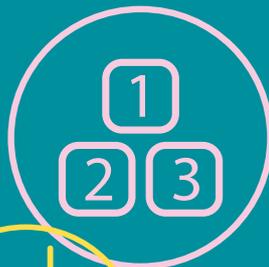
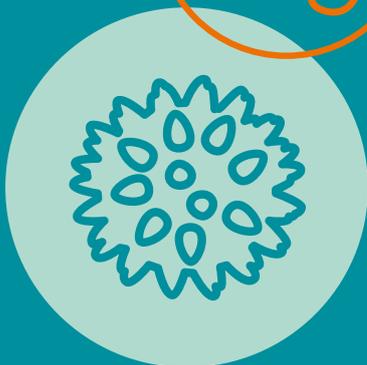
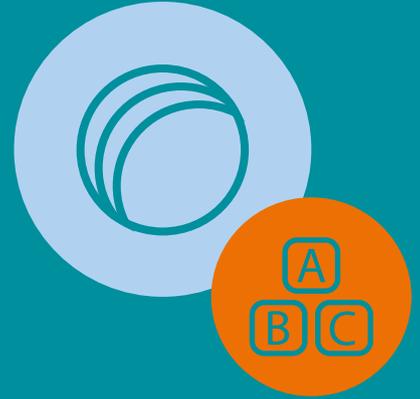


sense
connecting sight, sound and life

Making play inclusive

A toolkit for parents





The Case for Play

In 2015, Sense undertook a Public Inquiry into the provision of play opportunities for children aged 0-5 with multiple needs in England and Wales. The Inquiry found that disabled children have significantly fewer opportunities to access play settings and activities than their non-disabled peers.

All children should have equal access to play, which is fundamental to childhood. Sense is campaigning for national and local policy changes to address this inequality. We have also provided recommendations for play settings. While achieving these policy changes will improve access to play in the long term, we have produced these play toolkits to have a more immediate impact.

Parents told us that they need more support to learn the best ways to engage their child in play. This toolkit has been designed as a guide for parents of children with multiple needs. It contains useful information on play, as well as simple ideas, suggestions and practical tips on play activities.

You can read more about the Play Inquiry on our website: www.sense.org.uk/play

Key principles for inclusive play



- Promote play for the sake of play!
- Children are unique – they all do things differently.
- Manage risk effectively – don't let it get in the way of play.
- Give your child time to respond, explore and play.
- Never say never.
- Live in the moment.
- Encourage adventure.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Use your imagination.
- Have fun yourself!



Top tips for playing with your child

- For children who are sensitive to touch, it may be helpful to start by introducing activities with their feet.
- Remember: less is more – avoid sensory overload.
- Always consider the positioning of your child and adapt each activity to their needs and preferences.
- Remember that activities must always be supervised. With each activity be aware of allergies, sensitivities and choking hazards.



Let your child lead



As adults we may find it difficult to play. However, it is important to remember that you have one of the best teachers: your child! Forget the normal rules of play as an adult – if your child wants to dress a car up with a hat instead of pushing it then that’s fine. Learn from them and follow their lead.

This approach is useful for observing and learning what your child likes and dislikes. It can also help you to think about how to approach activities and the areas you feel they may benefit from more exposure to.

Allowing your child to lead provides them with the opportunity to consolidate, develop and extend their learning at their own pace. They will be motivated to explore a project or express an idea in their own individual way. Providing choice in terms of play activities develops communication skills, confidence, independence and a sense of self. This can be as simple as asking if they want the red or blue crayon, or by offering more complex choices, such as the order to take turns in a game. When your child communicates their preference always praise them for it.

“Providing choice in terms of play activities develops communication skills, confidence, independence and a sense of self.”

Use a ‘**hand under hand**’ approach. This is where your hand performs the activity and your child’s hand rests on top of yours. With this approach, if your child decides they want the activity to end, they can simply take their hand away at any time. This offers choice, control and a sense of freedom.

This approach is great for trying new play activities. Your child may be hesitant to put their hand on an unknown object. However, they can still join you and have a safe space to experience the activity. This gives them time to feel the movement of your hand, understand it is safe, and feel comfortable trying it themselves.

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits



Make it sensory

Senses are important for everyone as they enrich life and are vital to our cognitive development. Through taste, smell, touch, vision and hearing we learn about the world around us and become more engaged with the activities that we try.

Children with physical and sensory disabilities may struggle to access information. Those who experience difficulties processing sensory information may choose to avoid certain experiences. Play helps to introduce new sensory stimuli in an accessible and entertaining way. Let your child explore – and avoid instructing children on how to engage with activities.

Sensory stories are a great way to provide sensory stimulation and develop communication in a fun way. Most importantly, however, they make stories fully accessible.

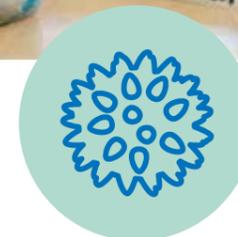
Any book can be broken down into workable parts. Each section should be a sentence or two long, and accompanied by a sensory experience. The sensory experience should include an item that matches each part of the story. Try to use the real thing if possible and make sure you find an item to match the story, not the other way around.

It is important to tell the story a number of times with consistency. This repetition promotes cognitive development and helps your child to develop an understanding of communication. It will also encourage anticipation and the expression of preferences.

It is worth considering whether published stories are relevant for your child – or whether creating a personalised story is more meaningful.



Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits



Develop self-awareness

For children with multiple needs, developing an awareness of others, accurate self-perception, and understanding the impact of actions on others can be a challenge. For this reason, activities that help children to develop self-awareness are important.

Resonance boards are made from a thin piece of plywood that is raised slightly from the floor by a wooden frame. They can be expensive to buy but easy to make if you have the time. They are an excellent resource that will help to develop your child's self-awareness.

The special quality of the board is that any movement on its surface will produce amplified sound and matching vibrations. It encourages communication, large motor skills and mobility, fine motor manipulation, the use of vision and hearing, tactile and visual search, turn-taking, anticipation, vocalisation and speech, problem solving, sequencing, cause and effect, rhythm – the list is endless!

Remember to start slowly and assess activities by putting your own ear on the board. You may want to spend time introducing your child to the board before including any toys. Your child may not be used to a hard surface and therefore may notice parts of themselves they had not been aware of before. Make sure that they are always in their preferred position, comfortable and safe.

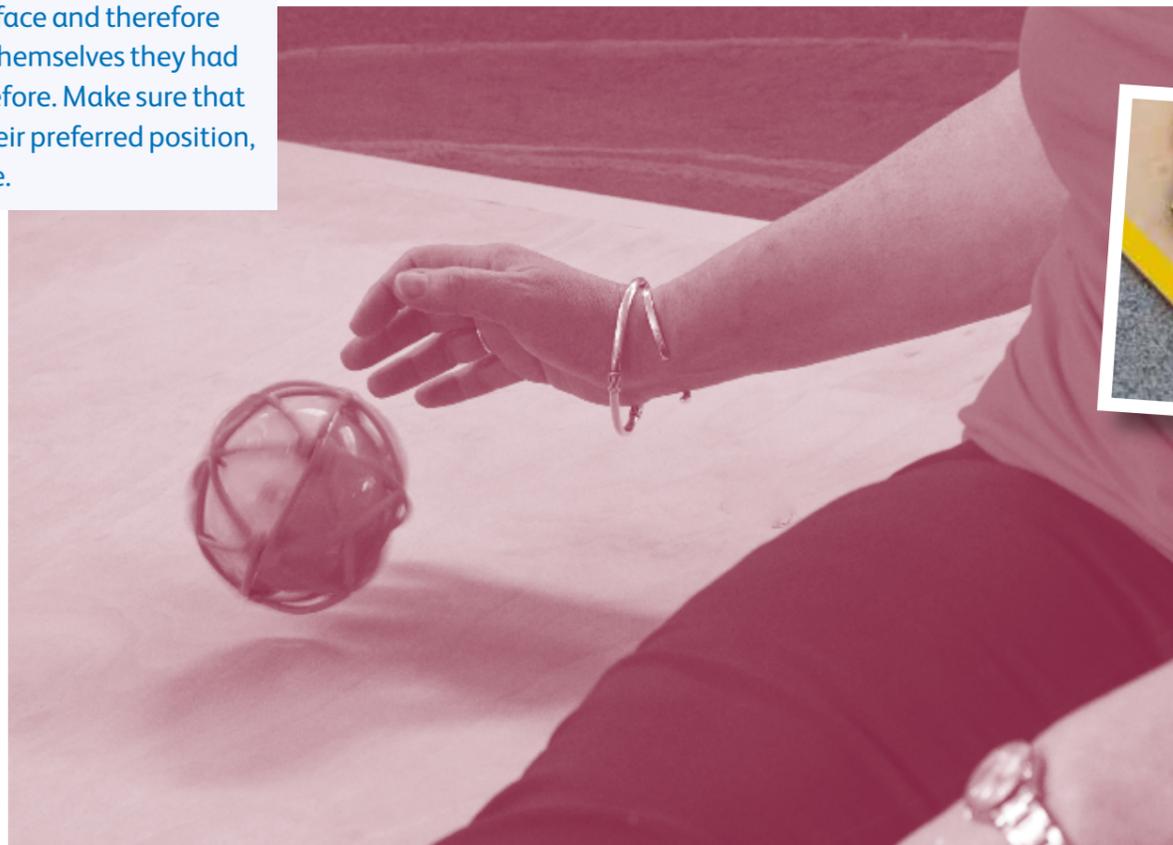
Your child can be placed alone on the board or use it with another child or adult if it is strong enough. It is a very adaptable activity; standing and walking on the board barefoot can be fun, as well as sitting and lying down.

The use of toys and equipment on the board depends entirely upon safety considerations, personal preferences and availability. When selecting toys to use, it is good to think about those that will provide an instant response. Items such as portable speakers, wind-up music boxes, vibrating toys, spinning tops, stringed beads and bells are effective.



There are various different ways that toys can be used on the board. Lengthy items such as stringed beads can be laid over your child's limbs. Every time they move an arm or leg it makes a noise that will be amplified by the board. With portable speakers you can play music that will be amplified and accompanied by vibrations.

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits



Focus on the process of play

It's crucial to remember that the process is important – and to not get too attached to the outcome. Go with your child even if it differs from your objective.

Messy play is an activity where you can really focus on the process. It's a great way for your child to learn more about things by experiencing them. Messy play can be presented in a number of ways, such as on sensory trays, each with a different theme. Remember to use edible, clean materials, and be mindful of choking hazards and allergies.



Textures

Being mindful of different textures can help you make an activity more suitable for your child and their preferences. It can also help you build in exposure to a variety of different objects.

Easy textures: with these your child has more control over contact.

1. Dry textures that fall away from your hand: dried rice, dry sand, dry lentils, or cotton wool.
2. Dry textures that mostly fall away but some particles or bits may stick to the hand: play dough, sterile compost, clean mud, or chalk.

Difficult textures: with these your child has less control over contact.

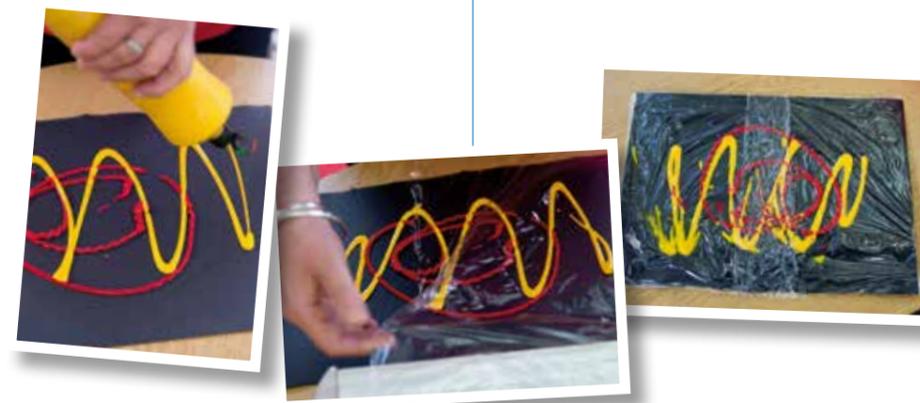
1. Wet textures that stick to the hand but that your child can easily break contact with (e.g. by lightly wiping): jelly, baked beans, wet sand, or sensitive shaving foam.
2. Wet textures that stick to the hand and that your child has least control of breaking contact with (e.g. by repeatedly wiping): yoghurt, finger-paint, mud, Angel Delight or ice cream.

Changing textures: you can demonstrate how textures change by starting with dried custard powder or dried shredded tissues and then adding water.

Hand movement

When undertaking this activity, be mindful of the different movements you might want to encourage. These can include:

- A palmer grasp (squeezing toys and play dough)
- Using thumb and fingers (building towers of bricks)
- Pincer grip (popping bubble wrap)
- Release (placing objects in containers)
- Rotary action (pouring from one container to another)
- Finger isolation (making fingerprints in play dough)
- Bilateral hand use (tearing paper)
- Hand and finger strength (manipulating play dough)
- Tracking (following lines of wool).



Adaptation

Not all children will be able to make these movements and some don't like to get messy. As an alternative, try paints in a clear plastic bag or on paper with cling film over the top. Your child can play by pushing the paint around with their fingers and hands over the plastic or cling film. You might find that some children will slowly choose to get messy by picking off the cling film and trying to put their hand directly into the paint. The hand under hand approach is a great way to help introduce children to new textures in a safe and supportive way.

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits

Encourage exploration

Children learn through exploration and experience. Much of this takes place through play, where children can be creative, take risks and make discoveries.

A **treasure basket** is a shallow sturdy basket containing a collection of everyday items. The idea is that children explore the basket and discover a variety of treasures. It brings exploration within reach of your child and gives them the opportunity to handle a range of items that they may not be able to experience unless they are brought to them.

Items in the treasure basket should vary in weight, size, texture, colour, taste, sound and temperature – for instance:

- Natural objects: pumice stone, lemon, natural loofah, feathers, shells
- Metal objects: spoons, keys, bells, small whisk
- Brushes: paintbrush, nail brush, pastry brush, toothbrush
- Textiles: velvet scrunches, silk, wool.

Remember to avoid plastic and typical soft toys as they do not offer much sensory feedback.

Think about how the child might interact with the objects. It's good to include things that rattle, fit inside each other, or that can be used to build and demolish.

A treasure basket can be adapted to suit each child's needs. For children who are not yet sitting, for instance, items can be suspended from a baby gym.

Memory baskets: the same concept can be used to encourage memory. By including items attached to a specific experience, your child can revisit and recollect.

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits



Adapt and make toys

Mainstream toys are not always accessible to disabled children and buying sensory toys can be expensive. Simple adaptations can be made to toys to make them more suitable for your child. You can also make toys out of everyday household items.

Remember that anything that has been adapted should always be used under supervision. Never leave a child alone with an adapted or homemade toy. Be aware of anything that could come off and become a choking hazard.



Tips on adapting toys

- Keep it simple.
- Tailor it to your child's needs.
- Try adding a tactile element.
- You may want to enlarge features to make it easier to interact with.
- Think about whether there are any unnecessary features or distractions that can be removed.
- You might find it useful to stabilise the toy with Velcro strips or suction cups.

Using everyday household items

- Pots, pans with lids, and a selection of wooden spoons can either be used to make noise or add clean mud (tissue paper and brown paint) for messy play.
- Items like sieves can be fun to look through.
- Fill rubber washing up gloves with beans or liquid cornflour.
- Put some bells in a secure bag and squeeze into a kitchen whisk to create a shaker (remember that children may pull the bag out).

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits

Include siblings



Play is a great way for children to connect and there are lots of ways of encouraging this. You can adapt activities to include turn-taking. For example, children can take turns to tap rhythms on a resonance board, use a Big Mack Switch, or roll tactile balls to each other.

Tailoring play to include the way your child communicates is important. Learning to communicate as a family is a great bonding experience, especially for siblings. Play activities can include both informal and formal communication methods.

Try to make inclusion work both ways so that children are able to get involved in each other's favourite activities – as well as to create new things together.

Den making is a great inclusive activity. By making a safe den that is exciting and inviting, other siblings can and will want to join in. Children who might find it easier can help to create the den for their siblings. Dens are also extremely adaptable. For example, you can make a den by attaching an umbrella to supported seating or a wheelchair.

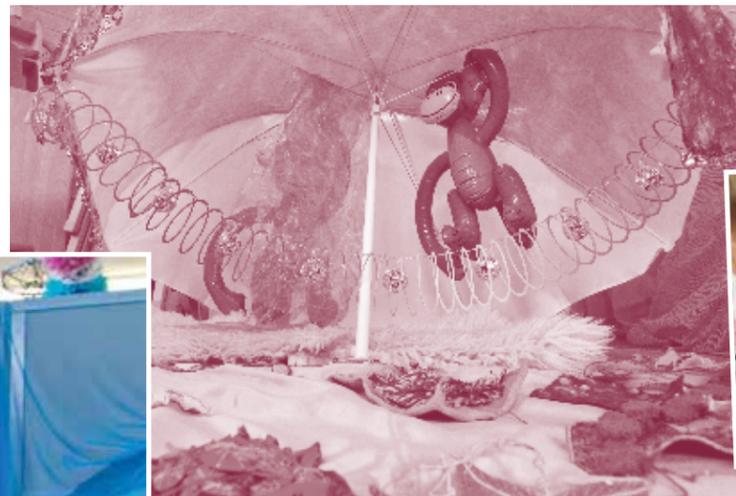
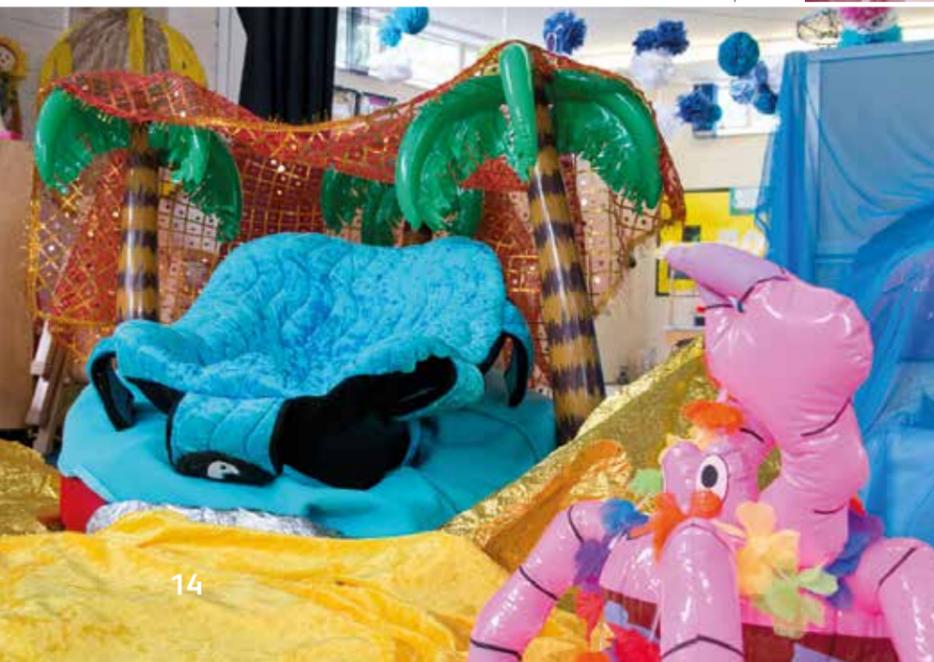
“Tailoring play to include the way your child communicates is important.”

Making a cardboard box den

You can build a den using a large cardboard box that is either lined with black paper or painted black. Punch holes in the top of the box and press some battery-operated fibre optic lights against the holes to create a starry sky effect. Use different tactile elements to create panels that slip into the sides and the back – these can be attached and moved around as required. You can add other elements, such as lights and torches, but remember not to overload the space with too much stimulus.

Signing songs bring children together to sit and sing a song. The songs include basic vocabulary from British Sign Language or signing systems, such as Makaton, and can easily be adapted to include other forms of communication, such as on-body signing or deafblind manual. Remember to consider the pace of the song, the wording, and recognise that it may only be key signs that you are trying to get across.

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits



Incorporate play into other settings

We know that parents often find it difficult to find time for play. For parents with children who have complex health issues, time can be even more limited. Ideas for incorporating play into different settings can be very useful.

Play in hospital

- The play worker or therapist will be able to provide toys that are suitable for your child, or the child's favourite toys can be brought from home if ward protocol allows this.
- Remember that anything brought into the hospital needs to be reviewed for suitability in a sterile environment. It is also best to avoid toys that need to be plugged into an electrical socket.



Go outdoors!



Outdoor play is essential to the healthy physical, social and emotional development of all children. Having an awareness and connection with nature enhances appreciation and wellbeing, and the opportunity to play freely develops confidence and self-esteem. Children with more complex needs benefit greatly from exploring sights, smells, textures and sounds in natural environments.

Consider undertaking the play activities described in this toolkit in an outdoor setting as well. For example, messy play using sensory trays can be great outside – as well as good for parents when it comes to cleaning up after!



It is important to spend time **relaxing**. On a warm day, lay your child down on a blanket, under a tree. They can look at the leaves, hear them rustle, and feel the breeze in the shade. Try hanging different coloured scarves, textured materials or wind chimes on the branches.

Set up a selection of **sensory trays**, each with a different theme, for your child to choose from, explore, and leave and come back to. This creates open-ended play.

For children who are less mobile or reluctant to explore, sensory trays can be a good way to introduce natural items. This can include sterile compost or clean mud (made from toilet paper and brown paint), sticks, leaves, clean feathers and clean large stones.

Sensory trays always require supervision. Be mindful of hygiene, sensitivities and choking hazards.

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits

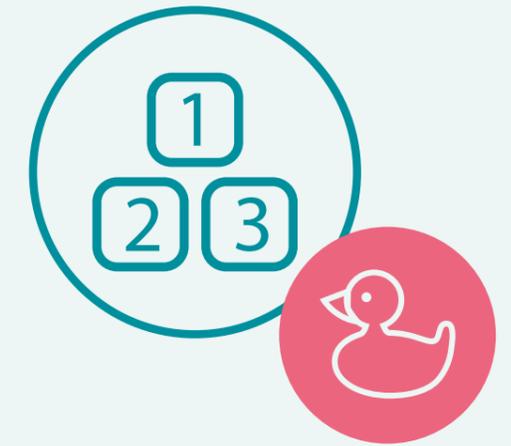


- It may not be possible to bring lots of toys to the ward but there are practical nursing items that can be adapted to make excellent sterile play-things:
 - Blow up a rubber glove and draw a face on it or fill it with water
 - Try tapping rhythms on a disposable paper bowl
 - Survival blankets are shiny, have an interesting texture and make a nice sound. You can take turns scrunching a corner
 - 'I've been GOOD!' (or similar) stickers can make you very popular!
 - 'Beads of Courage' recognise your child's journey and can support them to talk about it.
- If your child requires a quiet space it is always worth asking if a room is available.

Read more about Sense's Children's Specialist Services' work in hospitals at www.sense.org.uk/content/multi-sensory-impaired-children-hospital

Watch the video at www.sense.org.uk/playtoolkits

Your rights



We want to make sure that you, as parents, know your rights and understand what you and your child are legally entitled to. This section provides key information on the legal requirements around play for disabled children.

- The Equality Act 2010 provides legal protection to disabled children and families seeking to access play services. Through the Act, providers of play facilities:
 - Must avoid treating a disabled child less favourably than they treat others because of their disability (direct discrimination).
 - Must avoid provisions, criteria or practices that, when applied to all children, put disabled children at a particular disadvantage and which cannot be justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim (indirect discrimination).

- Must make reasonable adjustments¹ to allow disabled children to enjoy similar opportunities to those of children without disabilities. Providers should consider barriers that obstruct disabled children accessing play facilities, and take action to reduce or remove those barriers, prior to a disabled child using the facility.
- Public bodies that provide play facilities must also comply with the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires that a public authority must have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not when exercising their functions, such as making decisions or setting policies about how they provide play opportunities.²



- The Children and Families Act 2014 outlines how support should be offered to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Local authorities have a responsibility to identify children and young people with SEND, and where necessary to provide support to meet their special educational needs. For some children this provision will be specified within an Education, Health and Care plan, and could include support with play at nursery or the development of certain skills through play.
- All parents of three and four-year-olds are entitled to register for 15 hours of free childcare for 38 weeks of the year in England. Two-year-olds are entitled to free early education if they have an Education, Health and Care plan or receive Disability Living Allowance at any rate.
- Through the Childcare Act 2016, working parents of three and four-year-old children will have a legal entitlement to receive 30 hours a week of free childcare from September 2017. This will be a right for all children with working parents, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum is currently used to set standards for learning, development and care for all children attending schools and Ofsted registered early years providers. In order to deliver the curriculum successfully, early years educators and teachers are required to have an understanding of different approaches to education, including the role of play in supporting early learning and development.

“The Equality Act 2010 provides legal protection to disabled children and families seeking to access play services.”

¹ Reasonable adjustments relate to adjustments to provisions, criteria and practices, providing auxiliary aids, or to adaptations to premises: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/what-are-reasonable-adjustments

² The Equality and Human Rights Commission provides a range of guidance on its website about legal requirements in relation to discrimination, reasonable adjustments and the public sector equality duty: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en

Risk, health and safety

A key theme of submissions to our Play Inquiry was a concern that play providers' attitude towards risk, health and safety can limit disabled children's opportunities to play. In many cases these fears were felt to be caused by a misguided perception of legislation and regulation. As a result there can be a reluctance to engage in more challenging play and an exclusion of children with more complex needs.

While health and safety is important and must always be taken into account, it should be used reasonably and proportionally. Creating the right balance between protecting children from serious risk and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. Risk needs to be managed but not removed altogether.

As the Health and Safety Executive argue:

'Play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.'³

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has set up the Myth Busters Challenge Panel to ensure that health, safety and risk are not misused to prevent children from playing in environments where they develop and learn. As a parent, if you think a decision or advice that you have been given in the name of health and safety is wrong, or disproportionate for the activity you are doing, you can contact the panel via www.hse.gov.uk/contact/contact-myth-busting.htm

³ The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Statement provides some useful guidance on this topic: www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf



Further information



Sense Children's Specialist Services

Sense Children's Specialist Services (CSS) is a team of advisory teachers, children's therapists, and children and family support workers. They provide expert advice and information to children and young people who are deafblind or have sensory impairments, their families, carers, and to professionals who work with them. They also offer support in the home, at school, in the community or at Sense Family Centres.

CSS's core offer to families includes:

- **Contact within two working days** from when a family first contacts Sense
- **Each family will be offered the opportunity to meet a member of the team** within eight weeks of first getting in touch with us
- Each family will have their own **identified worker**
- Each family will be invited to attend **at least one family event per year**
- **CSS will keep in touch** with families through an annual contact.

There are a variety of other ways CSS can support you. This includes regular multi-sensory groups, family support events, resource libraries, an identification report to highlight needs related to deafblindness, packages to provide support at key times, and social or educational advice and assessments. For more information visit www.sense.org.uk/content/childrens-specialist-services

For all queries, contact our Information and Advice Service via www.sense.org.uk/content/information-and-advice-service

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0300 330 9256 or 020 7520 0972

Text phone:
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Email:
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Local Offer

Your Local Offer provides information about relevant support services in your area.

Family support groups and resources for parents

Lookout for family-led initiatives, peer support groups and resources designed for parents, such as:

Mumsnet

The UK's most popular parenting network offering support, advice, product reviews, competitions and more. Visit www.mumsnet.com

Contact a Family parent support groups

Parent support groups are a great way to meet other parents for practical and emotional support. Most support groups are set up and run by parents and carers of children with additional needs. Contact a Family is a charity for families of disabled children. Visit www.cafamily.org.uk/connect-with-families/parent-support-groups

Cerebra's guides for parents

Cerebra provides high quality health and social care information for the parents and carers of children aged 0-16 years with neurological conditions. Visit <http://w3.cerebra.org.uk/help-and-information/guides-for-parents>

Rainbow Trust

A children's charity that provides emotional and practical support to families who have a child with a life threatening or terminal illness. Visit <http://rainbowtrust.org.uk/>

Scope's play resources for parents of disabled children

Scope has put together some useful play resources to promote equal access to play opportunities. Visit www.scope.org.uk/support/families/play



sense

connecting sight, sound and life

About Sense

Sense is a national charity that supports people who are deafblind, have sensory impairments or complex needs, to enjoy more independent lives.

Our expertise in supporting individuals with communication needs benefits people of all ages, as well as their families and carers. We provide information and advice, offer a wide range of flexible services and campaign passionately for the rights of the people we serve.

Sense

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