

## AREA TITLE: Parents and carers

### AREA TITLE EARLY YEARS

#### About Introduction

...

Early years - before the age of five - is a crucial time for children on the autism spectrum. Diagnosis and identification is occurring at an earlier age and there is increased recognition that early intervention is vital to improved outcomes.

There are a range of pre-school programmes and initiatives (more information on many of these programmes can be found in the Home based provision section of this website) working with children on the autism spectrum and their parents including:

- **Portage schemes:** An early education service offered in the home in which parents and the Portage home visitor work together to develop the child's skills
- **Outreach and Training projects,** for example the 'Early Bird' Scheme, the National Autistic Society's three-month programme which combines group training sessions for parents with individual home visits where video feedback is used to help parents apply what they learn, whilst working with their child.
- **Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI)** programmes involves teaching linguistic, cognitive, social and self-help skills, breaking down these skills into small tasks which are taught in a highly structured and hierarchical manner. There is a focus on rewarding, or reinforcing, desired behaviours and ignoring, re-directing or discouraging inappropriate behaviours. These programmes usually begin before the age of five and are home-based. Sometime also referred to as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA).
- **The Son-Rise™ programme** is a home-based one-to-one approach, which is based on the idea that the best way to help a child with autism is to follow the child's lead, joining in with his/her preferred activities. When the child becomes attentive and interactive the adult expands on the shared activity in order to help develop communication and interaction skills.
- **Nursery places** in mainstream and special school settings and support for children to attend local pre-schools.
- **Playgroups** including those run by the Pre-school Learning Alliance, where additional help can be provided for children.
- **Advisory services** of different types provided by local authorities with input from speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and teachers
- **Children's Centres,** which provide childcare, early education and family support in one place. Some have additional facilities for

children with special needs or disabilities

### **The Early Support Programme**

The Early Support Programme is a government programme aiming to achieve better co-ordinated, family-focused services for young disabled children and their families. It is a national programme being introduced and used in local authorities, hospitals and community-based health services across England.

The Early Support Programme provides a standard framework and set of materials that can be used in many different circumstances, and a set of expectations about how services should work with families. Families are held at the heart of discussion and decision-making about their children.

The programme aims to better integrate service planning and delivery. Families with young children on the autism spectrum are often in contact with many different services provided by different agencies, so should benefit from the better multi-agency working as this is at the heart of the programme.

As a parent you will know that children receive support from many agencies in the early years and across a range of locations including home, nursery and child development centres. Many authorities employ outreach staff to work with children on the autism spectrum. As many as 20 different professionals might be involved with a child under the age of five on the autism spectrum so co-ordination of services is vital.

Things like Family Files and Family Service Plans should also improve the working relationship between you and your family and those you receive support from, as should the development of key worker services.

### **Planning Provision**

Local Authorities should prepare, publish and implement an annual plan for developing early years and childcare provision for the area through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), which includes representatives from statutory, private and voluntary sectors. EYDCPs oversee early years provision and should ensure that all early years settings in receipt of government funding to provide early education identify a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) responsible for establishing the setting's special educational needs policy. See the separate page on SENCOs for more detailed information about their role.

### **Improving provision for early years children on the autism spectrum**

There are a number of improvements that local authorities could make in their provision of early years support for children on the autism spectrum and their families:

- Improve early identification of children on the autism spectrum by participating in multi-agency assessments and developing identification protocols
- Assist with forward planning by collecting and coordinating information on numbers of children on the autism spectrum

- Liaise effectively between agencies, promoting partnerships between health, Local Authorities' children's services, the voluntary sector and parents
- Provide a range of early years provision, which includes different methodologies and settings so that the differing needs and learning styles of children on the autism spectrum can be provided for
- Provide specialist input from a range of professionals
- Acknowledge the role of families as carers and educators of their children
- Ensure good communication between all those involved with the child and the family.
- Ensure there is a key worker who has an overview of all the interventions the child is receiving and expertise in autism to assess their appropriateness
- Ensure good liaison between pre-school providers and schools including reciprocal visits.
- Review regularly the child's needs and progress targets
- Provide specialised training for those who work with children on the autism spectrum in the early years

Get help from...

[Early Support Programme](#): the Government programme to achieve better co-ordinated, family-focused services for young disabled children and their families.

[Sure Start](#) is the Government programme to deliver the best start in life for every child. It brings together early education, childcare, health and family support.

[Early Years Foundation Stage](#) Government initiative setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. Brings together: *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (2000), the *Birth to Three Matters* (2002) framework and the *National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding* (2003), building a coherent and flexible approach to care and learning. All providers are required to use the EYFS to ensure that whatever setting parents choose, they can be confident that their child will receive a quality experience that supports their development and learning.

[National Portage Association](#): a charity offering support and information to parents and professionals involved in Portage.

[The National Autistic Society's Early Bird Programme](#): a three month programme for the parents/carers of pre-school children on the autism spectrum. It is delivered by licensed trainers who work with parents/carers on how to get the best out of their child.

[Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention](#): early intervention enabling learning

---

and development.

[The Son-Rise™ programme](#) a home-based one to one approach

#### Links

[National Autism Plan for Children \(NAPC\)](#) Produced by the National Initiative for Autism: Screening and Assessment (NIASA). The Plan covers the identification, assessment, diagnosis and access to early interventions for pre-school and primary school aged children on the autism spectrum. The guidelines are for parents and all who work with children and were developed by a multi-disciplinary group of core professionals from Health, Education, Social Services, and representatives of parents and the voluntary sector.

[Teachernet](#) Valuable source of information and good practice case studies

[Early years Support Materials](#) including: Service Audit Tool

[Autism Good Practice Guidance](#) This guidance developed by the Autism Working Group gives practical advice to providers for children on the autism spectrum, based on existing good practice, and helps them to reflect on their own practice and examples of good practice

#### Reading

[Changing Perceptions](#), Mark Brown & Olivia Trimbee, Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Improving Access and Inclusion in Early Years Services](#), Philippa Russell, Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Working with Parents in Partnership](#), Hilton Davis and Lorraine Meltzer, Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Best practice in key working: what do research and policy have to say?](#) Care Co-ordination Network UK: Judith Cavet, Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Team Around the Child](#), Peter Limbrick Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Knowing yourself and the family](#), Jonathan Rix Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Information sharing, the Common Assessment Framework and Early Support](#) Paul Gutherson and Elizabeth Pickard Early Years Support Programme (2007)

[Family structures](#) Barry Carpenter with Jo Egerton Early Years Support Programme (2007)

---

**Case Study** **Hampshire**

**Studies**

Hampshire County Council has developed a wide range of services aimed at enhancing the learning and development of young children on the autism spectrum. Many aim to build on the skills of parents/carers, increasing their confidence in meeting the needs of their child at home. Hampshire offers :

- The National Autistic Society's (NAS) EarlyBird Programme
- Portage home visiting service
- The Hampshire Outline for Meeting the needs of the under five's on the autism spectrum (THOMAS) training - four days of education and training with additional ongoing support for anyone living or working with the under fives on the autism spectrum
- The THOMAS Outreach Project (TOP) - a service delivered to children on the autism spectrum in their home or their preschool or in their first term of school. TOP offers between 5 - 15 hours weekly per child in close partnership with parents/carers.
- Nursery places in mainstream and special school settings and support for children to attend a local pre-school.

**Lancashire**

The Lancashire Under Fives Autism Programme (LUFAP) - Good practice example on Teachernet

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/asds/asdgoodpractice/ey/earlyyearExamples/>

**Sheffield**

Footsteps - Early Years project in Sheffield - Good practice example on Teachernet.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/asds/asdgoodpractice/ey/earlyyearExamples/>