



Every Child Matters

Understanding support, services,
financial help and your child's rights

Cheryl Brownlee MLA

*Member of the Northern Ireland
Assembly for East Antrim*



*Your guide to Special
Educational Needs (SEN) in
Northern Ireland*

Foreword from Cheryl Brownlee MLA

As both a public representative and a parent, I understand the challenges, uncertainties, and successes that come with supporting a child with Special Educational Needs.

This is not simply a policy issue for me – it is deeply personal.

Like many families, I have experienced the complexities of securing the right support and ensuring my child's needs are recognised.

Every child deserves the chance to reach their full potential, and every parent deserves clear guidance and reassurance. Too often, families must navigate systems that feel overwhelming and, at times, unresponsive.

I remain committed to campaigning for better services, stronger accountability, and a more compassionate approach.

This booklet has been created with parents and carers at its heart. It aims to provide accessible information, practical resources, and signposts to support that can make a real difference. Whether you are at the beginning of your journey or have been advocating for your child for many years, I hope you will find something here that helps, informs, or reassures you.

Most importantly, I want every family reading this to know that your experiences matter. Your voices are powerful, and together we can continue to push for a system that works better for all our children.



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Glossary of SEN Terms

Navigating the world of SEN can be overwhelming, and part of that is due to some of the terminology that is used. While not exhaustive, this list helps explain some of the acronyms and terms used.

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASD Advisory Service	Specialist support for schools to help meet the needs of pupils with autism
CA	Classroom Assistant. Staff who provide in-class support to pupils with additional needs
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Clinical services supporting children with emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. Oversees curriculum and assessment in NI
DE	Department of Education. Government department responsible for education policy
Differentiation	Adapting teaching methods or materials to suit different learners
Dyscalculia	Learning difficulty affecting mathematical understanding
Dyslexia	Learning difficulty affecting reading, writing and spelling
Dyspraxia (DCD)	Development Coordination Disorder. A condition affecting coordination and motor skills
EA	Education Authority. Body responsible for SEN services, assessments and education provision in NI
ELS	Enhanced Learning Support. Additional educational support within school
EP	Educational Psychologist. Supports children and young people with their learning, development and mental wellbeing.
IEP	Individual Education Plan. A plan outlining personalised targets and support for a pupil

Intervention	Targeted support to help a pupil with specific learning or behavioural difficulties
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties.
Neurodivergent	Nonmedical term that describes people whose brains develop or work differently. This means the person has different strengths or struggles from people whose brains are considered to be 'typical'.
Neurotypical	Nonmedical term that describes people whose brains are considered to develop and work more 'typically'.
OT	Occupational Therapy. Supports children with sensory, motor or functional difficulties
Pediatrician	Medical specialist often involved in assessing neurodevelopmental needs
PD	Physical Disability. A physical impairment that affects daily activities or mobility
RA	Reasonable Adjustments. Changes made to remove barriers to learning or participation
SEBD/SEBN	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties/Needs. Needs relating to emotional regulation or behaviour
SEN	Special Educational Needs. When a child has a learning difficulty or disability requiring additional support
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator. Staff member responsible for SEN provision in a school
SEN Framework	Statutory process for identifying, assessing and supporting SEN in NI
Sensory Needs	Needs relating to sensory processing (sight, sound, touch, balance, etc)
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulties.
SLT	Speech and Language Therapy. Support for Communication or swallowing needs
TA	Teaching Assistant. Staff providing classroom or 1:1 support (term used in some schools)
Transition Plan	A plan to support a pupil moving between key educational stages
VI	Visual Impairment. Partial or full loss of sight affecting learning



Understanding SEN

Special Educational Needs (SEN) describes a child or young person who needs **extra help or different support** to learn compared to most children of the same age.

A child may have SEN if they:

- Find it harder to learn than most children their age
- Have difficulties with communication or understanding
- Have physical or sensory needs that affect learning
- Need support with behaviour, emotions or social skills

Having SEN **does not** mean a child is not intelligent or capable. It simply means they may need learning to be adapted to help them succeed.

Understanding the Differences

SEN vs Disability

A **disability** is a long term physical or mental condition that affects everyday activities

- A child can have a disability **and** SEN
- A child can have a disability but **not** need extra educational support
- A child can have SEN but **not** a diagnosed disability

SEN vs Learning Difficulties

A **learning difficulty** means a child finds certain academic skills harder and may fall under SEN if extra support in school is needed

- **Dyslexia** affects reading and spelling
- **Dyscalculia** affects understanding numbers
- **Dysgraphia** affects handwriting

SEN vs Medical Conditions

A **medical condition** is a health diagnosis. Some may affect learning (SEN) and others may need medical treatment but not educational support

- **ADHD** can affect concentration and impulse control
- A child with asthma may need medical support but not learning adaptations

Common Types of Special Educational Needs

Below are some common areas of need. A child may have one or several.

Autism / Social Communication Needs

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects how a person communicates, understands social situations and experiences the world.

A child with autism might:

- find social interaction confusing
- prefer routines and predictability
- be sensitive to noise, light or touch
- have focused or intense interests

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects attention, activity levels and impulse control.

A child with ADHD might:

- find it hard to stay still
- be easily distracted
- act before thinking
- struggle with organisation

Dyslexia, Dyscalculia & Dysgraphia

These are known as **specific learning difficulties**.

- Dyslexia – difficulties with reading and spelling
- Dyscalculia – difficulties understanding numbers and math
- Dysgraphia – difficulties with handwriting or organising writing

Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN)

These needs may be short-term or long-term. Some children may have issues with:

- understanding what others say
- expressing themselves clearly
- finding the right words
- social communication (taking turns, understanding tone or body language)

Moderate or Severe Learning Difficulties

Children with **moderate learning difficulties (MLD)** or **severe learning difficulties (SLD)** learn more slowly than their peers across most subjects. They may:

- need work broken into smaller steps
- require repetition and extra time
- need support to develop everyday life skills

Sensory Processing Needs

Sensory needs are common in autistic children but can also occur on their own. Some children are over-sensitive or under-sensitive to sensory input. For example they may:

- find certain sounds painful
- avoid certain textures
- seek movement or pressure
- become overwhelmed in busy environments

Behavioural, Emotional & Social Needs

Behaviour is often a way of communicating an unmet need. Support focuses on understanding the cause, not just the behaviour. Sometimes children struggle with:

- managing emotions
- building friendships
- anxiety or low mood
- anger or frustration

Physical or Medical Needs

Some children require support due to:

- physical disabilities affecting movement
- long-term medical conditions
- mobility or coordination difficulties
- fatigue or pain

They may need:

- specialist equipment
- adapted classrooms
- personal care support
- healthcare plans in school

Every Child is Different

SEN Support is about **removing barriers to learning.**

With the right support and understanding, children with SEN can achieve, develop confidence and reach their full potential.



The SEN Code of Practice

The **SEN Code of Practice (1998)** is statutory guidance based on the **Education Order (Northern Ireland) 1996** and **The Education (SEN) Regulations 2005**.

Educational settings and schools use the guidance in the SEN Code of Practice to deliver a clear and consistent approach for identifying and providing for children and young people with SEN.

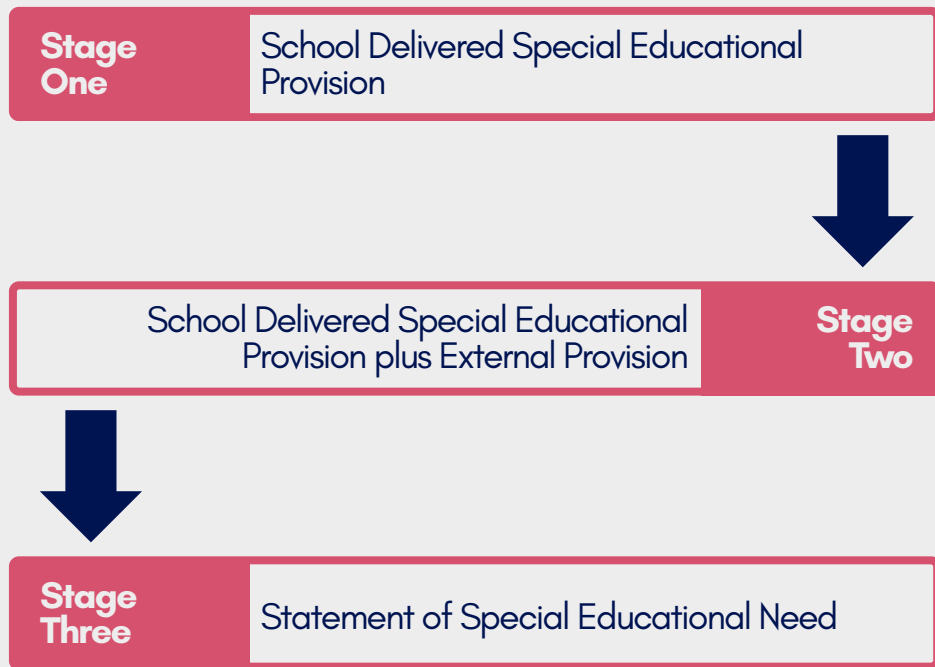
As a parent, you have an important role to play at each of these stages because you have unique knowledge and experience of your child's needs to share with their school. This helps everyone involved with your child decide on the best way to support them both in school and at home.

The school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) is a key person in the school throughout each of the stages. They will help to ensure that the necessary steps are in place to support your child's ability to access the curriculum and will work in partnership with parents and other school staff to establish the support your child's needs.



Stages of Special Educational Provision in the SEN Code

The new **3 Stage Code of Practice** stages focuses on the level of intensity of the special educational provision needed for each child or young person to improve their individual outcomes.



Stage One

At this stage of the Code of Practice, special educational provision is made by the school.

- the child or young person will have an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** or **Personal Learning Plan (PLP)**
- responsibility for teaching and learning lies with the school
- school put in place reasonable adjustments and additional strategies and approaches aimed at meeting and addressing the child's SEN

The majority of children and young people with SEN will have their educational needs met through this stage of provision.

Stage Two

At this stage of the Code of Practice, special educational provision is made by the school plus external provisions such as the Education Authority or a Health & Social Care Trust.

- the child or young person will have an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** or **Personal Learning Plan (PLP)**
- responsibility for teaching and learning lies with the school plus external provision from the EA
- school put in place reasonable adjustments and additional strategies and approaches plus resources, advice, guidance support and training provided through the EA SEN Support services

A smaller number of children and young people will need this provision.

Stage Three

At this stage of the Code of Practice, special educational provision is made by the school, EA plus any relevant treatment or service identified by a Health & Social Care Trust

- the child or young person will have an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** or **Personal Learning Plan (PLP)**
- responsibility lies with the school and the EA - with input from HSCT where relevant
- school will put in place reasonable adjustments, school delivered special educational provision plus EA provision as set out in a Statement.

Statutory Assessments & the Statement of SEN

A **statutory assessment** is a formal, detailed investigation carried out by the **Education Authority (EA)** to determine a child's special educational needs and what support they require. It is used when a child's needs cannot be fully met through school-based provision alone.

When is a Statutory Assessment Requested?

A **statutory assessment** may be requested when:

- a child is not making expected progress **despite SEN support already in place**
- a child's needs are complex or long term
- a multidisciplinary view is required to understand the child's needs
- experts such as Educational Psychologists recommend further assessment

What happens during the Assessment?

The Education Authority gathers advice from:

- parents
- school staff
- Educational Psychologist
- Health Professionals
- Social Services (if involved)
- any other relevant specialists

Outcome of the Assessment

The Education Authority will decide either to **issue a Statement of Special Educational Need**, or that **a Statement is not necessary** and continue at school-based stages of support.

The Right to Appeal

If you don't agree with the EA's decision, you have the right to appeal within two months of receiving the decision. The first step is to speak with your SEN Link Officer. Organisations such as SENAC are also fantastic with appeals.

The Statement of Special Educational Needs

A statement is a **legally binding** document that sets out:

- your child's strengths and needs
- the provision required to meet those needs
- the school placement
- any health or social care support required

A statement **must include**:

- description of your child's needs
- objectives of the support
- provision required (including staffing hours)
- school placement
- review arrangements



A statement **is not a diagnosis** and vice versa. You do not need a diagnosis for a statement.



Education Authority (EA) Support

For all calls relating to Special Educational Needs call **(028) 9031 7777**

Option 1

If you want to speak with SARS (Statutory Assessment and Review Service) with a specific query about a child who is undergoing statutory assessment or already has a statement of special educational needs. Or if you wish to speak with the 14+ Transitions Team.

Option 2

To speak to our Send Support and Advice team who can provide general and advice guidance regarding special educational needs or transfer your call to one of our Local Impact Teams for further assistance.

Option 3

For Educational Psychology Service.

Sensory Service (Hearing and Vision) Monday - Friday | 9am - 4:30pm

Support for children and young people who are deaf and/or hard of hearing, vision impaired or multi-sensory impaired sensoryservices@eani.org.uk

Northern Trust Support

Children's Speech & Language Therapy (SLT)

Support for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs or difficulties with eating, drinking and swallowing

 (028) 9083 1442

Paediatric Occupational Therapy (OT)

Community based care for children and young people from birth to 18 years of age (19 in special schools) with motor, sensory and/or learning difficulties

 (028) 9335 3745

 Monday - Friday | 9am - 5pm

Paediatric Physiotherapy

Working with children and young people of all ages from premature babies to adolescents to ensure optimal physical function and development

 (028) 9055 2279

 Monday - Friday | 9am - 5pm

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Paediatric ASD Services

Service available to help children/young people who may present as autistic

 (028) 2563 3777

 Monday – Friday | 9:30am – 4pm

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

Promotes emotional wellbeing and delivers mental health services to children and young people up to the age of 18

 (028) 9442 4693

 Monday – Friday | 9am – 5pm

Social Care & Family Support

Family Support Hubs

Supporting access to early intervention family support services for families and children/young people aged up to 18 years

 (028) 9446 7345

 07921 492 138

Children's Disability Team

Working with children up to the age of 18 with a range of severe learning or physical disabilities or sensory impairments, aiming to enable them to live as normal a life as possible in their own home

 (028) 9331 5114

Sharing the Care Short Break Service

Children with disabilities can spend some time with other families who are carefully chosen and vetted by the Trust, offering social opportunities and respite for parents

 (028) 9331 5114

My Care App

The patient portal for Health and Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland. allows you to view hospital appointments, medications, and some test results, and message your hospital care team



www.mycare.encompass.hscni.net

Connect North

Central database for support, contacts and resources in the Northern Trust area



www.connectnorth.co.uk

Direct Payments

If you or someone you care for has been assessed as needing social services support, you can apply for Direct Payments to arrange and pay for your own care, instead of the Health and Social Care Trust arranging it for you.

? Who can get Direct Payments?

To be eligible for Direct Payments, **you must already have been assessed as needing help from social services**. You can apply for Direct Payments if you:

- have a disability and are aged 16 or over
- have parental responsibilities for a child with disabilities
- are a carer aged 16 or over
- are elderly and need community care services

? How do you apply for Direct Payments?

If you already get services, ask your Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust about Direct Payments.

If you are applying for services for the first time, your social worker should discuss the Direct Payments option with you when they assess your care needs.

? How much will you get?

Your HSC Trust will decide how much money you get, based on what support you need to meet all or part of your social care needs.

? How is it paid?

Direct Payments are made directly into your bank account. Someone else can manage your Direct Payments on your behalf, and either way it is advised to have a separate bank account for this as bank statements will need to be provided throughout the year.

Direct payments do not affect any other benefits you may be getting however any person you employ must report this as income and this could affect any benefits they receive.



What can you use Direct Payments for?

You can use the money to pay for services or equipment identified in your assessment and care plan or to recruit personal assistants.

If you have **parental responsibility for a child with disabilities**, following an assessment, you can use direct payments for a variety of services which offer your child stimulation, new experiences, independence or that can reduce the stress on you as a parent.

If you are a **carer aged 16 or over**, you may be eligible for direct payments to buy services the Trust agrees you need to support you in your caring role.



Do you need to keep records?

If you receive Direct Payments, you'll need to account for the money you spend.

Your Trust will tell you what records you need to keep and what information you must provide, such as receipts for services from agencies.



What if your circumstances change?

If your needs change, even in the short-term, such as changes to your condition, a hospital stay or part of your support network is no longer available, contact your Trust as soon as possible so that they can reassess what you need.

Centre For Independent Living NI

Direct Payments & Self Directed Support

CILNI are experts in the field of Self Directed Support and Direct Payments. They can offer intensive support for each individuals unique circumstances - whether you are already receiving Direct Payments or just considering your options.

They can be contacted using the details below:



(028) 9064 8546 (Option 1)



enquiries@cilni.org

Financial Support

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

DLA for children is a tax free benefit made up of two component parts - care and mobility. The child might qualify for one or both parts.

Care Part	Weekly Rate	Mobility Part	Weekly Rate
Lowest	£30.30	Lower	£30.30
Middle	£76.70	Higher	£80.00
Highest	£114.60		

** Figures correct as of 1 April 2026*

Care Needs

The rate the child gets depends on the level of looking after they need, for example:

- lowest rate - help for some of the day or night
- middle rate - frequent help or constant supervision during the day, supervision at night or someone to help while they're on dialysis
- highest rate - help or supervision throughout both day and night, or a medical professional has said they might have 12 months or less to live

Mobility Needs

The rate the child gets depends on the level of help they need getting about, for example:

- lowest rate - they can walk but need help and or supervision when outdoors
- highest rate - they can't walk, can only walk a short distance without severe discomfort, could become very ill if they try to walk or they're blind or severely sight impaired

How to Apply

You can request a claim form using the contact details below:

 0800 587 0912

 dcs.formsedfnci.gov.uk

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Disabled Facilities Grant

A Disabled Facilities Grant from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) helps adapt a home for a person with a disability based on an occupational therapist's recommendation.

? Who can apply?

Owner occupiers, landlords or private tenants can get help to carry out adaptations if there is a person with a disability living in the house.

? What can you use it for?

Only works recommended by your Occupational Therapist, unless agreed differently by the local health trust and NIHE, can be considered for grant aid. Typical work may include:

- improving access to bathroom, living room or bedroom
- adding extra bathroom facilities
- making the preparation and cooking of food easier, e.g. by enlarging the kitchen or putting in low-level units
- adapting lighting or heating controls
- improving your heating system

An Occupational Therapist will look at your circumstances and recommend what type of adaptations are needed.

? How much can you get?

The amount of grant paid depends on the approved cost of the work and your financial circumstances.

If you are on a low income you may get grant aid up to a maximum of £35,000. In some cases NIHE may increase the award up to a maximum of £70,000. A calculation will be made to decide if you have to make a contribution.

? Who can apply?

You cannot apply to the Housing Executive. You must contact your local Health Trust occupational therapy service who will start the process for you.

Family Fund

Family Fund provides a wide range of grants to families living in Northern Ireland raising a disabled or seriously ill child, or young adult, on a low income.

Eligibility

Family Fund base their decisions on the social model of disability. This means that they focus on the support a child or young person needs and not just on a medical diagnosis.

To be eligible, a child or young person must need a high level of support in at least 3 out of 7 key areas they look at:

- personal care *physical support with feeding, washing, toileting or moving*
- access to social activities *support to engage socially and take part in activities*
- education *support with education and learning*
- communication *support listening, speaking and understanding*
- supervision *high level of supervision and measures to ensure their safety*
- medical treatment *support in the form of treatment or therapy*
- physical environment *high level of support with physical adaptations and adjustments*

Support is available for families on low income. **You do not need to be in receipt of benefits**, but you will need to provide some additional information about your household income.

What the grant can be used for

Grants can be used for a wide variety of items and activities including:

Family Breaks | Computers & Tablets | Clothing | Kitchen Appliances | Sensory Toys | Games Consoles | Outdoor Play | Days Out | Furniture & Household | Beds & Bedding | Games, Books & Music | Specialist Bikes & Trikes | Clubs, Hobbies & Activities

How to Apply

Applications can be made on the Family Fund website or by using the contact details below:



01904 550055



info@familyfund.org.uk

Applications to the Family Fund in Northern Ireland can be made every 2 years. Once the funding has run out, applications will be closed.

Carers Allowance

If you're aged 16 or over and spend at least 35 hours a week caring for someone who is ill or has a disability, you may be eligible for Carer's Allowance.

Eligibility

The person you care for must get one of the following benefits: PIP (daily living part), DLA (middle or highest rate for personal care), Attendance Allowance, Constant Attendance Allowance (no less than full day rate) or Armed Forces Independence Payment.

You need to spend at least 35 hours per week caring for someone. This can include helping with washing & cooking, taking the person you care for to appointments or helping with household tasks like managing bills or shopping.

How much you will get

The current weekly rate, as of 1 April 2026, is £86.45

You will get less if you get certain benefits or State Pension.

Your savings don't affect how much you get.

How to Apply

Applications can be made online on the NI Direct website or by contacting the Disability & Carers Service using the details below:



0800 587 0912



belfastcastlecourt.caenquiries@dfcni.gov.uk

Make the Call Service

Contact the Make the Call service to check if you are getting all the benefits, services and supports you're entitled to.

Phone lines are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm excluding public holidays.



0800 232 1271



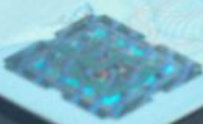
text ADVICE to 07984 405248

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**Parking Card
for Disabled People**

Carte de stationnement
pour personnes
handicapées
Carta de estacionament
per persones
amb discapacitat
Karta dla osób
niepełnosprawnych
Cartão de estacionamento
para pessoas com deficiência



EUROPEAN UNION UNITED KINGDOM

Practical Support

Blue Badge Scheme

The Blue Badge scheme is an important service for people with severe mobility problems. It allows badge holders to park close to where they need to go.

You can get a blue badge if your child receives the **higher rate of the mobility part** of DLA.

Children under the age of 3 may also qualify for a badge if they need to travel with bulky equipment or be close to a vehicle for emergency medical treatment.

A Blue Badge costs £10 and will run for 3 years.

You can apply online on the NI Direct website, or by contacting the Blue Badge Unit on the details below:



0300 200 7818



bluebadges@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Free School Meals and Uniform Grants

Parents/Guardians can apply if your son or daughter is in full-time education and if you are in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Related Employment & Support Allowance
- Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit
- Universal Credit and have net household earnings not exceeding £15,390 per year

You can also apply if your child has a statement of special educational needs and is designated to require a special diet.

Full information is available on the Education Authority website or via the contact details below:



028 9047 0233



mealsanduniforms@eani.org.uk

Home to School Transport

Transport assistance may be provided for pupils with a statement of special educational needs if they have been identified as having a special transport need during their statutory assessment process.

If your child is eligible there is no need to apply. The EA's Statutory Assessment and Review Service team will make a referral to the Transport Service requesting that transport is arranged.

If your child has a statement and is attending a mainstream school, unless a special transport need has been identified you must apply for transport assistance and will be assessed against the criteria.

Where a child is entitled to transport, but no service is available, **Parental Payments can be offered in certain circumstances** to contribute towards the cost of alternative transport.



028 9598 5959 (option 2)



transport.localitynorth@eani.org.uk

Caudwell Children – Equipment & Sensory Packs

Caudwell Children provide a wide range of specialist mobility and sensory equipment tailored for disabled and neurodivergent children and young people.

The right equipment doesn't just support development, it gives children invaluable independence, confidence and boosts self-esteem, opening up new possibilities.

Powered wheelchairs, specialised sports equipment, therapy tricycles, car seats & harnesses, buggies, sensory equipment and sensory packs can be applied for if you meet the following criteria:

- the child is under the age of 19 and lives in the UK
- they have a disability or chronic illness
- your household income is below £60,000 (not including benefits), or you receive means-tested benefits, and you have savings of less than £16,000

Full details are available on the Caudwell Children website, or they can be contacted using the details below:



0345 300 1348



applications@caudwellchildren.com

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Hospital Passports

Hospital Passports are for people with additional needs to complete and present to staff every time they have contact with a hospital. It gives staff important information on the person, how they prefer to communicate, their medical history and any support they might need while in hospital.

Staff can then make reasonable adjustments in order to provide the best possible care.

Blank Hospital Passports are available online to download and complete from the Public Health Agency website.

NHS Nappies & Continence Products

Free NHS nappies and continence products are available for children with SEND, typically from age 4 or 5, through a Paediatric Continence Nurse assessment. Services include free delivery of nappies, pads, or sometimes pull-ups, with eligibility determined by a continence team following a review of the child's needs.

How to access free nappies/continence aids:

- **Request an Assessment:** Contact your GP, health visitor or pediatrician to refer your child to a local continence service
- **Assessment Process:** A nurse will usually ask you to complete a toileting chart or diary to assess the child's needs
- **Age Requirements:** While usually for children aged 4+, exceptions can be made for children with multiple disabilities
- **What is Provided:** Products can include disposable nappies, pads with mesh pants or bedding protection

Rates Relief – Disabled Persons Allowance

DPA is a 25% reduction on domestic rates for properties that have been adapted to meet the needs of the person(s) with a disability living in the household. This is not affected by income or savings but certain adaptations must have been made to qualify. You can check your eligibility and any other queries by contacting the Disabled Persons Allowance Team within LPS:



0300 200 7801



applicationbased.raterelief@finance-ni.gov.uk

Family Support

Autism NI

Local support services including a free helpline, Early Intervention Service that supports families after receiving an autism diagnosis, Support Groups throughout local communities and accredited training to parents, carers, and professionals.

 028 9040 1729

ADDNI

Specialist support for children, young people, and adults affected by ADHD across Northern Ireland. Programmes, training and support groups as well as a dedicated advice line.

 028 9081 2222

Spectrum Connections NI

Local charity supporting children and young people with autism and ADHD, and their families across Carrickfergus, Larne, Whitehead and Islandmagee. Youth clubs, family groups, training and other activities run regularly across East Antrim.

 info@scni.org.uk

 Spectrum Connections NI

National Autistic Society

Offering a range of supports including day services as well as a range of evening and weekend programmes for children, adults and families. NAS run two specialist autism centres in Carryduff and Randalstown as well as campaigning for better support for those with autism.

 028 9068 7066

 northern.irelandenas.org.uk

Sense NI

Sense NI offer a range of supports for disabled people with complex needs in Northern Ireland including adult services, outreach services, family support, supported living, residential care and specialist support for children with complex needs.

Sense Nursery in Newtownabbey is a specialist service for children with complex needs under the age of four, while the centre in Carrickfergus offers a range of activities for disabled adults.

 028 9335 5665

 nienquiries@sense.org.uk

Sure Start

The Sure Start programme supports young children and their families, living in disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. The programme provides support to parents from pregnancy until their child's fourth birthday.

Your Postcode will determine whether you will qualify for Sure Start services. Places are allocated to areas which are within the top 25% of deprived wards within Northern Ireland. You should contact your nearest SureStart to check whether you are eligible.

Carrickfergus & Larne  028 9335 5665
Newtownabbey  028 9086 0938

Special Educational Needs Advice Centre (SENAC)

SENAC provide free advice on the statutory SEN system in Northern Ireland as well as practical support in the statementing process, appeals, etc.

 028 9079 5779

 info@senac.co.uk

Strive NI

Private one-to-one sessions for children and young people up to the age of 17 as well as parent appointments for individual support and guidance. Covering areas such as emotional regulation, school based anxiety and confidence and self esteem.

 07795 395 868

 info@striveni.co.uk



Home Start East Antrim

Home Start East Antrim is a family support charity, helping families with at least one child aged under 5, living in Carrickfergus, Lame or Newtownabbey. All support is free, confidential and non-judgemental.

Home Visiting Support

Home-visiting volunteers visit families at home weekly for two hours, offering befriending support, practical help, a listening ear and an extra pair of hands.

They are all parents, grandparents or have caring experience themselves, understand the challenges faced by families with young children and want to help.

Volunteers undertake Access NI checks and full training before being carefully matched to families.

Group Support

Home Start East Antrim provide a variety of group activities in community venues across Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey and Lame including:

- Weekly term time family groups (parent and tots style groups with smaller numbers and additional support provided for families struggling to attend groups or feeling isolated)
- Weekly family group tailored for children with additional support needs
- Weekly parent carer self-care group, providing peer support for parents caring for a child with a disability or additional support needs

 028 9332 8875

 office@homestarteastantrim.org.uk

The Cedar Foundation

Supporting people with a range of disabilities that include; brain injury, physical and sensory disability, learning disability, autism, and mental health conditions. Services support disabled people to access employment and education, connect with the community, or live more independently.

 028 9046 1834

 communications@cedar-foundation.org

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People

Chris Quinn is the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). His primary role is to **safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people.**

The Commissioner's office can offer a wide range of advice and assistance on issues such as children's rights, education, health and so much more.



028 9031 1616



info@niccy.org

Children's Law Centre

The Children's Law Centre works to protect the rights of all children living in NI, particularly those who are the most disadvantaged, e.g. children with disabilities, special educational needs, mental ill health, homeless young people.

They provide free legal advice and representation for children and young people and use the law to ensure access to critical services for children and young people, as well as challenging discrimination faced by many of our most vulnerable children.



028 9024 5704



info@childrenslawcentre.org

Tax Free Childcare

Tax Free Childcare is a UK-wide scheme, administered by HMRC. You will need to set up a childcare account which both you and the government pay into.

For every £8 you pay into the account, the government will top it up by £2.

The total you can get for each child is £500 every 3 months (up to £2000 a year).

This goes up to £1000 every 3 months (up to £4000 a year) if your child is disabled.



www.gov.uk/tax-free-childcare

NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme

The NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme (NICSS) is specific to Northern Ireland, administered by the Department of Education on behalf of the NI Executive and can work hand-in-hand with Tax Free Childcare.

Rather than paying money into an account, it gives an automatic discount on your childcare bill through participating providers.

In order to qualify for NICSS you must be a working parent with children aged between 0–11 years old **and registered for Tax Free Childcare.**

If a child receives DLA, eligibility extends until the September after their 16th birthday, and the monthly subsidy cap is doubled to £406 per month instead of £203 per month.



028 9066 2825



www.early-years.org/nicss

Tax Free Childcare & NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme

Example Scenario

Suppose monthly childcare costs are **£1000**

Step One - NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme (NICSS)

Provides an automatic 15% discount directly to childcare provider (**£150**)

Amount remaining to pay: **£850**

Step Two - Tax Free Childcare (TFC)

After the NICSS discount has been automatically applied, you pay 80% of the remaining childcare costs into your Tax Free Childcare account and the Government adds a 20% top up (subject to scheme limits)

80% of £850 means you deposit **£680**

Government TFC top up: **£170**

Total childcare bill: £1000

Total saving when both TFC & NICSS applied: £320

Total you would pay: £680

Community Support

NI Fire & Rescue Service – Home Fire Safety Check

Those identified as being more at risk can avail of a free home fire safety check from NIFRS. This will include assessing fire risks, escape plans, fire prevention and adequacy of smoke alarms. New smoke alarms can be provided as well as advice on testing them safely.

Applications can be made online via the NIFRS website or by contacting your local fire station.

Mae Murray Foundation

Offering a wide range of supports, events and opportunities for people of all ages and abilities ranging from family events, free equipment hire (such as buggies, wheelchairs, beach buggies, etc) and inclusive beaches at Cranfield, Portstewart and Tyrella.

 0300 600 1166

 info@maemurrayfoundation.org

Baby Bank

Providing emergency baby supplies such as nappies, baby wipes, etc. to families in urgent financial hardship. My office can provide referrals or you can contact them on the details below:

Carrickfergus, Greenisland & Whitehead

 07761039536

 carrickfergusbabybank@gmail.com

Larne

 028 9352 8875

 office@homestarteantrim.org.uk

Changing Places Toilets

Changing Places facilities provide sanitary accommodation for people with complex disabilities who have assistants with them. These bathrooms are bigger and offer specialist equipment such as grab rails, hoists and adult-sized changing platforms to ensure dignity and accessibility for those that need it.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

MEABC are committed to making the borough as accessible and inclusive as possible, and have a number of initiatives and programmes aimed at achieving this goal.

Adoption of Just a Minute (JAM) Card

Allows people with a hidden disability like autism or a communication barrier to tell others they need 'Just A Minute' discreetly and easily.

Employability Guide

Providing resources to local businesses to help support autistic people into roles within their workplace.

Sensory Parks

The sensory areas at Peoples Park in Ballymena and Carnfunnock were designed to create spaces away from the main play areas that engage the senses and promote a calming atmosphere.

Quiet Hour at Principal Play Parks

Dedicated quiet hour at the following parks: People's Park, Ballymena, Carnfunnock Country Park and Town Park, Larne, and Marine Gardens play park in Carrickfergus. Quiet hour is Wednesday and Sunday from 2pm-3pm.

Autism Friendly Museums

Pre-Visit Guides for Council Facilities

Includes museums, parks, leisure centres and the Gobbins

Changing Places Facilities at Council Events

Wherever possible, changing places facilities are provided as part of major Council events.

Visitor information centres in each of the major towns in the Borough will be able to advise on support available for any local attractions:

Carrickfergus

 028 9335 8222

Larne

 028 2826 0395

Ballymena

 028 2563 5077

Additional Bins

If you require additional waste capacity due to medical needs or a large family you can apply for an additional bin. There is an application form available on Council's website or you can contact the Waste Helpdesk on the details below:



0300 124 5000



waste.helpdesk@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

Radar Keys

All Council toilets have disability access. The National Key Scheme, known as the Radar Scheme, was developed to protect valuable disabled facilities from damage and misuse.

Toilets under the Radar scheme require a key to open. The Radar keys can be purchased from Council receptions:

The Braid, Ballymena (Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 4.30pm)
Carrickfergus Civic Centre (Monday – Friday 9.30am – 5pm)

Keys cost £5.70 to purchase. (correct as of April 2026)

MEActive Adapted Bikes

Adapted bikes can be hired free of charge in Carrickfergus and Larne. A consent form and booking form can be obtained on Council's website or by email.



www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk



inclusivebikehire@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

MEAqua Quiet Hour

Dedicated quiet hour in the swimming pools. Carrickfergus Amphitheatre (Mondays 5–6pm), Larne Leisure Centre (Mondays 4–5pm) and Seven Towers Leisure Centre (Wednesdays 4–5pm)

MEA Disability Sports Clubs

- Junior PAN Disability Sports Club (Carrickfergus)
Mondays from 5pm – 5:45pm
- Adult PAN Disability Sports Club (Carrickfergus)
Tuesdays from 3:45pm – 4:30pm
- Boccia Club (Larne)
Mondays from 4:30pm – 5:15pm
- Junior PAN Disability Sports Club (Larne)
Thursdays from 5pm – 5:45pm
- Adult PAN Disability Sports Club (Larne)
Thursdays from 4:15pm – 5pm

LUDO Soft Play Booking System & Quiet Hour

Inclusive sessions designed for children with disabilities or specific needs. Limited numbers for sessions to create a calm, supportive environment. Sensory packs are also available to borrow from reception with a £5 refundable deposit.

Monday, Wednesday & Friday from 10-11am

MEActive Adapted Summer Camps

The programme is open to children living with additional or special needs aged between 6 and 18 years of age with the opportunity to avail of bookable slots.



www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk

Greenisland FC – Disability Football

Greenisland FC's Bears Section offer opportunities for ambulant males and females aged 6 to 16 with a learning and/or physical disability to become involved in football.



www.greenislandfc.clubforce.com



Greenisland FC

CHILL – Carrickfergus Hub Improving Lives Locally

A dedicated charity committed to providing support, resources, and a safe space for individuals in Carrickfergus and the surrounding areas. Their mission is to promote positive mental health, prevent suicide, and create a community where everyone feels valued and supported.



info@chillonline.org



CHILL – Carrickfergus Hub Improving Lives Locally

Sunflower Lanyard

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is a simple tool for you to voluntarily share that you have a disability or condition that may not be immediately apparent – and that you may need a helping hand, understanding, or more time in shops, at work, on transport, or in public spaces.



www.hiddendisabilitiesstore.freshdesk.com

Mid and East Antrim Community Advice Services

Formerly Citizens Advice, MEACAS provide practical advice, negotiate on behalf of clients and represent them formally, such as at tribunal hearings.

From benefits, debt and money advice, consumer issues, work-related problems, housing or relationships, MEACAS offer in-person, telephone and email advice.



028 9600 1333



advice@meacas.com

Carrickfergus Community Forum

Support group called Super Kids which meets in the Carrickfergus Community Forum (31 Lancasterian Street) offering support and activities for parents and children with additional needs.



028 9335 9777



dliza423@gmail.com

Rutledge Training

Offering training, education and employment opportunities for those aged 16-18 (age varies for young people with a SEND diagnosis or from an in-care background).



028 9336 4483

NOW Group

NOW Group works with people aged 16 and over who are neurodivergent, autistic, have ADHD or a learning disability, providing free support to help them gain skills, find employment and participate fully in their communities.

One-to-one support, CV and interview prep, work placements and accredited qualifications are some of the services offered.



028 9043 6400

Super Tutors Academy

In person and online tutors based in Carrickfergus offering one-to-one and group tutoring, home schooling, SEAG transfer test, GCSE, A Level, Masters & PhD tuition.



07999 729 744



info@supertutorsacademy.com

Aspire Day Opportunities Service

Aspire Day Opportunities Service, opening in September 2026, provides a welcome, supportive and engaging environment for young adults aged 18-30 with learning disabilities, autism and additional needs



07493 050 435



info@aspiredayopportunities.com

Mini Ville Play Carrickfergus

Mini Ville is an early years development play hub that offers children an escape from today's technology-driven world. It is a mini Carrickfergus town for children with its own vets, school, cottage and even their very own Castle! Children with sensory needs can indulge securely and quietly in our purpose-built multi-sensory room.



07886 237 806



minivilleplay@gmail.com

Luxe Male Grooming – Autism Barber NI

Jamie founded Autism Barber NI to give children with additional needs a safe space to get their hair cut. His lived experience with his own daughter means he knows the struggles and is able to bring that knowledge to his own work. From a quieter shop to silent clippers, Jamie utilises a number of techniques to make the experience more manageable and enjoyable for every child.



07714 024 228



www.luxemalegrooming.co.uk

Transport Accessibility & Support

Translink

All trains, and most buses, are accessible to wheelchair users. Mobility scooter users must obtain an approval sticker.

The majority of main bus and train stations have improved access features such as step free access, accessible ticket offices, trained staff on hand, hearing loop systems and accessible toilet facilities.

The dedicated Contact Centre is available for any questions, queries or advice on accessibility:

 028 9066 6630

Stena Line

Almost all ports and ferries are adapted to suit the needs of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. If you require assistance you can contact them 48 hours in advance via phone or at least 7 days before travel via email:

 03447 707 070



Contact Form on Stena Line website

P&O Ferries

Disabled toilets, wheelchair use and a minibus with wheelchair lift available, as well as hearing loops in the Port of Larne.

 01304 448 888



customerservices@poferries.com

Belfast City Airport

Special assistance is available for passengers with impairments, disabilities, hidden disabilities and reduced mobility.

 028 9093 9093

Belfast International Airport

Support and assistance available including access, security process, boarding, etc. through a dedicated Persons with Reduced Mobility Team based in the airport:

 028 9448 4957



prm.bfseocs.com

South Antrim Community Transport

Providing accessible and affordable transport to individuals and groups living in rural areas of Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council



028 9334 2455



info@southantrimcommunitytransport.com

Disability Action Transport Scheme

Local transport service for disabled people, older individuals and those who find it difficult to use public transport. Membership is free with a small charge per trip. For more information and to become a member:



028 9029 7870



transport@disabilityaction.org

Vehicle Tax Exemptions

Those who receive the Enhanced Rate of the Mobility Component of PIP, Adult Disability Payment or the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA are eligible for a 100% vehicle tax exemption. Standard rate PIP/ADP recipients are eligible for 50% reduction.



www.gov.uk/get-vehicle-tax-exemption-disability

Accessible Parking Bays

An accessible parking bay is a reserved space on the public road for use by Blue Badge holders only. These are normally only for drivers with a Blue Badge, however **a bay may be given for a Blue Badge holding passenger who cannot be left alone, such as a child under 16** who lives at the same address as the driver.

Before you apply, you will need:

- the Blue Badge number
- driving licence number
- vehicle registration
- a valid email address



0300 200 7899



www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/accessible-parking-bays

Activities & Days Out

Cinema Exhibitors Association (CEA) Card

A UK-wide scheme for disabled people. It's one way for cinemas who take part to make sure they make reasonable adjustments for you when you go to the cinema – it includes a free ticket for someone to go with you. Cards cost £6.50, are valid for one year and can be applied for online.

 01244 526 016

 info@ceacard.co.uk

Carers Card UK

A carers card costs £8 for a two year period and includes a free app which provides access to hundreds of online discounts plus additional features, tools and services designed to support the carer in their caring role.

This can be applied for on the Carers Card UK website – www.carerscarduk.co.uk

National Trust Essential Companions Card

The Essential Companion pass makes it simple to bring one or two carers or companions with you, free of charge. Show the pass when you arrive, and your carers or companions won't need to pay an entry fee. You can contact National Trust on the details below to get an Essential Companions Card free of charge:

 0344 800 1895

 enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

IFA Accessible Tickets

Windsor Park now offers 133 wheelchair-accessible places, free essential companion tickets, ambulant seating, a quiet room and match commentary headsets. Guide dogs are also welcome. To discuss accessibility requirements or apply for free essential companion tickets:

 028 9066 9458

 dao@irishfa.com

Belfast Zoo

Free admission for an accompanying carer of a visitor paying standard admission. Proof of carers allowance, a doctors letter or other relevant paperwork showing need for a carer will be required.

 028 9077 6277

 harrisonl@belfastcity.gov.uk

SSE Arena

The SSE Arena offer a number Personal Assistant tickets (previously known as Essential Aid tickets) at a discount or no additional cost. This is eligible to customers who meet the criteria and would be unable to attend an event without the support of another person, who can assist in the event of an emergency. These tickets need to be applied for via Ticketmaster's online booking, and required evidence submitted to Ticketmaster ahead of the event.

Streamvale Open Farm

Carers entry fee for just £1 with proof of ID.

 028 9048 3244

Titanic Belfast

Carers go free. When booking online please choose the carer option.

 028 9076 6386

W5

Carers go free with ID.

 028 9046 7700

Grand Opera House – Access for All Scheme

A free scheme to ensure tailored support so that all visitors needs are catered for.

 028 9024 1919

Support Groups & Clubs

Access Employment Ltd Larne

AEL provides support services, work experience and training to individuals with additional needs, learning disabilities, health conditions and social disadvantage, helping them to progress into employment or further education.

 028 2827 4992

 AEL – Access Employment Ltd Larne

Hawthorns Adult Centre

Adult Centres provide day care to people with a learning disability who have complex health care needs and / or challenging behavior. Each adult centre has specially trained day care staff, assisted by a multi- disciplinary team providing a person-centred approach to care planning. This ensures that the specific and complex needs of individuals are met in this environment. Multi-disciplinary support includes physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work, community nursing, dental services and challenging behavior service.

 028 9331 5110

 81 Ellis Street, Carrickfergus

Carrickfergus Senior Gateway Club

Carrickfergus Senior Gateway are a leisure club for adults with a learning disability.

 Carrickfergus YMCA

 thomas_haighton@yahoo.co.uk

Carrickfergus Junior Gateway Club

Junior Gateway is a youth club for children with learning disabilities based in Carrickfergus, running on Thursday evenings from 6:30-8pm for ages 8-18.

 07894 864825

 info@carrickjunorgateway.org.uk

Carrickfergus Junior Gateway (Crossroads)

Crossroads is a youth club for young adults with learning disabilities based in Carrickfergus, running on Thursday evenings from 8-10pm for ages 15-29.

 07894 864825

 info@carrickjuniorgateway.org.uk

Rumbles Autism Group Newtownabbey

Early intervention Playgroup based in Newtownabbey for children 2-5 years old with additional needs.

 07783 569329

 Rumbles Autism Group

Blue Blossoms Autism Support Group

Supporting families living with and affected by autism and ADHD by giving a safe place to play and socialise. Running every Saturday morning in Rathfern Social Activity Centre.

 07736 587429

 emilyjane29@hotmail.com

Monkstown Special Stars

Supporting families and children with additional needs and disabilities each Saturday in the Monkstown Jubilee Centre

 Monkstown Special Stars

You2Me Tuition

SEN & mainstream tuition for children aged 3-18 years. SEN/ASD Holiday Clubs & Summer Schemes.

 You2Me Tuition

 you2metuition@gmail.com

Anxiety Based School Avoidance Parent Group

Support group for parents and carers in Northern Ireland who have children struggling to attend school due to anxiety.

 Anxiety Based School Avoidance Parent Group

NI Community for Parents/Carers of Children with Complex Needs

There are a lot of diagnosis specific groups but many people don't have answers or a diagnosis or have a child that has multiple conditions. This group is open to all parents/carers of children from birth up to teenage years who have complex needs.

 NI Community for Parents/Carers of Children with Complex Needs

Parents 4 Pegs NI

Concerned parents holding those responsible accountable for delays in paediatric PEG surgery & care.

 Parents 4 Pegs NI

Caleb's Cause NI

Campaigning for Post-19 SEND lifelong care plan underpinned by legislation for young people/adults with complex disabilities here in Northern Ireland.

 Calebs Cause NI

Cubbie

Cubbie is a sensory management pod used in schools and public spaces across the UK and Ireland. It provides neurodivergent individuals with a customizable, immersive digital environment of lights, sounds, and visuals to pause, reset, and regulate sensory experiences in just 5 to 15 minutes

ASD Support Group Northern Ireland

This group was created as a support group for those with ASD and their families, designed specifically for people in Northern Ireland.

 ASD Support Group Northern Ireland

SEN Hub NI

Providing information on inclusive and suitable activities, classes and venues which are available in Northern Ireland for children and young people and their families who have special educational needs.

 SEN Hub NI

Carrick Nazarene Little Stars

Parent and toddler group for children ages 0–3 with additional needs. A safe and inclusive space for children to explore, play and have a snack. Tuesdays (term time, excluding first Tuesday of the month) from 10:30am – 12pm at Carrickfergus Nazarene Church.

 Carrick Church of the Nazarene  hello@carricknazarene.co.uk

Mid and East Antrim Community Advice Service

Community Advice Mid & East Antrim helps people resolve their debt, benefits, housing, legal, discrimination, employment, immigration, consumer and other problems and is available to everyone regardless of race, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, disability or religion.

 028 9600 1333

The DEN – Greenisland

Welcoming children from 2 years old with a wide spectrum of additional needs including ASD, ADHD, Global delay and PDA. Work closely with Hillcroft, Rosstulla and Thornfield schools.

 028 9544 2882  hello@thedenafterschool.com

Cheryl Brownlee MLA | 46

Libraries NI

All Libraries in Northern Ireland are fully accessible with a range of measures and supports in place for those with additional needs. Larne Library is one of 3 Sensory Libraries in NI which have gone the extra mile to create a welcoming space for people with autism.

 028 2827 7047

 larne.library@librariesni.org.uk

SOLAS

Special needs charity which supports children and young people with a broad range of additional needs including Autism. Based in South Belfast with work extending across Northern Ireland offering a number of social development, early intervention, educational support, parent support and therapeutic programmes.

 028 9024 7600

 www.solasbt7.com



Useful Helplines

Mencap NI Family Support Service

028 9069 1351

Housing Rights

028 9024 5640

Advice NI

0800 915 4604

Law Centre

028 9024 4401

Parentline NI

0808 802 0400

Family Lives

0808 800 2222

Lifeline

0808 808 8000

Samaritans

116 123

Carers UK (Northern Ireland)

028 9043 9843

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