

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).

Pharmacists

Local pharmacists have knowledge of most everyday health issues. They can suggest the best medicine to help. They are widely available and you do not need an appointment to talk with your pharmacist.

Accident and emergency departments

These are for serious situations like head injuries, burns, broken bones or if you are really worried. You do not need to make an appointment but may need to wait. In an emergency dial 999 to seek immediate help.





Health visitors

A health visitor will usually visit you for the first time during your pregnancy and then at between 10 days and 14 days after your baby is born. After that, your health visitor will advise you of the occasions you will be seen at the child health clinic (see the next column) or at your home, 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 Healthy Future 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, 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. 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.

Dietitians

Dietitians are qualified professionals who are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

Dieticians give practical information about food. They work with infants and children to promote nutritional well-being, prevent food related problems and treat disease.

Your child's doctor or health professional may ask you to bring your child to see a Dietitian for dietary advice for conditions such as faltering growth, food allergy, obesity, diabetes mellitus or other conditions that can be affected by nutrition.

Dietitians run clinics in a variety of different settings. During the visit, your child's weight and length/height will usually be measured and you will be asked about your child's eating pattern. The Dietitian will discuss your child's diet and advise on the best foods, whilst ensuring they get a nutritionally balanced diet. The Dietitian will arrange a follow-up appointment, if required.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapists are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. They specialise in the assessment of a child and young person's abilities in relation to activities they do every day such as self-care, school work and play.

An Occupational Therapist will offer advice, deliver treatment, and recommend equipment or adaptations to overcome or help with any difficulties your child may have to help maximise their potential in the child's home and school setting.

Occupational therapists are often based in Child Development Centres but your GP or HV can advise you on how to make a referral to your local Occupational Therapist.

Orthoptics

An Orthoptist is an Allied Health Professional who is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. Part of the role of an Orthoptist is to assess and treat babies, young children and those with special needs who have a suspected eye problem such as a squint, reduced vision, lazy eye, droopy eyelid or eye movement problem.

The orthoptist will see your child in a Health Centre or hospital setting, depending on where they are based. Orthoptists also work as part of the eye care team and other multi-disciplinary teams. Orthoptists lead the Vision Screening programme for all children in Northern Ireland.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. Children's (Paediatric) physiotherapists work with babies and young children who have problems with movement, e.g. learning to roll, sit, crawl, stand and walk.

The Physiotherapist will look at how your child is moving and if required will give you advice and information on how to help your child. Children's physiotherapy may be provided in a number of settings, e.g. hospital, home or an outpatient setting.

If you have any concerns about your child's movement please discuss this with your health visitor or GP. They may suggest you see a children's physiotherapist.

Podiatry

Podiatrists are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council who provides specialist care and treatment of disorders and conditions that could affect your child's feet or lower limbs. You may need a Podiatrist for advice on how your child's foot is developing, what shoes to wear or an assessment

of how they are walking. You can contact a Podiatrist within your local health care trust.

Radiography

Sure Radiographers are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and work in the hospital setting:

Diagnostic radiographers are responsible for taking and frequently reporting images for diagnosis of your child when ill or following a fall or injury, including, x-rays, ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and computed tomography scanning (CT). Diagnostic radiographers work as part of multidisciplinary teams throughout the hospital.

Therapeutic radiographers are responsible for the management and care of children and adults undergoing radiotherapy before, during and immediately after radiotherapy treatment. Therapeutic Radiographers work as part of the multidisciplinary cancer team and will support children, adults and their families through the entire cancer journey

Speech and Language Therapy

Speech and language therapists are registered professionals with the Health and Care Professions Council. They work with children who need help with their communication skills. This may include difficulties with understanding others; using words and sentences; saying sounds correctly; stammering; voice and interacting with others. Speech and language therapists also work with children who have eating and swallowing difficulties. Ask your health visitor about referral to speech and language therapy if you have concerns about your child's communication.

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. 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 trust 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 health trust (the number will be listed in the phone book) and get hold of a new medical card.

You will need to give the health 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**





Sure Start Centres

Sure Start Centres are the government's policy for under-fives and their families, providing a range of support and help in some areas. Sure Start Centres work closely with maternity services and health visitors and provide health and family support services. They also provide integrated early learning and childcare 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. To find if you live in a Sure Start area, please check www.directgov.uk/sure-start-services



National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

Families Information Services NSPCC
NI Regional Headquarters

First Floor, Unit 7
The Lanyon Building
Jennymount Business Park
North Derby Street
Belfast
BT15 3HN
Tel: 028 9035 1135
help@nspcc.org.uk
www.nspcc.org.uk

The NSPCC is a leading national charity specialising in child protection, with offices in Belfast, Craigavon and Foyle. Provides a range of services in Northern Ireland for both children and adults.

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 health trust, 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.

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 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

- **Parenting NI** 0808 8000722
www.parentingni.org –
Opening hours: Monday to Thursday, 9am–8pm, Friday 9am–5pm.
- **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.
- **One Parent Families/ Gingerbread** (single parent helpline) 0800 018 5026 or www.gingerbread.org.uk – support service for single parents.
- **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.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

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.

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 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. 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 Centre.

Family Nurse Partnership Programme

If you are under 20 and expecting your first baby, a family nurse can visit you to help you have a healthy pregnancy and enjoy being the best mum you can be. Your specially trained family nurse will help you understand all about your pregnancy and how to care for yourself and your baby. Your nurse will visit you regularly during your pregnancy and then after the birth until your baby is two years old. You and your family nurse will decide together what you will cover in each visit. Your nurse will share lots of information with you about pregnancy, giving birth and looking after babies and toddlers, helping you to prepare well and deciding what is right for you and your family. You and your family nurse will get to know each other well and you will be able to rely on her to help you out if things get difficult in any way.

Your nurse will help you plan for your future. You can talk about childcare, education, training and gaining new skills as well as about housing and finances. Together, you decide what you want and how to make it happen.