

Preparing for Life is very grateful to the Childhood Development Initiative for developing the **'Support Pathways for Children with Additional Needs'** guide. The guide has been adapted for the Northeast Dublin community. This guide arose from a need within the community to support parents and caregivers who have concerns about their child's development. It sets out various pathways and supports available for children with additional needs and brings information from several different organisations into one place to help parents and caregivers navigate what is often a complex journey.

Parents/caregivers may use this guide to support them at various stages of their journey and different sections will be relevant at different stages of a child's life.

We hope the information in this guide provides you with the knowledge you require to support your child to access services and supports. We know this journey can be challenging, but know that you are not alone, and there are many layers of support within the community.

This guide was put together with the support of many local professionals and organisations and we are very grateful for their time and contributions throughout this project.

This document is regularly updated, please see our website for the most up to date version. Please contact pfl.info@nspartnership.ie should you wish to order printed copies, or to suggest any amendments.

For more information about the work of Preparing for Life please see www.preparingforlife.ie.



Additional Education Supports for Children with Special Educational Needs

Contact: Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO).
See www.ncse.ie/seno-support-service to find your local SENO.

Website: www.ncse.ie

Preschool Supports:

All children in Ireland are eligible for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and National Childcare Scheme (NCS). These schemes provide free (ECCE) and/or subsidised (NCS) childcare places for children. See a list of participating services: www.childcare.ie

Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in Early Childhood Care and Education: Your child's preschool service provider can apply for targeted supports under this model, for example, additional assistance in the preschool room, specialised equipment or minor alterations, and/or therapeutic supports. See: www.aim.gov.ie

Any equipment that children receive through AIM will transfer to school with them. Children with additional needs can apply for one extra year in preschool if they are not ready for school. They can also apply for an over age exception to continue their preschool education. AIM's supports will also be provided during this additional year.

Some children may also access autistic-specific Early Years education outside of the ECCE scheme, if recommended on the child's report.

There are two main types: **No.1: Early Intervention Classes** – these are usually located within or attached to a national school. **No.2: Private autism-specific preschools** which are usually funded through the Home Tuition Grant. Places in these preschools will only be funded for those children who cannot access a suitable place in an Early Intervention class.

Home Tuition: The Home Tuition Grant is available to Autistic children aged between 2 ½ years and 5 years of age who cannot find an appropriate early intervention placement within the State Education system. The Department of Education will sanction Home Tuition for children who are unable to source a suitable place so that the child can get early intervention from a sanctioned organisation such as a specialist autism preschool who have a direct payment agreement with the Department of Education or from suitably qualified Teacher/Tutor who can work with the child in their own home.

Children with a diagnosis of autism can access 10 hours of home tuition per week from age 2.5, and from age 3 a place in Early Intervention Class or 20 hours of home tuition until school entry.

Diagnosed Autistic children who attend a local ECCE preschool can also avail of 5 hours home tuition a week. 15 preschool hours + 5 hours Home Tuition = the 20 hours that Autistic preschool children are entitled to. Contact your local SENO for further information. See: www.ncse.ie/seno-support-service.

Children with a **visual impairment** can avail of the Home support Teacher from the Department of Education. This intervention should be applied for at the time of diagnosis.

Children with a significant **hearing loss** can avail of the support of the visiting teacher for the Deaf. This intervention should be applied for at the time of diagnosis.

Primary and Post-primary School Supports:

Access to Special Needs Assistant (SNA): SNA stands for Special Needs Assistants. They play an important role in assisting the teacher to support students with special educational needs who have significant care needs. Your child's school allocates access to SNA. Discuss with your child's Principal.

Access to Special Education Teaching: This is allocated by your child's school. Discuss with your child's school.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): Access to this service is allocated by your child's school. Discuss with your child's school.

Assistive Technology: Your school can apply for assistive technology equipment for your child to use at school (e.g., laptops, iPads, audiology equipment). Applications for assistive technology must be based on a professional recommendation for same. Discuss with your child's school.

Summer Provision: This is funding for parents/guardians to engage a teacher/SNA to provide tuition or care support as appropriate in the child's home during the summer. All students in special schools and special classes in primary and post-primary schools are eligible. Some students in mainstream schools with special educational needs are also eligible. Apply through your child's school by completing a Grant Claim Form. See: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5d15a-summer-programme/>.

School Transport: If your child has a disability and attends a special class or special school the SENO can apply for special transport arrangements for your child, including bus escorts and safety harnesses. Discuss with your child's school.

Reasonable Accommodation at Certificate Examinations (RACE) scheme: under this scheme post-primary students with disabilities may receive special arrangements while sitting state examinations (e.g., assistive technology, access to a scribe, exemption from aural part of the exam, etc.). Discuss with your child's School Principal and/or **SEN Coordinator in School**. A booklet about school supports can be found here <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Web-Ready-03178-NCSE-Children-SEN-InfoBook-Parents2-Proof7-VISUAL-ONLY.pdf>.

Special Schools / Classes and School Transitions:

Contact your local **Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)** to enquire about a place in a special school and/or special class (this includes an Autism class located in a mainstream school). See www.ncse.ie/seno-support-service to find your local SENO.

See www.ncse.ie/special-classes for a list of special classes and their contact details.

If you have difficulty finding a school place for your child, contact the **Educational Welfare Officer (EWO)**, see www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services

After School and Social Supports:

P.L.A.N. Parent-Led Autism Network: a network for parents of children with autism/ASD who are supported by their local Family Resource Centre in their locality, by Tusla and other local organisations to give support, courses, workshops and expert talks to both parents and their children. PLAN operates in Dublin 5, 13 & 17. <https://parentledautismlnetwork.ie/>

PLAN offers supports through the following centres:

Doras Bui: www.dorasbui.ie

Tús Nua Artane Coolock Family Resource Centre: www.artanecoolockfrc.com

Baldoyle Family Resource Services: www.bfrs.ie

Many community organisations run groups that may be specific and/or beneficial for children with additional needs (e.g., parent and toddler groups, LEGO groups, STEM programmes). Contact your local **Child and Family Support Network Coordinator (CFSN)** for what's available in your area.

www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/child-and-family-support-network-co-ordinators.

Ask your local CFSN Coordinator about Meitheal – a national interagency support model led by Tusla. If you feel that your child is facing challenges that are difficult to overcome, and you are finding it hard to access the support necessary to help them, Meitheal may be able to help you.

Preparing for Life at Northside Partnership offers Triple P (Positive Parenting Programmes) Stepping Stones groups and seminars for parents of children with additional needs. <https://www.preparingforlife.ie/parenting-programmes-2/>

Coolock Library has a sensory room and resources for children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Find your local library on <https://www.dublincity.ie/residential/libraries/find-library/coolock-library>.

See also: www.asiam.ie, www.middlestownautism.com, www.sensationalkids.ie, www.thinkingtoys.ie, www.autismassistance.dogsireland.ie

Financial Supports

Websites: www.citizensinformation.ie, www.welfare.ie, www.revenue.ie, www.mabs.ie

Visit: local INTREO centre, local Citizens Information Centre

Contact: Community Welfare Officer (INTREO): responsible for the day-to-day running of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme including Additional Needs Payments. For more information, please see www.citizensinformation.ie.

Carers Support Manager: provide support to family carers through and beyond their care journey by phone, online or in-person appointments to provide individualised information, supports and guidance. To find contact details for your local Carer Supports Manager and your local centre, please see www.familycarers.ie.

Join: DCA Warriors Facebook Group fb @ DCA Warriors

Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA)

A monthly payment for parents of children who require substantial care, over and above the care that would usually be required by children of the same age. You can apply for it without your child having a diagnosis (e.g., while waiting for a diagnosis). DCA is not means-tested (this means that e.g., you can receive both Carer's Allowance and DCA payments).

For more information on the application process visit: **DCA Information on Gov.ie:** <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/30fac9-domiciliary-care-allowance/>

If your child is in receipt of DCA then s/he is automatically entitled to a non means tested medical card. Apply here: <https://www2.hse.ie/services/schemes-allowances/medical-cards/other-types-of-medical-card/domiciliary-care-allowance/>

Carer's Allowance

A weekly payment to people on low incomes who care for a person who needs support because of age, disability, or illness. Carer's Allowance is means-tested. To apply, fill in an **application form for Carer's Allowance (CRI) (pdf)**. You can get this form (CRI) from **your local Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Branch Office** or Citizens Information Centre.

Carer's Benefit

A weekly payment to people who leave work to care for a person who needs full time care. You must have paid sufficient PRSI contributions from your employment to receive this benefit. You can get Carer's Benefit for a total of 104 weeks for each person being cared for. Carer's Benefit is not means-tested. To apply fill in an **application form for Carer's Benefit (pdf)**. You can get this form (CARBI) from **your local Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Branch Office**.

Carer's Support Grant

Paid once a year in June. Awarded automatically if you receive DCA, Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit.

Carers GP Visit Card

If you get carers benefit or Carers Allowance, at full or half rate, you can visit your GP for free. Phone 0818 22 44 78 to order an application in the post.

Income Tax Credits and Reliefs

Incapacitated Child Tax Credit: See details on www.revenue.ie.

Dependant Relative Tax Credit: A tax credit for people caring for relatives. See details on www.revenue.ie.

Home Carer Tax Credit: Tax credit for married couples or civil partners where one spouse or civil partner works in the home caring for a dependant person. See details on www.revenue.ie.

You can claim **VAT refunds** on aids and appliances including ICT equipment purchased to manage disability (e.g., an iPad).

You can claim a range of tax reliefs in connection with the purchase or use of motor vehicles under the Disabled Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme. See www.ddai.ie.

Families may be entitled to a reduction on the amount of income tax they have to pay on their earnings.

Other

If you are in receipt of Carer's Allowance and/or other disability-related payments you are also entitled to other financial supports including **Household Benefits Package, Free Travel Pass** and/or **Medical Card** that gives you access to medical services, prescription medicines and hospital care for free.

Housing Adaptation Grant: Financial assistance to make changes or adaptations to your home (e.g., making it wheelchair-accessible, adding a ground-floor bathroom). See: www.localgov.ie.

Fully Funded Energy Upgrades (formally known as Warmer Homes Scheme): If you are in receipt of one of the following welfare payments: DCA, Carers Allowance (and live with the person you are caring for), or Disability Allowance (for over six months and have a child under seven years of age), and **own and live** in your own home which was **built prior to 2006** – you will meet the three criteria to apply for the Fully Funded Energy Upgrade Scheme. For further information, see here: <https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/fully-funded-upgrades-for-eligible-homes/>

Many places offer free, or reduced fee, entries for carers with a Family Carer Membership card (e.g., cinemas, Tayto Park). www.familycarers.ie.

See www.financialwellbeing.ie for advice on financial planning for the future of a child with disabilities (including establishing a trust).



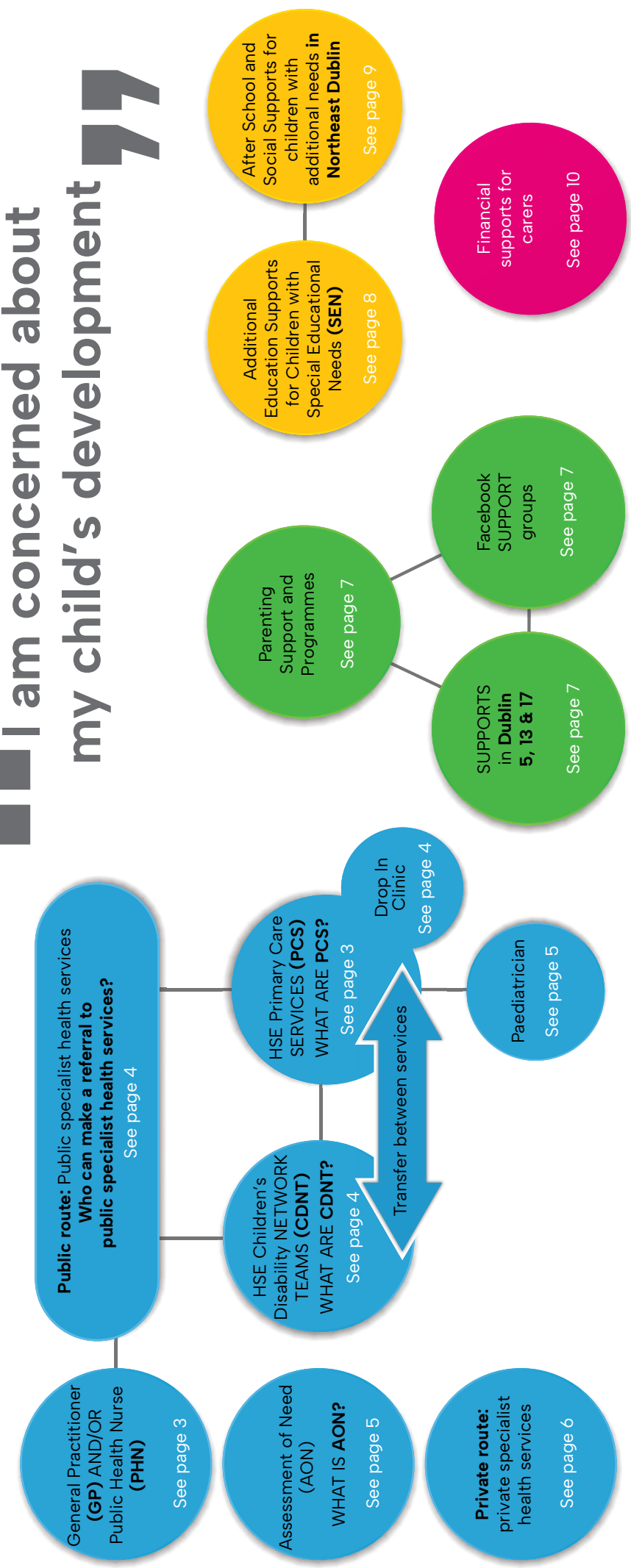
Support Pathways for Children with Additional Needs

Information Booklet for Parents and Caregivers

2025



I am concerned about my child's development



Health Supports

General Practitioner (GP): In Ireland, a GP (your local doctor) is often a first point of contact if you would like to access specialist primary or secondary disability or mental health services. The GP can refer you to other health professionals (e.g., in Primary Care Services and/or Children's Disability Network Teams). Your GP can also make a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) if you have concerns about ADHD or significant anxiety/mental health difficulties. Make a regular appointment with your GP to discuss your concerns.

Public Health Nurse (PHN): Can provide supports to children throughout their childhood years and can make a referral to specialist primary or secondary disability services. You can make a regular appointment with a PHN to discuss your concerns. Contact your PHN through your local Health Office.

See: www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/ to find your local Health Office.

Continence Care Provision: All children aged four and over who cannot be potty trained due to a disability are entitled to nappies from the HSE. Contact your local PHN to discuss this further.

What are Primary Care Services (PCS)?

Primary Care Services (PCS) include all health professionals that you can find in your community, outside of the hospital setting. If your child's [needs are non-complex](#) and they have a mild or moderate impact on your child's life, their needs should be met by the relevant Primary Care health professionals. In Primary Care, the health professionals typically work *within their own discipline* (for this reason, Primary Care health professionals cannot support multidisciplinary assessments). See below what health professionals work in Primary Care Services.

What health professionals are in Primary Care Services (PCS)?

Speech and Language Therapist (SLT): Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) – supports speech, language, communication, and social interaction. For example, an SLT may support your child to speak clearly so they are more easily understood.

Occupational Therapist (OT): Supports their clients to do everyday activities that they want and need to do when faced with illness or disability. For example, an OT may support your child's self-care skills.

Physiotherapist: Works to help children achieve their optimal physical development. They help children experiencing delays in gross motor skills such as crawling, walking, jumping or hopping. Physiotherapists also see children with musculoskeletal conditions (e.g. joint pain, hypermobility, torticollis).

Psychologist: Supports children with mild to moderate psychological difficulties, for example, emotional or behavioural difficulties, issues with toileting, sleeping or food.

Primary Care Social Worker: Will support you by offering emotional, practical and social support.

You can enquire about access to these health professionals through your local Health Office.

See: www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/ to find your local Health Office and the wide range of other health services provided in your local area.

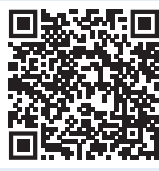
Drop In (Advice Clinics)

Some Health Centres operate advice clinics. This is confidential parenting advice for parents and carers who may have questions or concerns about their child's behaviour, emotions, or development. You do not need to have an appointment to attend these clinics.

- Phone **01-921 2330** for Edenmore SLT advice clinic.
- Phone **01-921 4334** for Coolock/Darndale Health Centre
- Phone **01-921 3603** for Portmarnock Primary Care Centre

Or enquire at your local Health Office for other advice clinics.

For tips on how to help children's early communication development scan this QR code or type 'HSE Learning to Talk Playlist' into YouTube.



What are Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT)?

If your child's [needs are complex](#) and they have a significant impact on your child's life, your child will be seen by the Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT). If your child's referral to CDNT is accepted, your child may be seen by some or all health professionals from the *interdisciplinary* Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) (e.g., a Psychologist and a Speech and Language Therapist). The Interdisciplinary Team is a team of professionals who work *together* to meet your child's needs with a *joint* care and support plan. The CDNT is a family centred service. This means that the team will work with you to set and achieve goals for your child and your family. They will create a support plan called the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and will support you to use everyday activities to achieve the identified goals.

If you [do not know your child's needs](#), you are advised to apply for the Assessment of Need (see page 5).

Who can make a referral to Primary Care Services (PCS) and/or Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT)?

- Your **General Practitioner (GP)** or **Public Health Nurse (PHN)**
- Any health or education professional (e.g., a teacher)
- Parents/guardians
- Assessment Liaison Officer following the Assessment of Need process

All referrals need signed consent by parents/guardians.

A referral to Primary Care Services (PCS) will ask the referrer to specify what services the child needs (e.g., psychology, speech and language, occupational therapy).¹ Ask at your local Health Office for a copy of a referral form.

See: www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/ to find your local Health Office.

See: <https://www2.hse.ie/services/disability/childrens-services/services/find-a-cdnt/> to find your local Children's Disability Network Team(CDNT) and referral forms, or, ask at your local Health Centre.

¹ A referral to PCS may change in the future. Referrals to PCS and CDNT are separate at present, however, it is proposed that they will merge at some point in the future. Referrers will submit a completed national Children's Services Referral Form, including a signed parental consent, and an age specific Additional Information Form to the local Primary Care Service or Children's Disability Network Team.



Paediatrician

A **Paediatrician** is a medical doctor who is trained to treat a broad range of childhood illnesses and diseases, for example, breathing or growth problems. Your child may be referred to a paediatrician for more specialised assessments. They might explore any underlying reasons for your child's presenting needs such as genetic testing.

Who can make a referral to a Paediatrician?

- Your **General Practitioner (GP)**
- A health professional (e.g., Occupational Therapist)
- Some private paediatric clinics accept self-referral

What happens after the referral to a health professional?

You will receive a letter inviting you to attend an appointment with an allocated health professional. Each health professional your child will see may:

- Spend time with your child and observe your child in play
- Administer certain tests and tasks (e.g., ask your child to point to pictures, do puzzles, play games with them, etc.)
- Ask you and/or other important people in your child's life (e.g., a teacher) questions about your child's learning and development

Before your child is seen by a public health professional in Ireland, you may be invited to attend a group programme for parents (e.g., a parenting course, a course on supporting language development, etc.)

It is a good idea to prepare for an appointment by writing down why you are concerned and any observations you have.

What is an Assessment of Need (AON)?

Email for Coastal Children's Disability Network Team: cdntcoastal@smh.ie

Coolock Children's Disability Network Team: cdntcoolock@smh.ie

Kilbarrack Children's Disability Network Team: cdntkilbarrack@smh.ie

Clontarf Children's Disability Network Team: cdntclontarf@crc.ie

If your child has a disability or you think they may have a disability you can apply for an Assessment of Need. Under the Disability Act 2005 all children with disabilities in Ireland have a right to:

- An independent assessment of their health needs,
- An assessment report,
- A statement of the services they will receive,
- Make a complaint if they are not happy with any part of the process.

Parents can apply themselves directly for an Assessment of Need; you do not need to be referred by a medical practitioner. It is recommended that you apply for AON at the **same time** as you refer your child to Primary Care/ Children's Disability Network Team.

Do not wait for the AON process to be completed before you refer your child for support.

To apply for an Assessment of Need (AON), contact your local **Assessment Officer** or ask for an Assessment of Need (AON) application form and post this to your local Assessment Officer. You can do this at your local Health Office.

After you send in your application, you will receive a letter confirming its receipt, and the Assessment Officer will contact you for more information about your child. The AON is not a diagnostic process, i.e., your child will not receive a diagnosis

of their disability, instead you will receive a statement of your child's needs ('assessment report') and recommendations for what services are needed to meet these needs ('service statement'). The allocated **Liaison Officer** will then make appropriate referrals to these services on your behalf.

The AON process will usually engage a team of health professionals, typically a Clinical Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapist and/or Occupational Therapist, but some children will be assessed by one health professional. The Assessment Officer will decide whether your child needs a team assessment or an individual assessment.

The AON is a [separate](#) service to CDNT / PCS.

If you are confused about how the public health services are organised, ask at your local Health Office.

Private route: Private specialist health services

Accessing private assessments/ support for your child can be costly. Health insurance companies offer individual policies for children from as little as €35 per month; these policies allow you to claim up to 75% of the cost of private therapies back. You can also claim 20% tax back on health expenses via your annual Med 1 form.

Private assessment cost may range from €450 to €2,000+. There may be waiting lists too, but they are generally shorter than public services. You can ask for a screening instead of a full assessment, this will be cheaper and may give you some recommendations, however, a screening will not provide a diagnosis.

To find a **private clinic** in your area (Google search, ask other parents, join Facebook groups and ask there). If you have private health insurance the provider may have a paediatric clinic. A clinic may be able to offer a full **multidisciplinary assessment**.

Find a **private health professional** (check that the professional is registered with a professional body in Ireland, for example CORU www.coru.ie, Psychological Society of Ireland www.psychologicalsociety.ie, Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists www.iaslt.ie, Independent Speech Therapists of Ireland www.isti.ie, Association of Occupational Therapists in Ireland www.aoti.ie).

Be aware that many health professionals will need other health professionals to confirm or rule out certain diagnoses, so you are likely to be asked to see more than one professional. Thus, for complex needs, it may be more beneficial to find a multidisciplinary clinic, though a single professional may give you some helpful recommendations in their area of expertise.

See also: www.asiam.ie, www.dyspraxia.ie, www.dyslexia.ie, www.adhdireland.ie, for further guidance and support.



Supports for Parents of Children with Additional Needs

Facebook and Instagram SUPPORT Groups

DCA Warriors: Aims to improve the quality of life of families affected by disability by providing support and information to members. The group also supports those needing assistance with applications for financial supports (Disability Allowance, Carers Allowance/Benefit) and/or with special educational issues

Autism Mamai Ireland: Support group for parents of Autistic children. A place to chat and ask for advice.

@fussireland: An advocacy group founded by the parents of neurodiverse and disabled children—a place to learn and access information.

SUPPORTS in Northeast Dublin

Family Carers Ireland: Provides supports and advocacy for family carers. Members can avail of its services including Carer Groups, Counselling, Freephone Careline, Training and Legal Advice, and Emergency Scheme. For details and to contact the **Carer Support Manager** for Dublin Region see: www.familycarers.ie. National Freephone Careline: **1800 240724**.

Parent-Led Autism Network D. 5, 13, 17: Education and advice for families with children on the autistic spectrum via monthly online workshops, face-to-face groups and parenting support groups. **Contact 01 8512289 or Valerie @ 085 7040013 or manager@artanefrc.com.**

The Ripple Effect: Social group for children with Autism, ADHD and Dyspraxia **Contact Anne 086 603 8163.**

Family Resource Centres: Offer a range of programmes and supports for children and families in their local areas. See www.familyresource.ie to find your nearest family resource centre and to find out what is available in your community and the wider area. Ask also about other local Community Centres.

Social Prescribing: Connects people with supports and activities in the community to strengthen their health, wellbeing, and quality of life. If you feel lonely, socially isolated, anxious, depressed and/or in need of social supports contact a Social Prescriber (<https://www.northsidepartnership.ie/health/social-prescribing/>) or ask your GP for support and/or a referral to a Social Prescriber. For other Health and Wellbeing, Lifelong Learning, Community Development and Enterprise & Employment Supports see www.northsidepartnership.ie.

Parenting Support and Programmes:

Various parenting supports and programmes (e.g., Circle of Security, Triple P Positive Parenting Programme, PEEP) are offered by organisations in Northeast Dublin. Some of these may be specific and/or beneficial for families with children with additional needs (e.g., Triple P Stepping Stones groups and seminars). Contact your local **Child and Family Support Network Coordinator (CFSN)** for what's available in your area. www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/child-and-family-support-network-co-ordinators.

See also activities and programmes run by the **Preparing for Life team at Northside Partnership**. www.preparingforlife.ie

Aster Family Support **01 516 1146**

Daughters of Charity Child & Family Service/ Turas Springboard **01 877 1716**

Autism Parent Peer Support Group (Baldoyle Family Resource Centre) **01 832 6115**

For more information about parenting support programmes please contact: www.parentledautismnetwork.ie, www.barnardos.ie, www.docchildandfamily.ie.

Respite Support:

Respite is taking a break from caring while the person you care for is looked after by someone else. Useful websites: www.jackandjill.ie, www.lauralynn.ie, www.familycarers.ie.