

Education

Early years

Babies and young children

Education for babies and very young children does not have to mean any kind of formal setting or provision. For children this age, engaging them in activities and enabling them to take a full part in family life is the best start you can give them.

You'll find more ideas in the Early Development section of our website, under Children, Families and Education.

As your baby gets a little older, you may want to explore more structured learning opportunities. This could be a home learning service such as Portage. A trained worker will visit you at home and work with you and your child on play based learning activities. You will be involved in choosing which activities are most important to work on.

Some local Down's syndrome support groups also run developmental sessions for babies and young children. Contact your local group to find out what they do.

The Developmental Journal for Babies and Children who have Down's syndrome

This resource supports families to monitor and celebrate their children's development and to share information between families and the professionals they meet. It describes development in sections for communication, socio-emotional, cognition and play, motor and sensory and self-help in 11 developmental steps from birth to 5 years.

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/downs-syndrome-development-journal-early-support>

Early education age 2-5

Most children with Down's syndrome attend mainstream early years settings with their typically developing peers. This gives them the opportunity to develop social relationships and learn new skills in an inclusive environment.

All children are entitled to 15 hours a week free early education from the age of 3. Some children are eligible from age 2; this includes children with special educational needs or disabilities. To find out more about early education and childcare, contact your local Family Information Service.

Getting help in nursery or preschool

There is no hard and fast rule about how much extra help your child will need at nursery. Some children who have Down's syndrome manage well within what the nursery generally provides; others may need additional support. The nursery should be working very closely with parents, as they know their child best. It is also helpful for the nursery to get advice from other professionals such as a speech and language therapist or educational psychologist. The local authority may also have early years advisory staff for special educational needs, for example an early years inclusion officer or area SENCO (special needs co-ordinator) covering a cluster of early years settings. The DSA has produced several early years resources and also provides training on supporting early development.

If your child needs more help than the nursery can provide from their own resources, you should consider asking for a statutory Education, Health and Care Assessment which may lead to an Education Health and Care Plan (in England). If you haven't done so before, we suggest you start the process at least a year before your child starts school.

Starting school

It's important to plan early so that your child can have a smooth transition to primary school.

Most children who have Down's syndrome attend their local mainstream primary school along with their brothers and sisters.

For information about support in primary school, go to the Primary school factsheet.

Types of Childcare and Early Years Education

- **Childminders** are government registered carers who look after children in their own homes. The service offered is unique to each family's needs and many childminders provide evening, weekend and school holiday cover.
- **Childminder agencies** are organisations designed to offer a 'one-stop shop' of services for both childminders and parents.
- **Nanny or home childcarers** look after children in the family home.
- **Day nurseries** can care for children aged from birth to five years and usually offer day care from 8am to 6pm, for most of the year.
- **Private nursery schools** can offer sessional or full day care to children aged two to five. Some schools can offer a particular educational approach, for example Montessori or Forest.
- **(Local Authority) Maintained Nursery Schools** offer full and part-time early years education places, typically between school hours. They are attached to primary schools. A child can attend for a full or half day. Nursery schools may also offer childcare after school.
- **Pre-schools and playgroups** offer care to children aged from two to five in their local community, either as a morning or afternoon session or as extended sessions including lunch. They are often run by voluntary groups but can also be run by private individuals. They differ from day nurseries in that they offer sessional based care and admit children from the age of two years old.

- **Independent schools** are owned privately and can cater for children aged from three to sixteen. Independent schools make their own arrangements concerning staff numbers qualifications and curriculum.
- **Out of school clubs** provide safe and stimulating play opportunities for school age children at times when schools are not open. They can operate before school ('breakfast clubs') in the mornings, and from the end of the school day ('after school clubs'), throughout the school holidays, or a combination of all three. They typically cater for children aged four to fifteen but some clubs might look after younger children.

Regulation and Inspection

England, Wales and Northern Ireland governments differ in their childcare and education registration, legal requirements and inspection bodies:

Ofsted inspects and regulates services in England <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>

Care Inspectorate Wales <https://careinspectorate.wales/> and Estyn inspect and regulate services in Wales <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/>

NI Direct inspects and regulates services in Northern Ireland <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/>.

Further help and information

The Information Team at the DSA is happy to answer your education related queries.

Please call the helpline on 0333 1212 300 or email info@downs-syndrome.org.uk

We also offer several online training events that may be of interest. Visit our website for all the details or email training@downs-syndrome.org.uk

Search for portage services in your area on the [National Portage Association website](#).

Find your local Family Information Service by searching online with the term 'Family Information Service'

It will provide local information on childcare and early years provision.

Find your local information, advice and support service for special educational needs and disability on the [Information, Advice and Support Services Network \(IASS\) network website](#).

This was previously called Parent Partnership.

Contact us

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