

ADAPTATIONS AND EQUIPMENT



This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.

If your home is a difficult place for your child to live in, your local council has a responsibility to look at how to make it safer and more accessible. These kinds of changes are called 'adaptations' and they can be made to a home you own or a home you are renting from the council or a private landlord. This fact sheet explains what kinds of adaptations are available and how to go about getting them. We also offer tips for dealing with the lengthy and complex process of getting an adaptation.

What is an adaptation?

An adaptation is a change or changes to a property that mean a disabled person can move more freely and independently around their own home. Adaptations can range from simple things like installing a handrail or bath seat to widening doors, installing stair lifts or even creating entire wheelchair friendly bathrooms or kitchens. If your child needs specialist equipment like a hoist, this may also be considered at the same time as the other changes.

How to get an adaptation

If you already have a social worker, you can ask them to refer you to the social care occupational therapists (OTs). If not, you can contact them for under 18s via the social care team at the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH). For over 18s contact the Adults' CarePoint – see 'Ask about' at the end of this fact sheet for details. An OT from social care will arrange to assess your needs. They will look at your disabled child's current and likely future needs and also the needs of the whole family. They will talk to you about what adaptations might help you overcome your difficulties. If the OT agrees that an adaptation is needed, they will make recommendations to your local council. Be aware that if there is a long waiting list to see an OT, the council can ask someone else, like your GP, to carry out the assessment.

Adaptations can be funded in various ways: the council funds adaptations to council homes; adaptations to an owner-occupied, privately rented or housing association home that cost less than £1,000 will usually be provided free of charge by the council; if they cost more than £1,000 you will need to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The OT will advise you of all the steps in the adaptation process, including what needs to happen to get approval for a DFG - work must not be carried out until it has been given.

The maximum amount for the DFG grant is £30,000. **Disabled Facilities Grants** are means-tested for adults, which means that your income and savings will be taken into account. **DFGs are NOT means tested for disabled children under 18**, but your income will be taken into account for any amount over the £30,000 threshold.

If you are asked to pay towards any work over £30,000, social care may still be able to assist with the costs but how much they can pay will depend on your income. And the work must be considered essential and not just desirable.

Once a formal application for a DFG has been made, the council has six months to make a decision. You don't need to wait for an OT assessment before you fill in an application form to get the process started.





ADAPTATIONS AND EQUIPMENT

Tips for the assessment process

Don't wait until your situation is desperate before you ask for help. The process can be time-consuming and frustrating, so the sooner you ask the better.

A lot hangs on the assessment so be prepared; our fact sheet *Meetings and paperwork* may help. Be clear about what you, your child and the rest of the family need and why. Use other reports and advice to back up what you are saying. You need to demonstrate that any adaptations are 'necessary and appropriate'. For example, though it may be OK for a three year old to crawl on the floor, it's not for a 10 year old who hasn't space to use his wheelchair. As part of the assessment the OT may, with your permission, seek information from other professionals involved with your child to gain a clearer picture of their abilities.

Any assessment must include the needs of siblings. It's not OK for a child to have to share a bedroom with a sibling who smears, destroys the other's belongings or won't let them sleep. But you will need to make a strong case.

Don't be afraid to explain how what you are doing right now is taking its toll. You may want to ensure your child is elsewhere if you need to talk about how exhausted and miserable you feel.

If you are a council tenant, 'get your house in order'. High rent arrears, or uncertainty about your tenancy, like the imminent sale or transfer of your home, are reasons for not approving work an OT has recommended.

If you are renting privately, don't be put off asking for your landlord's permission for adaptations - they could end up with a more desirable property afterwards. There are laws that govern 'reasonable adjustments' that private landlords must make for disabled tenants. Ask your social care team or local housing charities about this.

Ask other people what they did. Disabled young people and families who have been there before you often have a wealth of useful advice about where to compromise, what to insist on and changes they would make if they were starting to plan again. Organisations run by disabled people are good places to ask.

Be prepared to negotiate hard over the specification of the work; after all, the whole family has to live with the adaptations and you want to be sure that major works will continue to meet your child's needs in the future. These discussions may feel intrusive, especially if you are contributing a significant sum towards the cost.

If large expensive items are recommended, make sure you try them out before making a decision: you need to see how they would work in your own home. Don't be rushed or rush your child into making a decision and make sure you listen to what your child is telling or showing you: a hoist isn't the answer if your child is terrified or experiences pain being lifted this way. The Disabled Living Foundation has information about equipment and you can also go to www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk to find details of equipment demonstration centres you can visit to try things out.

Tips for the build phase

Make sure funding is allocated within your DFG to organise and manage the project, otherwise you will end up doing it in your spare time and it's a major undertaking. The council can get quotes for





ADAPTATIONS AND EQUIPMENT

the works from approved contractors or you can approach contractors yourself. If you do this, it may be best not to say how the work will be funded to avoid inflated quotes.

If you appoint your own contractor make sure you choose carefully. Any problems will be left for you to sort out and the DFG is likely to be withheld unless the work is completed to a satisfactory standard.

If you need to move out while work is done, tell the council as soon as you can. If you don't, they'll assume you have family or friends to stay with!

When adaptations are not the solution

Sometimes it just isn't reasonable or practical to adapt a property. If this is the case it's worth moving to a place with more potential to get it right, before you ask for help. If you rent from the council or a housing association, speak to your housing officer about transferring to a more suitable home. The social care OT can give advice on the suitability of a new property to meet your child's needs.

If you are thinking of selling and moving on to something better, some local estate agents keep information about adapted properties for sale. You can also find details of wheelchair accessible properties for sale or rent from the Accessible Property Register: www.accessible-property.org.uk.

Ask About

- **Community Equipment Service** – you can access community equipment through your GP, an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or community nurse.
- **Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)** – visit: www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants or contact the MASH (for under 18s): **01403 229900** email: mash@westsussex.gov.uk. For over 18s, contact the Adults' CarePoint call: **01243 642121**, or email: socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk.
- **Housing adaptations**– to find out more, and to request an assessment, ask to speak to one of West Sussex County Council's occupational therapists. For under 18s, contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on: **01403 229900** or email: mash@westsussex.gov.uk, for over 18s, contact the Adults' CarePoint call: **01243 642121**, or email: socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk.
- **Home Improvement Assistance** – this council-run service for Adur and Worthing residents can tell you what work needs to be done. They can also recommend builders. Find out more by calling: **01273 263308** or email: homeimprovement@adur-worthing.gov.uk
- **Specialist equipment** – Chailey Clinical Services has a Rehabilitation Engineering Service (RES), which will custom-make or specially adapt existing aids to suit your requirements. For more information contact the RES on: **01825 722112** or email: Sc-tr.chaileyenquiries@nhs.net.
- **Wheelchair Service** – if you need a wheelchair you can get one on loan from the West Sussex service, which has branches in Bognor, Horsham, and Worthing. You need a referral from a healthcare professional, such as your GP or physiotherapist. Once you are accepted to the service, you can contact the teams directly:
www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/services/servicedetails.htm?directoryID=16359.



ADAPTATIONS AND EQUIPMENT



Further reading and useful links

- ***Making Sense of it All*** and ***Making Sense of Adult Life (14+)*** – Reaching Families’ handbooks for parent carers of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex provide essential information on education, social lives, money matters, social care, health, employment and much more. Go to: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- **Accessible Property Register** – a website that promotes accessible and adapted property for sale and rent, including holiday lets. For more go to: www.accessible-property.org.uk.
- **Disability Equipment Service** – national website where you can buy and sell disability equipment. For more tel: **07845 041678** or go to: www.disabilityequipmentservice.org.uk.
- **Disabled Gear** – a website where you can buy or sell equipment. For more information, go to: www.disabledgear.com.
- **Disabled Living Foundation** – provides information, advice and training on daily living aids. Tel: **0300 999 0004**, email: info@dlf.org.uk or visit: www.dlf.org.uk. For information on equipment demonstration centres go to: www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk.
- **Independent Lives** – information, care and support services designed to enable people with care needs to be independent. For more go to: www.independentlives.org, call: **0845 601 2399 / 01903 219482** or email: feedback@independentlives.org.
- **Kidz to Adultz** – holds exhibitions of equipment for children and young people offering information and advice on: mobility; seating; beds; communication; education; toys; transport; sensory issues; sports and alternative funding streams. Go to: www.kidzexhibitions.co.uk.
- **MERU** – designs and custom-builds specialist equipment for children and young people with disabilities. For more, go to: www.meru.org.uk, call: **01372 725 203**, or email: info@meru.org.uk.
- **Remap** – tailor-made special equipment for disabled people designed and built by expert volunteers. Visit: www.remap.org.uk, call: **01732 760209**, or email: data@remap.org.uk.
- **Sullivan’s Heroes** - Sullivan’s Heroes offers fundraising support specifically for vital home adaptations. Go to: www.sullivansheroes.org/about-us/#adaptions-process.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to <https://westsussex.local-offer.org>.
- **Whizz-Kidz** – a charity providing equipment, support and life skills for disabled children and young people. For more, go to: www.whizz-kidz.org.uk, call: **0800 151 3350** or email: kidzservices@whizz-kidz.org.uk.

