

Early Support

Helping every child succeed

Early Support and You

A guide to the Early Support programme

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Early Support is the central government mechanism for achieving better co-ordinated, family focused services for young disabled children and their families. It stems from government priorities for restructuring children’s services in response to Every Child Matters and the National Service Framework for children. Its approach and principles – and ways of working – are now becoming standard features of support for families across the country. Children’s Centres are expected to use the Early Support approach and materials to deliver high quality services for families of young disabled children up to the age of 5. In a relatively short period of time, Early Support has become the tried and tested means of providing better support for families.

“Early Support is a programme of which we can all be proud. Its focus on families and on early intervention are its twin strengths”

Lord Adonis, Minister for Schools, DfES

Services that make sense to families

Early Support is a government initiative that puts the needs of families with young disabled children first.

It is designed to ensure that all services provided for families with young disabled children are well co-ordinated and responsive to their needs.

As soon as a young child is identified as needing additional help, parents need to know that they can rely on others for information and support – for example education, social and health services and those provided by the voluntary sector.

What matters most to parents is that the help and support they receive is well planned and well executed. That means that all the services working with the family are co-ordinated and keyed in to their specific needs.

That is where Early Support comes in. The programme aims to ensure that both parents and professionals supporting them are better informed about families' needs and requirements and how these can best be met.

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For Families

Families had a major input into the design of Early Support, and the programme is very much informed by what they identified as areas that needed fixing – for example, the need for key workers, joined up services, more information, less bureaucracy.

The very clear focus on what families need and how services can respond quickly is a direct result of parental involvement in the early stages of Early Support.

That involvement has paid off, with higher quality, more focused services being provided at local, regional and national level.

Families across England have felt these changes directly –

“Early Support has really helped us with our difficulties and had a positive impact on our lives. We are not so stressed or depressed. Parents like us depend on this support to get as good as quality of life as possible”

A parent.

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For Professionals

Like families, professionals have been involved in the development of Early Support at every stage. Their input has resulted in a programme informed by experience and proposals for change that lead directly to improved services for families with a young disabled child.

Early Support is a programme which helps professionals deliver a more co-ordinated service.

With the help of Early Support, and the principles that underpin it, the different agencies involved in supporting families with young disabled children are now much better co-ordinated and respond more coherently to families' needs.

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Removing the burden from families of a large number of contacts in different agencies is one of the principal advantages of Early Support. Key workers are central to the programme, benefiting from the practical materials in place to help them bring services together, providing a single point of reference and contact for families and professionals alike.

Periodic, multi-agency service reviews are encouraged, and the Early Support Service Audit Tool helps with the review and improvement of service delivery.

“One of the joys of being a key worker is helping parents work through systems and processes, and help professionals supporting families – it’s entirely a win-win situation.”

Anissa Haerd, a key worker.

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The materials

The principles and approach that define Early Support are reflected in a set of materials and resources that can be used by families and professionals. The materials have all been developed after close consultation with those in the know – families of course, but also professionals working in both the statutory and voluntary sectors, to ensure relevance and reliability. The materials are:

- information booklets for families about particular conditions or disabilities;
- a family pack that includes a family file which brings together all relevant information about a child's needs and services supporting the family;
- a service audit tool to help professionals evaluate the quality of services provided and help plan improvements;

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- a range of monitoring protocols/developmental journals for deaf children, for children with visual impairment and those with down syndrome
- professional guidance for those working with families using the Early Support approach

The majority of materials can be downloaded from the Early Support website at: www.earlysupport.org.uk

"The materials bear all the hallmarks of other leading players. Their usability is second to none, and their look and feel perfect for both families and professionals."
A Professional

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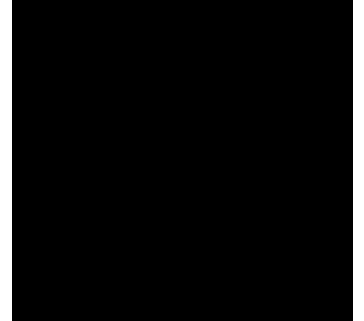
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Moving On

Early Support as a programme initially involved 45 pathfinder areas, but is now being rolled out across England.

Increasingly acknowledged nationally and internationally as a unique model of family support, Early Support's approach has been adopted by a diverse range of organisations, and underpins government policy for young disabled children.

The pathfinders have played a crucial role in informing early intervention policy and practice in their areas, and have played an equally important role in ensuring that the training package associated with Early Support meets the needs of families and professionals.



Training

Early Support training has, like all other aspects of the programme, been developed with the full and active involvement of parents and professionals. Early Support Training therefore has something for everyone – parents and carers, practitioners, and managers. Early Support Training supports the revolution in services for families and their children, and is a key tool in mainstreaming Early Support across the country.

The accredited *Working in Partnership through Early Support* training package is now being offered and is set to become the cornerstone of all early years disability training in the future. More information about the full range of Early Support training courses is available on Early Support's website.

“Early Support Training will transform children’s services in England. It sets a standard to which all services for families should aspire and exceed.”

Philippa Russell, Disability Rights Commissioner

“The philosophy of the modules has been located in family needs and family centred practice: the ‘constant battle’ is there and an excellent impetus for everyone to get Early Support right.” Professional

“I can say without any hesitation that the Early Support training will make a difference and prove to be a fundamental building block in our aspiration to live ordinary lives.” Mark Brown, parent

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