

Early Intervention: A Support Guide for Parents

Getting help for your child's mental health and wellbeing

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Does my child need help?

All parents worry about their children, and all children encounter difficulties as they grow and develop. But what should you do if you feel your child is really unhappy, struggling, or not fitting in? Help is available — from school, from your GP, and from specialists in child development.

Speak to your child

Start by creating a culture at home where talking about emotions and difficult things is normal. Model how to express your own thoughts and feelings. Ask follow-up questions, be curious, and show you are fully listening — sometimes paraphrasing ("I think what you're saying is...") can help.

As well as talking, listen with your eyes. Children are very aware of when you are too busy for them. If your child is struggling to open up, try saying: "We're going to have some special time together, just you and me, every day." Even 10 or 15 minutes — spent entirely on their terms — creates the space they need.

Recommended reading: the *What to Do When...* series by Dawn Huebner covers anxiety, anger, and other common difficulties and are excellent to share with your child.

Work with your child's teacher

Teachers can be a valuable ally. They can help with getting children back into school, signpost to helpful resources, and spot patterns you may not see at home. Keep a diary of events and behaviours so you can share them clearly — together you may notice trends that begin to make sense over time.

And importantly: be kind to yourself. Parenting is one of the hardest jobs there is — seek support and talk to others.

Support from school and the SENDCo

If you need more support than the class teacher can offer, ask to be introduced to the school's SENDCo (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator). Their role includes:

- Keeping a profile of children with special educational needs.
- Observing and supporting children on the SEN register.
- Advising parents, key workers, and teaching assistants on how to meet children's needs.
- Liaising with outside professionals — educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, and others.
- Arranging, organising, and reviewing support for individual children.

Every local authority publishes a **Local Offer** on their website, setting out what support is available and how to access it. The SENDCo can help you navigate this and plan next steps for your child.

Getting professional help outside school

Your GP is another important route to support. Not every GP specialises in children's mental health, but many practices have at least one staff member with a particular interest in the area.

Bring as much information as you can to the appointment — a diary of events and behaviours, key changes you have noticed over time, and any patterns. You know your child best: share your knowledge with confidence.

Your GP can refer to **CYPMHS** (Children and Young People's Mental Health Services) — the term now used for all NHS services supporting children with mental health difficulties. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) is an older term for the specialist community service within the wider CYPMHS. Schools and social workers can also make referrals. GPs can also signpost to NHS counselling services, which may be available through school or separately.

What is an EHCP?

If your child needs more support than the school can currently provide, you can ask the school or local authority to consider applying for an **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**. EHCPs are available for children and young people up to the age of 25 who need more than standard SEN support. The plan identifies educational, health, and social needs and sets out the additional support required.

A request for assessment can be made by a parent, or by anyone who believes it is necessary — including doctors, health visitors, teachers, or family friends. You may be asked to provide reports from school, medical assessments, and a letter describing your child's needs. The local authority must tell you within 16 weeks whether an EHCP will be issued.

The completed EHCP sets out your child's needs and strengths, what they need to learn, where they will be educated, and what resources will support them. Throughout the process, open communication between home and school leads to the best outcomes.

Common acronyms explained

- CAMHS — Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- CYPMHS — Children and Young People's Mental Health Services
- DfE — Department for Education
- EAL — English as an Additional Language
- EBD — Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
- EHCP — Education, Health and Care Plan
- EP — Educational Psychologist
- EYFS — Early Years Foundation Stage
- LA — Local Authority
- LAC — Looked After Child/Children
- LSA / TA — Learning Support Assistant / Teaching Assistant
- OT — Occupational Therapist
- PRU — Pupil Referral Unit
- SALT / SLT — Speech and Language Therapist
- SEN — Special Educational Needs
- SEND — Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- SENDCo / SENCO — Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
- TAC — Team Around the Child
- TAF — Team Around the Family