



PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER 16

Social Services

About Social Services

Social services are the main agency providing support to people with disabilities who need help with daily living. This support is often called Social Care.

Note that, unlike say education, social care is not a universal service, i.e. it is not available to everyone, only to those who are considered to be in sufficient need. Social services carry out an assessment to determine eligibility. In the case of adults (i.e. people over 18) this is known as a Community Care Assessment.

Children's social services are expected to carry out an initial assessment within seven days of a referral, and, depending on the outcome, may go on to do a more detailed Core Assessment. Family members who care for disabled people can also request an assessment of their own needs, known as a Carers' Assessment. For more information about community care assessments or carers' assessments, see the relevant factsheets.

Local authorities must measure eligibility for social services in accordance with government guidelines, but can set their own qualifying criteria. So there will be some variation between one local authority and another. Children's and adults' services are bound by different legal frameworks, so do not necessarily have the same criteria, even within the same authority. This means that it is not unusual for some people to qualify as children, but not as adults, and vice versa. For more information about the government's guidelines and how to access them, see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information*.

Responsibility for providing social services lies with upper-tier local authorities, i.e. county councils, London boroughs and unitary authorities. They vary quite a lot in the names they give their social services teams and departments, and how they organise them. So, for example, some authorities have a single Social Services department, but others have now put children's social services together with education in an overarching Children's Services department, and have a separate department called Adult Social Care. For more information about the terms used in your area, it is worth exploring your local authority's website.

Children and young people under the age of 18 are the responsibility of children's social services. In some areas, this may have another name such as Children and Young People's Social Care. As young people approach 18, their social worker will make a referral to adult social services, if appropriate. Some local authorities have Transition social workers, sometimes called the Transition team, to support young people as they move into adulthood. Depending on the authority concerned, this may be attached to children's services, form part of the adult social care department or may even be a stand alone team. The age group covered can also vary. In some areas, it is just 16–18 years; in others, as much as 14–25.

Social Services and the Transition Review

Local education authorities are required to inform social services of forthcoming Transition Reviews so that they can consider whether the young people concerned meet their eligibility criteria. Head teachers must also invite social services to the Transition review meeting, so that they can start to assess what support young people they consider eligible will need, either immediately, during the Transition period, and/or when they reach adulthood. They should then start arranging for it to be delivered. For more information about the Transition process and Transition Reviews, see the factsheet *The Transition Process*.

If your son or daughter is already receiving social services support (e.g. through short breaks), he or she will probably have a social worker who will almost certainly attend the Transition review meeting, or arrange for someone else to be there. If your son or daughter is not currently on social services' caseload, they are not obliged to send a representative and probably will not do so unless the school makes it clear to them that your son or daughter is likely to need their help either now, or as an adult.

Basically, social services tend to assume that if nobody has made a specific referral to them, then children and young people with SEN and/or a disability do not need their support, and by no means all of them do.

Many, perhaps most, young people with speech and language impairments do eventually develop adequate daily living skills, though perhaps a little later than their peers, and so do not need social services input.

However, even if your son or daughter is unlikely to need any day to day help, it is worth remembering that social services provide the principal gateway to support such as independent travel training, supported housing and access to the disability employment adviser at Jobcentre Plus, who may arrange a placement on a disability employment scheme. So if your son or daughter is likely to need this sort of help, it is worth requesting the involvement of social services.

Accessing Social Services

Try asking your son or daughter's school to make it clear when they invite social services to the Transition Review that he or she is likely to need their support. If they are not convinced, it might be worth asking them to carry out an assessment under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). This is a holistic assessment designed to build up a complete picture of children's needs, including things like social and independence skills, which schools do not always recognise as an issue.

For more information about the CAF, see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information*. Your Connexions adviser (if you have one) can also carry out a CAF or similarly detailed assessment and arrange a referral to social services. For more information about Connexions, see the relevant factsheet.

If neither the school nor Connexions will help you, make a formal request for an assessment yourself, addressing your letter in the first instance to the Children with Disabilities team (most children's social services have a team with this or a similar name). You will need to provide supporting evidence demonstrating how your son or daughter meets their criteria.

Remember that this will need to focus on daily living skills and show that your son or daughter is functioning at levels well below other young people of the same age. So school based reports that deal primarily with academic performance are unlikely to be very useful. Instead, try sending in a copy of a recent application for Disability Living Allowance (DLA), or compile a diary illustrating the difficulties your son or daughter faces.

It might be appropriate to revisit your son or daughter's diagnosis. Children can change a lot as they grow up and a term such as 'speech and language difficulties' may no longer accurately reflect their needs.

If your son or daughter now meets the criteria for a more widely recognised disability such as autism, or a learning disability, a change of diagnosis is likely to make it much easier to access social services support.

Check whether your son or daughter is on the local Register of Children with Disabilities – again the name of this register may vary from authority to authority. Children are often added to the register when they are statemented, but for various reasons this might not have happened in your son or daughter's case. He or she might not have met the criteria at the time, for example.

If your son or daughter does not currently have a statement, you should initiate the statutory assessment process immediately (remember you can only do this while your son or daughter is under 16). At the same time, contact social services and request an assessment. The local authority are obliged, as part of the statutory assessment process, to ask social services whether they consider the child concerned to be disabled and, if so, submit advice. However, as social services tend to assume that children and young people with speech and language impairments do not meet their definition of disability, they rarely become involved at this stage, unless they are made aware of the need for their input.

Handling Disputes with Social Services

If social services think your son or daughter probably does not meet their definition of disability, they are entitled to turn down a request for an assessment. If they do, try asking them to carry out or arrange an assessment of your son or daughter's social vulnerability, or an assessment of his or her functional ability, such as the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale. This is an assessment not only of cognitive skills (intelligence), but also of the young person's ability to cope with everyday tasks. You can also arrange an assessment yourself, by asking your GP to refer you to a clinical psychologist, either privately or through the NHS.

Like most statutory services, social services departments are often underfunded and overstretched and this can impact on the decisions they make and the way they deliver support. Do remember that, if you feel they have not handled your son or daughter's case appropriately, you are entitled to make a complaint, and should do so. For more information about the social services complaints procedure, see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information*.

For more information about these or any other related matters, see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information* or contact the **Afasic Helpline** on **0300 666 9410** or **0207 490 9420**.

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