

SUMMARY FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Part of the Parenting Disabled Children and Young People and those with Special Educational Needs Practice Guide

| Produced by Foundations, and commissioned by the Department for Education

This document summarises the [Parenting Disabled Children and Young People and those with Special Educational Needs \(SEN\) Practice Guide](#) and supports elected members – who play a key role in shaping local services – to reflect on their local parenting support offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people and consider how this can be strengthened.

This Practice Guide relates to all outcomes of the [Children’s Social Care National Framework](#). The enablers of the Framework (leadership, workforce, multi-agency working) have a role in supporting delivery of this Guide’s key principles and recommendations.

The Practice Guide also complements the [Family First Partnership \(FFP\) programme guide](#).

The Practice Guide on Parenting disabled children and young people is the fourth in a series of Practice Guides. The Guides set out the best available evidence for leaders in the children’s social care sector to support effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed and delivered.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting a disabled child or young person can be a rewarding and enriching experience. However, it is likely to be very different from other parenting experiences and for many, this may involve intensive, targeted support across the entirety of childhood, and for some, into adulthood. The type of support that parent carers of disabled children and young people need is potentially different to other families who are supported by social care.

The Practice Guide sets out the most effective parenting support programmes for parent carers of disabled children and young people aged up to 25 years old who have moderate

to severe and complex disabilities, including those with special educational needs (SEN). These children and young people are likely to receive a range of support across the system, from short-term support, such as an Early Help assessment to access short breaks, through to more intensive specialist social care support, such as having a Child in Need plan in place.

Throughout the Practice Guide, when reference is made to ‘disabled children and young people’ or ‘children and young people,’ this is inclusive of children and young people who may have SEN. Where the term ‘children’ is used this refers to people aged 0 to 17 years old. Where the term ‘young people’ is used this refers to people aged 18 to 25 years old. We recognise that although children and young people with SEN may fall within the Equality Act 2010, they may not identify as being disabled.

What do we mean by parenting support?

In the Practice Guide we use the term “parenting support” to broadly refer to parenting interventions, programmes, and services that support parent carers of disabled children and young people in their parenting, including parenting practices and the parent-child relationship.

Effective evidence-based parenting support, in conjunction with other types of support where needed, can help parent carers to maintain their caring role and lead more ordinary lives.¹

Visit the links below for more information on:

- **Extended definitions:** foundations.org.uk/extended-definitions-parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people-practice-guide
- **Policy overview:** foundations.org.uk/policy-overview-parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people-practice-guide
- **Legal frameworks:** foundations.org.uk/legal-frameworks-parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people-practice-guide

The best evidence on on parenting interventions for parent carers of disabled children and young people

The Parenting Disabled Children and Young People Practice Guide contains actionable key principles and recommendations for senior local leaders. These are based on findings from a robust review of existing evidence, which explored what works, for whom, and in what context.

Key principles: draw out evidence on the circumstances, experiences, and preferences of children and young people in the UK, and internationally, on how to engage and work with them. They also cover evidence on the effective implementation and design of mentoring and befriending interventions. This evidence helps to ensure that accessible, acceptable interventions can be effectively implemented.

¹ For more on the rights-based approach see: Broach and Clements (2020). *Disabled Children: a Legal Handbook*. 3rd Edition: <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/resources/all-resources/filter/inclusion>.

Recommendations: draw out the best-evidenced interventions for improving children and young people's outcomes. We only make recommendations where at least one rigorous impact evaluation has evidenced that the intervention achieves positive outcomes for children and young people or parents in the UK, or in countries with similar child welfare systems to the UK.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Key principles are grouped into two themes and apply to all levels of the local system, workforce development, and local offer design and development.

Whole-system culture

Key Principle 1: Implement different types of support to develop a mixed local offer that is responsive to the identified needs of families in the local area.

Key Principle 2: The local parenting offer should be coordinated with the formal and informal support networks around the child or young person.

Key Principle 3: Parent carers of disabled children and young people should experience effective, empowering and non-stigmatising parenting support.

Working with families

Key Principle 4: Parenting support should be accessible, flexible and sensitive to parent carers' needs. Practice should be adapted to overcome barriers to access.

Key Principle 5: Consider the role of family members and other caregivers in building a consistent and sustainable network of support around the disabled child or young person.

Key Principle 6: Adopt a holistic approach to parenting support by considering the needs of parent carers and encouraging opportunities for self-care and reflection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	STRONG EVIDENCE	GOOD EVIDENCE	PROMISING EVIDENCE
<p>1. Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers when an autistic child* shows behaviours that challenge, to support them to manage challenging behaviours and promote the child’s social and interaction skills.</p> <p>*aged 0–15 years old</p>	✓		
<p>2. Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children* or children with primary and secondary language impairment* to improve language and communication.</p> <p>*aged 1–6 years old</p>	✓		
<p>3. Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children,* and children with brain injury, ADHD, hearing loss, or intellectual disability,* to improve parent–child interaction.</p> <p>*aged 0–12 years old</p>	✓		
<p>4. Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children* and children with language impairment or intellectual disability* to reduce parental stress.</p> <p>* 1–11 years old</p>	✓		
<p>5. Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children* and children with ADHD* to promote positive parenting practices, improve parental wellbeing, and the characteristics of the child’s condition.</p> <p>* aged 3 years and older for behavioural parenting programmes; and 3–5 years old for programmes aimed at addressing behaviours that challenge; aged 1–11 years old for psychosocial parenting programmes.</p>	✓		
<p>6. Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children* and children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain injury†, to improve child development, cognitive skills, and emotional and psychological wellbeing.</p> <p>* aged 0–4 years old</p> <p>† I-inTERACT programme: 3–9 years old; Counsellor Assisted Problem-Solving (CAPS) programme: 12–17 years old.</p>		✓	

STRONG EVIDENCE

- Meta-analysis of at least two randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental studies
- Low on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates effectiveness of the intervention(s).

GOOD EVIDENCE

- Meta-analysis or narrative synthesis of at least two randomised controlled trials and/or quasi-experimental studies
- Moderate on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

PROMISING EVIDENCE

- One randomised controlled trial or quasi-experimental study
- Low or moderate on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

Read the evidence ratings in full: <https://foundations.org.uk/how-to-use-the-practice-guides/>

KEY QUESTIONS FOR ENGAGING SENIOR LEADERS

These questions are designed to help Elected Members strengthen the local parenting support offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people and those with SEN.

How evidence based is the current local parenting support offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people and those with SEN?

When thinking about how to strengthen local parenting support, senior leaders should make decisions based on the available evidence, while also taking into account lived experience, population data, organisational data, and professional knowledge.

The Practice Guide offers senior leaders a clear, evidence-based reference point to assess and strengthen the local parenting support offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people and those with SEN. It provides the evidence and tools needed to build on the availability of evidence-based parenting support that is geared specifically to the needs of these families. Where families are experiencing intersecting needs, local leaders should also refer to Parenting through Adversity Practice Guide – Parents of babies & children 0 to 10² and the forthcoming Practice Guide for this same cohort of families with children and/or young people aged 11 to 19 years old (Autumn 2025).

Leaders should review their current support for parent carers of disabled children and young people and those with SEN, identify any gaps or overlaps in services, and check how well used these services are across health, education, social care, and community organisations.

These activities should help comprehensively assess the current parenting support offer and consider:

- What the evidence base is for the currently available parenting programmes
- Whether the current local offer includes the evidence based parenting programmes featured in the Practice Guide
- Whether the currently available parenting programmes are suitable for the local parent carer population
- What data is available on completion rates, parental satisfaction and outcomes from parenting support to support continual service improvement.

To support this reviewing process, leaders can make use of the Reflective Tool accompanying the Practice Guide (forthcoming September 2025). The Reflective Tool is designed to support local leaders to systematically assess their baseline parenting support offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people.

² See: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-through-adversity-0-10/>

How do we ensure that our parenting support offer meets the needs of these parent carers?

The Practice Guide contains the best available evidence to aid decision-making and can be used to support ongoing commissioning cycles. It is important that local commissioners and leaders across health, education, and social care are aware of the Practice Guide, use it in a coordinated way, and make evidence-based decisions and assessments about which programmes to commission to meet the needs of the local population. While some areas may be committed to existing block contracts with programme providers, local leaders can use the Practice Guide to inform longer-term strategic planning of their parenting support offer.

When making commissioning decisions, as well as being informed by the Practice Guide, local leaders should consider the lived experience of parent carers and children and young people, the available local population and organisational data, the context of service delivery, and professional knowledge.

The evidence shows that parent carers appreciate parenting support which has been developed in partnership with them and in response to needs they have identified. You can use this Practice Guide to support meaningful engagement with the local Parent Carer forum or network and facilitate a co-developed approach to the parenting offer. There should be opportunities for parent carers to influence priority setting and understand the rationale behind commissioning decision-making; for example when it is not possible to commission a bespoke intervention for a specific need.

How can we ensure that the workforce has the right skills and knowledge to support parent carers of disabled children and young people?

Leaders should develop and actively promote a multi-agency workforce development plan. Parent carer forums or networks and representatives should be involved in the co-production and delivery of this training and development offer.

The Designated Social Care Officer (DCSO) has an integral role in the coordination of training across the multi-agency system, promoting disability awareness and harmonising support. Whilst delivering reforms in children's social care, local leaders should also consider creating workforce capacity by thinking creatively about how different parts of the system can be deployed to provide wrap-around support to parent carers; for example by drawing on the skills of short-break carers and residential staff to deliver parenting support programmes.

Local leaders should use the Practice Guide to help transform whole-system culture and create a shared vision. Local leaders play a vital role in shaping a culture of partnership by modelling collaborative values and behaviours, and by recognising parent carers as experts in their own lives.

How can we use this Practice Guide to deliver wider Children's Social Care reforms?

The key principles of the Practice Guide closely align with the Children's Social Care National Framework³ and the Family First Partnership (FFP) programme.⁴ Making use of the best available evidence is in line with the Children's Social Care National Framework and is the best way for local leaders to drive conditions for effective practice.

Local leaders play a key role in developing proportionate processes that are anchored in family help models, and which enable parent carers to access the support they need. Leaders are encouraged to consider:

- How the FFP programme will be deployed in relation to reforming and integrating social care support for disabled children and young people and their families
- The Family Help Lead Practitioner's (FHLP) role in coordinating support so parent carers experience greater consistency through enduring relationships with their families
- What the Family Help 'one assessment' and plan should look like for disabled children and young people and their families
- What the role of a DSCO is within a Multi-Agency Child Protection team.

How can we amplify the Practice Guide and ensure join-up across local services and organisational boundaries?

Effective parenting support requires strong place-based systems that coordinate services across organisational boundaries. This includes support provided by health, education, social care and the community voluntary sector.

Local leaders should consider what existing forums or means of communication can be used to share the Practice Guide across local networks.

As an Elected Member, you may want to engage your colleagues across the Cabinet and other relevant committees such as Partnership Boards, Integrated Care Boards, and Health and Wellbeing Boards to coordinate the development of the local offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people.

³ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-framework>

⁴ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-partnership-programme>

This resource is part of a set of publications linked to Parenting Disabled Children & Young People Practice Guide:

- Full Practice Guide: foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people-full-practice-guide.pdf
- Online summary Practice Guide: foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people

Find out more about the series of Practice Guides:
foundations.org.uk/practice-guides

We want to hear from local leaders who are engaging with the Practice Guides.
Get in touch at practice_guides@foundations.org.uk