



## About diagnosis: Concerned about your child

How to identify the right specialist if you have concerns about your child's:

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

Part 10



30 years of  
strengthening  
families with  
disabled children

For some children, getting help early can make a real difference and there are lots of different people who can help. This guide can help you identify some of the professionals you may need to have contact with and when they may be able to help you.

It can be very difficult to decide whether your child is just developing more slowly and will catch up or whether you need to ask for help. It can also be very confusing understanding the roles of the various professionals involved in the care of your child.

You can talk about any worries you have about your child with your family doctor (GP), nurse or member of your health visiting team. 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.

Local children's centres can also provide advice and help your child's development through play and learning experiences. In Scotland these are often called family 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 whenever your child visits a health professional.

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.
- **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.

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

- **Pre-school home visiting/service** (sometimes called **portage**) – which helps children with early communication and pre school learning skills.
- **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 on to 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.
- **Dietician** – who can provide advice on food, diet and nutrition.
- **Clinical psychologist** – who can offer support and advice on how to encourage your child to eat.

Call our helpline for a copy of 'Feeding and eating'.



## Movement and coordination

If your child has difficulty sitting up, walking, handling objects, or using certain parts of their body compared to other children of their age. 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.
- **Occupational therapist** – to assess your child's coordination and mobility, provide advice and recommend aids or 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, **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.

- **Paediatrician** – to check for medical reasons why your child might be finding this difficult.
- **Clinical psychologist** – to give advice on how to encourage your child to use the toilet.

Once your child reaches a certain age if they still require nappies the NHS can help by providing nappies and incontinence equipment. This service varies in different areas. Your health visitor or GP can tell you more about this service.

Call our helpline for a copy of 'Potty/Toilet training'.

### 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:

- **Nursery or play school/group** – for children under five who have staff trained to help your child learn new skills.
- **Pre-school home visiting/service** (sometimes called **portage**) – to help your child with early communication and learning skills, long before they start school
- **Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)** – 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.

- **Educational psychologist** – who might observe your child and advise on which teaching or behaviour programmes will be of most benefit.

Call our helpline for copies of our guides on special educational needs.



### Behaviour

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. If your child's behaviour seriously impacts on family life and his or her ability to learn, a doctor, **health visitor** or your child's school might refer you to a:

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

## Sleeping at night

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

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

- **Health visitor** – who can suggest strategies to promote a good sleep pattern.
- **Paediatrician or psychiatrist** – who can assess your child's needs and suggest various treatments or behaviour plans to help your child's sleep.

In some areas there are specially trained sleep counselors who can help families find what works best for their child.

Call our helpline for a copy of 'Helping your child's sleep'.

## Description of specialist terms in alphabetical order

These are some professionals you may have contact with:

- **Audiologist** – carries out hearing tests and can help a child obtain hearing aids should they need them.
- **Care manager** – refers to a person responsible for assessing, organising and reviewing the total care package required for an individual. They may work for the local children's services, social services or the health authority. However, most decisions about care packages are usually made by a team rather than an individual worker.

- **Child and adolescent psychiatrist** – a doctor who specialises in problems that affect the ways a young person thinks, feels or behaves. They 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.

- **Child development team** – usually based in a child development centre, they are a team of child health professionals who support disabled children.

- **Children's community nurse** – not available in all areas. Responsible for carrying out certain nursing procedures and treatments at home. Can also advise families on caring for their child at home.

- **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 impact on the daily life of the whole family.

- **Community dentist** – can provide advice on diet and planning for healthy teeth. They are trained to work with children and have special equipment for working with children with disabilities who may find mainstream dental services difficult to access.

- **Community paediatrician** – (see Paediatrician)

- **Consultant** – often the most senior member heading a team of medical professionals. However, if your child has complex needs, there may be several consultants involved in their care.

■ **Continance adviser** – provides advice and practical help. Once a child reaches a certain age, they can help you find appropriate nappies or equipment if the child is still incontinent, support to promote continence and the management of incontinence. May also supply continence aids. Some areas have Enuresis clinics to help with daytime and night-time wetting.

■ **Dietician/nutritionist** – can advise on food, diet and nutrition where a child is reluctant to eat, needs to be on a special diet or has difficulties chewing and/or swallowing.

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

■ **Geneticists** – doctors and genetic counsellors (who may have a nursing background). They provide information about the likelihood of a genetic condition happening in a family and about the medical management of a condition.

■ **Doctor/GP** – will be the first point of call for medical help and advice. They can ask for your child to be seen by a specialist and refer for second opinions.

■ **Health visitor** – a nurse who has had 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.



■ **Key worker** – maintains regular contact with your family and ensures that information about your child is shared efficiently with everyone who is working with your family. However, they are not yet available in all areas.

■ **Lead professional** – when a child has a team of doctors and specialists involved in their care the lead professional may coordinate or act as a single point of contact for a child and their family. This helps provide an integrated response when a range of services are involved.

■ **Metabolic disease specialists** – these are most commonly paediatric specialists who look for biochemical causes for disability.

■ **Nursery or play school/group** provides opportunities for pre-school children, usually aged three to five, 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.

■ **Nursery nurses** – can work in a nursery or playschool setting, they provide educational and fun activities to stimulate and help a child's development. Some work with the health visiting team and can provide support and guidance with certain aspects of raising children.

■ **Occupational therapist** – pays particular attention to hand-eye coordination, mobility, 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.

■ **Orthoptist** – works with children who have vision problems, abnormal eye movements and can check for squints.

■ **Paediatrician** – doctor who specialises in the care and treatment of babies, children and young people in a hospital or out-patients department. A **Community paediatrician** usually works outside hospital and is often involved with disabled children. They may be involved with educational assessments.

■ **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.

■ **Physiotherapist** – provides therapy through exercise and movement which will help the child to gain as much mobility and independence as possible. A physiotherapist may work with a child at home, in school, nursery or in a health setting like a clinic.

■ **Portage worker** – provides a home-teaching service for pre-school children with delayed development, offering practical help and ideas to assist with the development of play, communication, relationships and learning for young children.

■ **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.

■ **Social worker** – involved in assessing families for practical help, for example getting a break from caring. They can also provide advice and emotional support with social and financial problems. See section 'Services from your local authority', in 'Practical and financial help'.

■ **Speech and language therapist** – 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. They can also help if there are problems with eating, drinking and swallowing.

■ **Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)** – teacher 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 pre-school home visiting teacher, the child's class teacher or another member of school staff will co-ordinate additional support for learning.

## Specialist departments within health

Hospitals will vary in the range of conditions they are able to treat. Below is a list of some of the specialist departments and the functions they cover:

- **Cardiology** – heart and circulation
- **Dermatology** – skin
- **Endocrinology** – any internal organs which produce hormones, such as the thyroid gland, pituitary gland and ovaries
- **ENT** – ears, nose and throat
- **Gastroenterology** – oesophagus, stomach and intestines
- **Haematology** – blood

- **Immunology** – the body's reaction to dealing with bacteria and viruses
- **Nephrology** – kidneys and the urinary tract
- **Neurology** – brain and nervous system
- **Ophthalmology** – eyes
- **Orthopaedics** – bones and joints
- **Psychology** – behaviour and mental processes
- **Respiratory** – lungs and associated organs which involve breathing
- **Rheumatology** – joints and muscles

### Getting in contact with us

Free helpline: **0808 808 3555**  
Open Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm;  
Mon, 5.30–7.30pm

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

Contact a Family Head Office:  
209-211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN

Tel 020 7608 8700  
Fax 020 7608 8701  
Textphone 0808 808 3556  
Email [info@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:info@cafamily.org.uk)

Registered Charity Number: 284912  
Company limited by guarantee  
Registered in England and Wales No. 1633333  
VAT Registration No. GB 749 3846 82  
Charity registered in Scotland No. SC039169

Although great care has been taken in the compilation and preparation of this guide to ensure accuracy, Contact a Family cannot take any responsibility for any errors or omissions. The photographs in this guide do not relate to any personal accounts.



### Other guides in this series

- 1 How we can help
- 2 Support for parents
- 3 What is developmental delay?
- 4 Understanding behaviour
- 5 Getting a diagnosis
- 6 What if we don't get a diagnosis?
- 7 What is a genetic condition?
- 8 Rare disorders
- 9 Sources of medical information
- 10 Concerned about your child
- 11 Practical and financial help

Order code: i32j