

AREA TITLE: LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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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.

A range of pre-school programmes and initiatives have been developed for children on the autism spectrum 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 Intervention Programmes:** There are a range of programmes available for children in the early years; many are home based, some focus on behaviour, like Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (also known as Applied Behaviour Analysis), others focus on communication or skill development. For more information on these programmes see the section on home-based provision.
- **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 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

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 comprises representatives from statutory, private and voluntary sectors. EYDCPs oversee early years provision and should ensure all early years settings in receipt of government funding to provide

early education have identified a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) responsible for establishing the setting's SEN policy.

Supporting Parents

Parents need timely and accurate advice following identification of needs. 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.

The Early Support Programme

The Early Support Programme is the Government programme which aims 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 and integrate service planning and delivery, particularly when families are in contact with many different people and agencies.

Improving provision for early years children on the autism spectrum

There are a range of recommendations for Local Authorities which would improve early years support for children on the autism spectrum:

- Improve early identification of children on the autism spectrum by participating in multi-agency assessments and working parties to develop 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.

Links

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

[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 with autistic spectrum disorders. 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

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)

[Antidiscrimination, equality and diversity](#), Chrissy Meleady Early Years Support Programme (2007)

Case Studies

Hampshire

Hampshire County Council has developed a wide range of services aimed at enhancing the learning and development of young children with 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 Autistic 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](#) – Early years good practice example on Teachernet

[Footsteps Early Years project in Sheffield](#) – Early years good practice example on Teachernet

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