled and older people. Guides are available on request or through their website.

**Abilitynet**  
PO Box 94, Warwick CV34 5WS  
Tel/Textphone: 0800 269 545  
Web: <http://www.abilitynet.co.uk>

Offer advice and information on information and communications technology (ICT). Also supply a range of factsheets and skillsheets (available on their website) that give detailed information on a wide range of assistive technology.

**British Red Cross**  
44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL  
Tel: 0844 412 2804  
Web: <http://www.redcross.org.uk>

Has a volunteer-led medical equipment service that provides wheelchair hire and short-term loans of equipment in almost 1,000 outlets in the UK.

### Useful websites

There are numerous suppliers of disability equipment, mobility products and daily living aids in the UK. It can be difficult to find a suitable company. Below is a small number. Again, please note that their appearance on this list should not be seen as an endorsement by Contact a Family of their products.

**Youreable**  
Web: <http://www.youreable.com>

A community based website that has information on products and services for disabled people.

**eBay**  
Web: <http://pages.ebay.co.uk/zones/disabilityresources.html>

eBay has a disability resources page in association with Youreable

**Independent Living**  
Web: <http://www.independentliving.co.uk>

A site providing news, views and product information designed to assist with living independently.

**Disabled Living Foundation**  
Web: <http://www.dlf.org.uk/professional/resources.html>

Online directory listing manufacturers and suppliers of a range of disability equipment.

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**



## Frequently asked questions

**I bought a trike for my disabled son and was told by the supplier that I have to claim back the VAT. How can I do this?**

First of all, you need to establish whether or not the trike should be zero-rated (see 'Value Added Tax (VAT)' on page 17). To reiterate this advice, VAT relief does not apply to general purpose goods which are of benefit to disabled people. So you will have to pay VAT, unless the trike has been solely designed to be used by your disabled son. You should also be aware that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs do not refund VAT to customers. Instead it is the responsibility of the supplier to determine whether or not the item in question is subject to VAT. If

you have been charged VAT incorrectly, your supplier may be able to make an adjustment to their VAT records and refund you the VAT.

**With help from the Disabled Facilities Grants Scheme (Disabled Persons Allowance in Northern Ireland), I've just turned one of my reception rooms into a special playroom for my disabled child. I've been told I can get some help with the Council Tax because of this. Is this true?**

This is possible under the Disability Reduction Scheme. When a property has been altered in a certain way to accommodate the needs of a disabled person, then the 'band' for your property can be lowered. The lower the band, the smaller the bill. In your case, you qualify because you have a room which is needed by and predominantly used by

your disabled son. It is worth noting that if the dwelling is in band 'A', then you can get a reduction of one-sixth of your bill. And also that the reduction can be fully backdated. Properties in the lowest band already, (A), only have the right to backdate to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2000.

**I've just enquired about applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant and I've been told by the occupational therapist (OT) that there's a waiting list for the assessment. It could be months before I'm seen by the OT and two years before I get a grant. What are my rights?**

The assessment by the OT is a crucial part of the grants process. Following on from the OT's recommendations, a formal application is often submitted to the housing authority. But you can still make a formal application to the housing authority for the grant before the OT's assessment. This can help speed up the process as the authority is then required to make a decision within six months of receiving the application. Within that time, the OT will hopefully visit your home to carry out the assessment.

If you don't get a decision within the time limit, you should write to them asking why you haven't heard anything and asking for a decision to be made. If there is still no decision, then seek advice on other possible remedies, like making a complaint using the local authority's complaints procedure or the local government ombudsman. See 'Adapting your home' on page 21 for more information.

**I bought a second hand wheelchair from a trader, but I've been told I don't have the same rights as if I'd bought it brand new, and I can't return it if there's a fault. Is this true?**

No, you have the same rights as if you'd bought a new one, and the trader is also obliged to point out any faults before you pay for it. If any faults have been pointed out, then this may affect your rights. Contact your nearest advice service or trading standards office for further advice. See 'Consumer rights' on page 20

## Explanation of terms

### Health authority

Throughout this guide, we refer to the 'health authority'. In your area, this might also be known as the Primary Care Trust (or Health and Social Services Trust if you live in Northern Ireland). However, some equipment services are provided by the local authority.

In England, services for adults and children from the local authority have been split. Previously known as social services, it is likely that the office in your area responsible for children will be called 'Children's Services'. They will be responsible for delivering education and practical help for disabled children, in addition to that available from the health service.

In Wales, Local Health Boards assess health needs.

In Scotland, the department of your local authority involved in providing equipment services is usually called 'social work'.

In Northern Ireland, it will be part of the Health and Social Services Trust.

### Local authority

Please also note that throughout the guide, we use the term local authority or LA when referring to the part of the local authority that's responsible for education, which used to be known as the Local Education Authority (LEA). This is in response to the Department for Children, Schools and Families' decision to use this wording. In your area, it may now be called 'Education and Learning' or 'Children's Services'.

Note: The Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs still refers to Local Education Authority (LEA).

With thanks to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for funding to publish this guide.

Contact a Family is on Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Twitter and YouTube. We also have an office in Second Life.

Join us at:

### MySpace

[www.myspace.com/contactafamily](http://www.myspace.com/contactafamily)

### Bebo

[www.bebo.com/contactafamily](http://www.bebo.com/contactafamily)

### Facebook

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)  
and search for 'Contact a Family'

### Twitter

<http://twitter.com/contactafamily>

### YouTube

[www.youtube.com/user/cafamily](http://www.youtube.com/user/cafamily)

### Second Life

You can find our Contact a Family virtual advice office in Second Life on Aloft Island 19.40.22 (PG) or visit <http://tiny.cc/P9A5I> to teleport there directly

Freephone helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Web: **[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

## Getting in contact with us

Free helpline for parents and families

**0808 808 3555**

Textphone

**0808 808 3556**

Open Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm;

Mon, 5.30–7.30pm

Access to over 170 languages

**www.cafamily.org.uk**

**www.makingcontact.org**

Contact a Family Head Office:

**209-211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN**

Tel **020 7608 8700**

Fax **020 7608 8701**

e-mail **info@cafamily.org.uk**

Web **www.cafamily.org.uk**



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## Other information booklets available

This guide is one of a series produced for parents and groups concerned with the care of disabled children. A full list of Contact a Family publications is available on request or can be downloaded from our website [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

- Concerned about your child? <sup>(UK)</sup>
- Understanding your child's behaviour <sup>(UK)</sup>
- The tax credits guide <sup>(UK)</sup>
- Working <sup>(UK)</sup>
- Disabled children's services in England and Wales
- Getting direct payments for your disabled child <sup>(England & Wales)</sup>
- Dealing with debt <sup>(England & Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland)</sup>
- Holidays, play and leisure <sup>(UK)</sup>
- Benefits, tax credits and other financial help <sup>(UK)</sup>

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Incorporating **The Lady Hoare Trust**

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