

Working with disabled children



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Go to <http://content.socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/improving-care-and-support/children-who-are-looked-after/working-with-disabled-children> for the latest version.

Find out more how you can better support the disabled children you care for

Types of care for disabled children

There are different types of residential care for disabled children:

- Long-term residential care, where the setting is the child's home and they live there year round
- Residential schools for disabled children, where the child may live term-time or Monday to Friday and return home in school holidays and weekends
- Short break residential homes to give children and families a break while providing good quality care.

Your role in supporting disabled children

The tasks you might do working with disabled children are the same as working with any children, as they are children first. However, it may take you longer to achieve outcomes for the children because of their particular needs. You may also need to break down the outcomes into bite-size pieces.

Sometimes you'll need patience as you'll have to teach the same task to the same child every day or every time they visit for months until they remember it. But experience in the role will make every small success you have intensely rewarding.

You'll need to be caring, enjoy helping others and be able to connect emotionally with people who might think in a different way to you. You'll also need strength of character to stand up for children who face discrimination

because of their disabilities.

The needs of disabled children

Disabled children will have a wide range of needs and this may include both physical and learning disabilities. Their abilities, interests and strengths will all be different: you could be supporting children with Asperger's syndrome who lead independent lives and are generally good at coping but need help with one or two issues. You may also support children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, who can be withdrawn, not want to interact, and have communication difficulties.

You could also support children who have severe physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy or brain injury, who need all their care needs attended to and may need gastro feeding. Children may also have other conditions such as epilepsy or Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Some children will have [challenging behaviour](#) and you will need to be able to calm down children who get upset and know when to step back from difficult situations.

Your focus should be on responding to the child's needs and treating them with respect, helping them to live as independently as possible even in a care home setting. You must be able to identify social and environmental barriers that are preventing children from leading fulfilling lives, and making sure that, wherever possible, such barriers are overcome.

Training you will need

As well as the NVQ Qualification in Health and Social Care you will also need more specialist training including:

- Safeguarding disabled children – this is crucial training as the child may be unable to tell you directly that they are being abused. Disabled children are more likely to experience abuse, and for longer, than other children, so you will need to spot the [signs of abuse](#)
- Manual handling
- First aid
- Medication training
- Behaviour support
- Communication support. This can include using Makaton, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or sign language.

You might need individualised training to help children meet their well-being outcomes. This is normally provided by professional health care workers and can include gastrostomy feeding.

Behaviour support

There are a variety of different methods of [behaviour support](#) including Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), Positive Behaviour Management (PBM), and Team Teach to name a few. It's crucial that the home uses just one technique of behaviour support and regularly updates staff training.

Each child should have a Personal Behaviour Support Plan, which is agreed by staff, parents and professionals. You need to be familiar with this.

Staff who are supporting the child need to understand how their behaviour changes when they are:

- ill
- in pain
- not able to have their feelings understood, as they may not be able to tell you using words.

It's important you listen to families and others who know the child well to understand their behaviour.

The Behaviour Support Plan is part of a wider person-centred plan that looks at the whole life of the child, what is important to them, and what they enjoy doing. It helps you support them in the right way and help makes sure the child is living the life they want.

Useful resources

[Our work to support children who are looked after](#)

[Our chosen or 'curated' research about the number who are looked after](#)

[Scope](#) is a disability charity that offers online advice about a range of issues that might affect disabled people

[The National Autistic Society](#) has a variety of resources and a [comprehensive directory](#) of support services for those living with autistic spectrum disorders, their families, and people who work with them.

[Epilepsy Society](#) gives you to an easy to use A - Z of many epilepsy-related topics.

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Residential child care worker resource by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).