

USEFUL SERVICES

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A wide range of statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and local groups offer information, advice and support for new parents. This chapter will help you find what you need.

HEALTH SERVICES

Family doctors

You can contact your family doctor (GP) at any time, whether it's for yourself or your child. Some doctors will see small babies at the beginning of surgery hours or without an appointment if necessary, but be prepared to wait. Some will give advice over the phone. Most doctors provide developmental reviews and immunisation themselves, or you can go to a child health clinic.

Registering with your GP

Register your baby with your GP as early as possible in case you need their help. You can use the pink card that you will be given when you register your baby's birth. Sign the card and take or send it to your GP. If you need the GP to see your baby before you have registered the birth, you can go to the surgery and fill in a registration form there. If you move, register with a new doctor close to you as soon as possible (see page 154).





Health visitors

A health visitor will usually visit you for the first time around 10 days after your baby is born. After that, you might only see your health visitor at the child health clinic (see the next column), although you can ask to see them at any time. If you are on your own, or struggling, your health visitor will probably make a point of coming by to see whether you need any help.

Your health visitor is a qualified nurse who has had extra training to become a health visitor. Part of their role is to help families, especially families with babies and young children, to avoid illness and keep healthy. Health visitors are part of a team offering screening and developmental checks as part of the Healthy Child Programme. Talk to your health visitor or their team if you feel anxious or depressed. You can also discuss any concerns you might have, including about breastfeeding or general baby and toddler feeding, and concerns you might have about your child's behaviour. They will be able to offer advice and suggest where to find help. They may also be able to put you in touch with groups where you can meet other parents.

Your health visitor can visit you at home, or you can see them at your child health clinic, Children's Centre, doctor's surgery or health centre, depending on where they are based. Your health visitor will make sure you have their phone number.

health visitors support families

Child health clinics

Child health clinics are run by health visitors and doctors, and offer regular health and development reviews (see page 62) and immunisations (see page 99). You can talk about any problems to do with your child, but if your child is ill and is likely to need treatment, you should go to your GP.

Clinics are good places to meet other parents, too. Some run mother and baby or parent and toddler groups, breastfeeding and peer support groups.

Community midwives

You will be given contact details for midwives based in your local community. In the community, midwives provide antenatal and postnatal care in a range of different settings, including Children's Centres. They can also visit you in your own home.

Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

Sometimes children need more specialist help with their emotional health, development or behaviour.

CAMHS professionals are trained to understand children's emotional well-being and psychological health, as well as the pressures and strains of family life. If your GP, health visitor or child health worker cannot give you the help you need, they may suggest you see a CAMHS worker.

Patient advice and liaison services (PALS)



PALS provide information about local health services, including lists of local doctors. They can also advise you on how to get what you need from your health services and tell you about the complaints procedures. Contact your local PALS by calling your local NHS trust or primary care trust and asking to be put through, or by calling NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

How to change your GP

You may need to change your GP if you move. You may want to change for other reasons, even if you are not moving house.

First, find a GP who will take you on. Ask around, and see if anybody can recommend one. Your local PALS or NHS Choices can give you a list of the doctors in your area. You may have to try more than one GP before you find one willing to accept you, especially if you live in a heavily populated area. If you cannot find a GP after several attempts, your local health authority will do it for you. Send them your medical card if you have it, or the address of your previous GP if not.

When you call at your new GP's surgery, they may ask you why you want to change. You don't have

to give a reason, but if you do, try to avoid criticising your old GP and say something positive about the new one instead. For example, the surgery may be easier to get to, the hours may be better, the GP may have a good reputation for treating young children, the practice may be larger and provide more services, or you may prefer a woman doctor or one who shares your cultural background.



Leave your medical card with the receptionist. You don't have to contact your old GP at all. If you have lost your medical card, your

new GP will probably ask you to complete a form instead. In some cases, they may want you to get in touch with your primary care trust (the number will be listed in the phone book) and get hold of a new medical card.

You will need to give the primary care trust the name and address of your old GP. If you don't know them, the whole process could take a while. If you need treatment in the meantime, you can approach any GP, who must take you on, at least temporarily. In this case, it's best to say at the start that you need treatment straight away, even if you are also asking to be permanently registered with that GP.

**make sure
you are
registered
with a GP**



LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES

Sure Start Children's Centres

Sure Start Children's Centres are the government's flagship policy for under-fives and their families, providing a range of support and help. Children's Centres work closely with maternity services and health visitors and provide health and family support services. They also provide integrated early learning and childcare (including the free early education entitlement for three and four-year-olds – see page 81) as well as advice and information for mothers and their partners on a range of issues – from effective parenting to training and employment opportunities. Some provide specific services for young parents.

There are now over 3,000 Children's Centres across England and by 2010 there will be 3,500, one for every community. Your local Families Information Service (see next column) can provide details of your nearest Sure Start Children's Centre.

More information

www.surestart.gov.uk

Families Information Service

Families Information Services (FISs) provide information about registered childcare, free early education places and other local services and facilities that you may need to support your children. There is an FIS in every local authority area. To contact your local FIS, you can call 0800 2 346 346 or go to your local authority website.

Education departments

The education department (in the phone book under the name of your local authority) is responsible for and can provide information on all the state-run nursery schools, nursery classes and infant schools in your area. The department is also responsible for assessing children with special needs and providing suitable education for them.

Housing departments

The housing department (in the phone book under the name of your local authority) is responsible for all council housing in your area and runs the council housing waiting list. It has a legal duty to house people in certain priority groups who either are or soon will be homeless through no fault of

their own. Priority groups include pregnant women and parents of children under 16.

Through your housing department, you should also be able to find out about local housing associations, which provide housing for rent and in some cases shared ownership.

Social workers

Social workers provide support for people who are having difficulty coping, financially or practically. A social worker may be able to get your child a nursery place, help you find better housing, and give you information about your rights. To contact a social worker, phone your local authority children's social care department, or ask your health visitor to put you in touch.

Advice centres

Advice centres are non-profit-making agencies that give advice on issues including benefits and housing. They include Citizens Advice Bureaux, community law centres, welfare rights offices, housing aid centres, neighbourhood centres and community projects. Look for them under these names in your phone book, or under the name of your local authority.





GETTING THE MOST OUT OF SERVICES

Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of services:

- You might have a number of issues to discuss. Before you go, think through what you want to talk about and what information you can give that will be helpful. It can help to make some notes and take them with you as a reminder. It's much easier to talk and listen if you are not distracted. Unless your child needs to be with you, try to get a friend or neighbour to look after them so that you can concentrate.
- If you do have to take your child, bring some books or toys with you to entertain them.
- Take time to think about some of the answers or advice that you are given. At first you might think that it's not what you are looking for, but it might just be a solution you have not thought about. If you still think it will not work, then explain why, and try to come up with some different ideas.
- If a problem is making life difficult or is really worrying you, it's worth keeping going until you get some kind of answer, if not a solution. If the first person you talk to cannot help, ask if they can suggest where else you might go. If your GP or health visitor suggests a remedy that doesn't work, go back and ask again.
- Some professionals are not good at explaining things. If you don't understand, don't feel embarrassed about saying so.

It's their responsibility to be clear, not yours to guess what they mean. Go back over what is said to you to get it straight. It might even help if they write it down for you.

- If your first language is not English, you may be able to get help from a link worker or health advocate. Their job is not just to translate what is said, but to act as a friend and make sure that the professionals understand what you need. Ask your health visitor or staff at your local Sure Start Children's Centre if there is a link worker or health advocate in your area.

OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

As well as the services listed above, there are hundreds of local groups and voluntary organisations all over the country offering help and support for parents. This section lists just a few of them.

Helplines

- **Parentline** 0808 800 2222 (textphone: 0800 783 6783) or www.parentlineplus.org.uk – immediate help from volunteer parent support workers 24 hours a day, seven days a week
Opening hours: 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- **Contact a Family** 0808 808 3555 or www.cafamily.org.uk – a one-stop shop for parents with disabled children.
Opening hours: Mon 10am–4pm and 5.30pm–7.30pm, Tues–Fri 10am–4pm.
- **Family Rights Group Advice Service** 0800 801 0366 or www.frg.org.uk – support for parents and other family members whose children are involved with or need social care services.
Opening hours: Mon–Fri 10am–3.30pm.
- **Advisory Centre for Education Advice Line** 0808 800 5793 (general education advice) and 0808 800 0327 (exclusions) or www.ace-ed.org.uk – information, support and legal advice to help parents keep their children at school.
Opening hours: Mon–Tues 9am–5pm, Weds–Fri 10am–5pm.
- **One Parent Families/Gingerbread** (single parent helpline) 0800 018 5026 or www.gingerbread.org.uk – support service for single parents.

- **Lone Parent Helpline** 0800 018 5026 or www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk – help and advice on the issues that matter to lone parents.
Opening hours: Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9am–5pm, Weds 9am–8pm.
- **Children's Legal Centre Child Law Advice Line** 0808 802 0008 or www.childrenslegalcentre.com – advice on child law, services and support.
Opening hours: Mon–Fri 9am–5pm.
- **YoungMinds Parents' Helpline** 0808 802 5544 or www.youngminds.org.uk – service for any parent worried about their child's mental health.
Opening hours: Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 10am–4pm, Weds 10am–4pm and 6pm–8pm.

Local groups

To find out about local groups, try the following:

- Ask your health visitor or GP.
- Look on www.nhs.uk or www.netmums.com for a list of groups in your area.
- Ask at your Citizens' Advice Bureau or other advice centre, your local library, your social services department, or your local Council for Voluntary Service (see the phone book). Note: this may also be listed under Voluntary Action Group, Rural Community Council or Volunteer Bureau.
- Look on noticeboards and for leaflets in your child health clinic, health centre, GP's waiting room, Sure Start Children's Centre, local library, advice centre, supermarket, newsagent or toy shop.
- Look through the list of national organisations in the useful organisations section. Many run local groups.

In many areas there are groups offering support to parents who share the same background and culture. Many of these are women's or mothers' groups. Many Sure Start Children's Centres also run fathers' groups and separate groups for teenage mothers and fathers. Your health visitor may know whether there are any groups like these near you.

Alternatively, you can ask at your local library, your Citizens Advice Bureau or other advice or community centre, local Sure Start Children's Centre, your local Council for Voluntary Service or your Community Relations Council (see the phone book). Note: this may be listed under Council for Racial Equality or Community Relations Office. Support is also available through other channels such as web services, videos and audio materials. See www.dcsf.gov.uk/parentknowhow for further information.

Helpful tips

Do it yourself

If you cannot find a local group that suits you or cannot find the support you need, why not think about starting your own? Many local groups have begun through a couple of mothers (perhaps with crying babies or sleepless toddlers, or just fed up and lonely) getting together and talking. You could advertise on your clinic noticeboard or in a newsagent's window or local newspaper, or ask your health visitor to put you in touch with other parents who are in the same situation as yourself. You don't have to offer any more than a place to meet and a few cups of coffee.