

# WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

.....  
An information guide for parents  
who have a child with a disability



FOR PARENTS - BY PARENTS

*Alberta*   
Government

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- ◆ [www.aacl.org](http://www.aacl.org)

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- ◆ [humanservices.alberta.ca](http://humanservices.alberta.ca)
- ◆ Alberta Supports: 1.877.644.9992 toll free  
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# INTRODUCTION

★ Having a child changes your life forever. Children are a source of great joy and provide parents with unexpected opportunities to learn more about themselves and what is really important in life. Parenting opens us to a deeper love and capacity to care about someone else in a way many of us never previously imagined. Children bring us many gifts. This is part of the joy and wonder of parenting.

**Every child is unique** – each with his or her own personality, qualities, abilities, characteristics and challenges. If you are reading this information guide, you have probably recently learned that your child has a disability. While you may feel you are facing many unknown challenges, you may find some comfort in knowing you are not alone. Many hundreds of thousands of parents have come before you, many are walking with you and many more will come after. This guide is a reflection of the shared experiences and understandings of parents just like you, united in their love for their children and their desire for them to have every opportunity for a happy and productive life.





Having a  
child changes  
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forever.

Children with disabilities have the same needs as every other child – to learn, play, be included, have friends and be loved by their parents. Whatever your child's disability, one of the most important things you can remember is to see your child as a child first and their disability as only a part of who your child is. As with any child, his or her future is influenced by the vision you hold for him or her and your commitment to realizing these dreams.

As parents who have children with disabilities, our children have transformed our lives and taught us much about the value of family. We trust you will share in this experience.

This guide will answer some of the most common questions parents have when their child is diagnosed with a disability. It will not answer all your questions, but it will serve as a starting point and show you where you can find additional information.

# LEARNING YOUR CHILD HAS A DISABILITY

★ Parents have many different and mixed reactions when they learn their son or daughter has a disability. How you learn about your child's disability can have a significant impact on your emotional reaction.

You may be fortunate enough to learn about your child's disability from someone who has a positive and knowledgeable perspective on people with disabilities. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

You can be certain if you are not told about the positive benefits of having a child with a disability, then you have not been told the full story. It can be helpful to keep this in mind as you enter what feels like an unknown world.

Wondering  
about the  
future is only  
natural.



Not every parent will experience the same feelings, but it is perfectly normal to initially experience some or all of the emotions listed below:

- ◆ **Disbelief and denial** – This must be a mistake. This can't be happening.
- ◆ **Confusion or shock** – How did this happen? What should I do?
- ◆ **Anxiety** – What else will happen? How will I cope? How will I explain this to the rest of my family, friends and colleagues?
- ◆ **Uncertainty** – How can I best help my child? What does the future hold for us?
- ◆ **Anger** – Why can't someone fix what has happened to my child? Why is this happening to my family?
- ◆ **Despair** – How can I possibly deal with this? This is not the dream I had for my child and family.
- ◆ **Determination** – I will ensure this child has every opportunity to grow and learn. I will find out everything I need to know.
- ◆ **Relief** – At least I understand a little better what is happening to my child.
- ◆ **Commitment** – I will love and care for this child. I will be devoted to this child.







It is not unusual to have conflicting reactions given there are so many unknowns and uncertainties. Wondering about the future is only natural.

Parents want their children to be healthy, safe and secure. Now you have a million questions, perhaps some sleepless nights and need some answers. You may feel powerless to change things and doubt your own ability to be a good parent.

Not everyone will experience all of these emotions and each parent works through them in their own way and time. Connecting to other parents who are further along in their journey of parenting a child with a disability can be an immense source of reassurance and understanding. Most parents soon come to understand that their child with a disability is as precious a gift as any other child.

Over time, parents typically find strengths they did not realize they had to care for and raise a child with a disability. The energy that initially is consumed by anxiety and uncertainty is gradually transformed into energy that enables parents to be informed and effective advocates for their child.



Upon learning your child has a disability, you might keep the following ideas in mind:

◆ **Connect With Other Parents**

Feelings of isolation are very common for parents when their child receives a diagnosis. Most parents find it very helpful to connect with other parents who are raising a child with a disability.

◆ **Work Together As A Family**

Talk with those you are closest to – a partner, your other children, your extended family and friends. Share your worries and hopes with others who have a positive belief in children with disabilities. Some people who are close to you may not share in your joy of your child because she or he has a disability. Their view may change over time. It helps to remember you may not have had a positive view at first either. Having a child with a disability changes us in ways other people who have not had a similar experience may not understand.

◆ **Maintain A Positive Outlook**

Remember that all children require the support and guidance of their parents to help them realize their potential. A positive outlook can help you overcome barriers you may encounter.

◆ **Take Action**

You are your child's best advocate. Talk to other parents and participate in parent groups to learn about your child's disability and the benefits of inclusion. A list of some of the resources you and your family can access is included in this guide.

# THINGS TO REMEMBER IF YOU ARE STILL IN THE HOSPITAL

★ Many parents find out their child has a disability shortly after giving birth. This can be a challenging time – the excitement and emotion of giving birth followed by startling news that provokes anxiety and questions.

Some parents want a little privacy at this time and prefer a private hospital room to consider and respond to the news. As it is not unusual for a baby with disabilities to initially have difficulty nursing, new moms will benefit from the experienced guidance of someone who has helped newborns with disabilities to nurse. This may be a nurse or other medical professional, but it can also be another parent or someone from an organization that supports breastfeeding. It can be an emotionally trying time for new mothers. Supportive families, friends and professionals can be very helpful.





Raising a child with special needs often brings out strengths in parents that they otherwise would never have discovered.

As noted earlier in the guide, not everyone is positive and knowledgeable about what it means to raise a child with a disability, or has a positive perspective on the potential of children with disabilities and their affect on their families. Although this view is changing and many health professionals have a positive outlook regarding children with disabilities, you may be told that your family will be burdened or at best you should lower your expectations for your child. Of course there are challenges to raising a child with a disability, but there are also remarkable benefits. Raising a child with special needs often brings out strengths in parents that they otherwise might never have discovered. It is a journey which provides a unique sense of clarity and perspective. These are priceless gifts that many children with special needs ultimately end up bestowing upon their parents.

One of the most important things you can do for your child is to encourage and believe in them as this promotes learning and development. It is common to hear parents and others commenting on how much more a child with a disability is able to do than they anticipated.

It is possible that while you are in the hospital you may receive a visit from a parent organization or an early intervention/family support worker from a community agency or government program. They can provide you with information about your child's disability and some of the resources and services that are available. At first it can be hard to sort everything out and to know what would benefit you and your child. Typically, your best source of advice will come from other parents or early intervention workers who work with families directly in their homes to teach parents how to enhance the learning and development of their child with a disability. If you don't receive a visit, perhaps someone close to you can arrange to call and get the information (see resource list).

Children with disabilities should have the same medical care afforded to children without disabilities. If your child has a medical condition or a disability associated with possible future medical needs, learn all you can from your health professional and other parents so that you can make the best possible decisions in caring for your child.



# ARRIVING AT A DIAGNOSIS

★ If your child does not have a disability that is readily identified, it can sometimes take time, even years to obtain a diagnosis. A delay in diagnosis can be very frustrating.

This happens for two reasons. One reason is that it can simply take awhile before the necessary appointments and assessments can be made with the right professionals. The second is that some disabilities (e.g. autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, some developmental disabilities and muscular dystrophy) can only be conclusively diagnosed after some time has passed and there is sufficient evidence to complete the picture.

Often parents are the first to notice that something may not be quite right with their child's development (e.g. language, physical movements and interactions with others); sometimes it is just a sense parents have. You may find a healthcare professional who listens to you and relies on your observations. Or you may find healthcare professionals who tell you there is nothing wrong. Let your instincts guide you and if you feel things are not as they should be, continue to discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider until you feel an accurate determination has been made as to whether your child has a disability.

A delay in diagnosis can be very frustrating.

Let your  
instincts  
guide you.



In Alberta, families may be able to access some resources, such as the Family Support for Children with Disabilities program (see list of resources), before the child receives a final diagnosis.

Sometimes a diagnosis is helpful. It may explain some aspects of your child's behaviour and their understanding of the world. In other instances, it may simply confirm your concerns but not necessarily provide you with much new information. In any event, a diagnosis is often necessary to be eligible for supports and services.

# CREATING A VISION

★ Regardless of your child's disability, developing a clear vision for your son or daughter's future is fundamental to their later success in life. A vision for your child is developed and refined over time as you gain knowledge and understanding of your child and his or her disability. Your vision is a reflection of your understanding of your child and his or her place in the world. Every family has routines and traditions and it's important to include your child to the best of his or her ability.

For example, if you don't hold a vision of your child having the opportunity to continue their education or be meaningfully employed as an adult, then it is unlikely this will be achieved. You do not need to know how this might be accomplished, simply know in your heart this is what you desire for your child.

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Similarly, if you believe your child should have friends without disabilities and opportunities to participate in community activities, your vision would include their participation, to the highest degree possible, in recreational and cultural activities. More and more children with disabilities are being fully included in early childhood programs and in regular classrooms in their neighbourhood schools. You may choose to have a vision that sees your child as a valued member of a regular classroom.

As your vision becomes clearer, it will be important to share this vision with others. Most parents find they have to become advocates for their child to ensure their vision is realized to the greatest extent possible.

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# SHARING YOUR VISION WITH OTHERS

★ Some people react positively or neutrally upon hearing a child has a disability. Some aren't sure what to say, and others may react awkwardly or negatively.

Some people react positively or neutrally upon hearing a child has a disability. Some aren't sure what to say, and others may react awkwardly or negatively.

As mentioned earlier, having a child with a disability changes you. Now you are more likely to understand why you do not want others pitying your child or feeling sorry for you; why you want your son or daughter to be appreciated and recognized as a child first. This is why terms like a child with a disability, or a boy with Down syndrome, or a girl with autism are preferred to the terms a disabled child, a Down's boy or an autistic child. Ideally, your son or daughter will be known by his or her name, not by their disability.

Your child has given you the opportunity to be a teacher on their behalf and that of other parents. When necessary, take a moment to help people understand by explaining your child does not need pity, but opportunity. Perhaps share with them some of your child's accomplishments so they too can appreciate the courage and tenacity your child shows in learning; how small accomplishments can provide moments of celebration.

The most challenging moments come when least expected. For example, someone you may not know very well stops to admire your child when you are out for a walk, reminding you that you have received a wonderful gift. On the other hand, someone you trust or rely on may say something rude or hurtful. It may take a little time to heal from this

hurt and find the right moment to explain to this person what your child means to you and what you expect in return from those you trust. If you are positive about your child, it is most likely others will follow your lead.

Some parents find it hard to tell others they have a child with a disability. Generally, it is a good idea to let family and friends know as soon as possible after it is determined your child has a disability. Share information about the disability but always remember to share information about who your child is first, and that the disability is only a part of who they are.

Many people have stereotypes about people with disabilities that are simply not true. For example, that all children with Down syndrome are even tempered or that all children with autism cannot cope with change. These qualities are just as true for people without disabilities and untrue for many people with Down syndrome or autism. Who someone is – their character and personality – is greater than their disability.

Your love and vision will demonstrate to others how they should appreciate your son or daughter. They will realize sympathy is not as helpful as understanding and supporting your vision and hopes for your child.

Your love  
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they should  
appreciate our son  
or daughter.

# TELLING YOUR OTHER CHILDREN

★ Having a child with a disability can result in a moment when you are unsure of what to say to your other children.

Welcoming and including a child with disabilities is rarely an issue for children. You will need to tailor the information according to the age of your other children. If you have older children, they may already have relationships with children with disabilities from school or group activities in the community. You may also find your other children are the best teachers and supporters of your child with a disability.

Most siblings find the experience of having a brother or sister with a disability to be a positive experience. These children are often given a jump start on learning about priorities and the important things in life and are able to appreciate what they have. There are books designed specifically for children who have brothers and sisters with a disability. Some family organizations offer opportunities for siblings with and without disabilities to get together and share their experiences.

There are times when you or your other children may feel too much attention is being devoted to the child with a disability. Most children without disabilities understand their brothers and sisters with disabilities need extra attention; that this is what it means to share in family responsibility for one another. If this is an issue for you or your children, take some time to talk to them about their feelings and to explain how you love them equally. You may be surprised at your children's capacity to understand and be compassionate.

# CREATING A GOOD LIFE FOR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER WITH A DISABILITY

★ Raising a child with a disability will require you to gather information on many topics, issues and services, but the information you need may not always be accurate or available when you need it.

There is no single source that has all the information parents may need. Information about disabilities changes frequently, which means you have to be an active information gatherer. You must be able to judge the quality of the information and know how to put that information to use. Remember you are the most important person in your child's life. You may have to engage with many service providers and professionals who will require you to learn how to work as part of a team.

The professionals involved in your child's life, and the services your child receives, should be dedicated to creating as full a family life as possible. These supports can enable your child to participate in home and community life as would be true for any other child of a similar age.

Learn how to  
negotiate supports  
and work as part  
of a team.

# WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

## Gather information

There is power in knowledge and good information can help you become a more effective parent and advocate for your child.

Certainly you will want to find out more about your child's disability. Ask questions or consider the information in terms of how it may affect your child's life. How will this information help your child develop and learn? How will this information help your child be involved in the community?

There is a risk of information overload, so it helps to assess the information in terms of whether it will contribute to a better life for your child. Try to avoid searching for the "magic bullet" that promises to cure or fix your child. If one truly exists, you can be sure everyone will know about it and its results will be self evident. Time is usually better spent thinking about how to create a good life for your son or daughter.



## Where can I get more information about my child's disability?

Your best source of information on a particular disability can come from organizations specifically focused on the disability and from parent organizations. There are many books, magazines and professional journals that focus on specific disabilities or children with disabilities. Some organizations maintain libraries parents can access, and bookstores and the Internet are additional information sources. Your family physician or specialist may also provide information with respect to any medical conditions associated with your child's disability.

The volume of information can be overwhelming, with the content confusing and sometimes contradictory. Knowing which information to trust can also be a challenge. It is very important to obtain accurate information.

When reviewing information, keep the following advice in mind:

### ♦ Consider the source

Does the information come from a reliable source? If you are unsure of the reliability of the author or the publisher, check with a disability specific organization about the source.

### ♦ Ensure the information is current

Is the information current? Disability related information, especially about available supports and services, can become dated quite quickly.

### ♦ Trust your instincts

Does the information promise too much? Consider all the information you obtain and, if you have questions, ask a disability specific and/or parent organization.



### ◆ **Don't be afraid to ask questions**

As you find out more about the diagnosis, learn the terminology, locate programs, create a vision and access services, you will inevitably have more questions. Do not hesitate to ask those questions. If you do not understand the information you receive, keep asking questions until you understand.

### ◆ **Every child is different**

A similar diagnosis in two different children does not always mean the prognosis is the same. It is every child's unique physical, cognitive, communicative and emotional strengths and needs that determine how a disability affects a child.



## How do I advocate for my child?

You will need to speak on behalf of your child to make sure your child is receiving the care and attention he or she needs.

You are your child's most important advocate. You are familiar with the history and nature of your child's disability. You know your child better than anyone else and this knowledge will help ensure your child's needs are met.

To successfully advocate for your child, you must also be knowledgeable about his or her disability and aware of what programs, supports and services are available.

Parent and family advocacy organizations are an excellent source of information for families. They can provide much needed information and accompany you to a meeting if necessary. A number of these organizations have advocacy publications for families. Contact a parent or disability specific organization for more information.



## Tips for the parent advocate

### ◆ Believe in Yourself

Your child is important and worth the effort.

### ◆ Decide What You Need

Think about what you and your child need, such as funding, services or equipment.

### ◆ Know Your Rights

Get information from advocacy organizations and community groups regarding your rights. Ask about relevant policies, procedures and laws.

### ◆ Be Prepared

Develop a plan about what you want to say. Prepare notes listing each of your questions or concerns. Consider asking a friend or advocate for help.

### ◆ Use Good Communication Skills

Stay calm and express yourself clearly. Be a good listener; what you hear may be as important as what you say.

### ◆ Keep a Log

Make notes, including the name, title and telephone number of each person you speak to and a summary of the conversation.

### ◆ Use the Chain of Command

Be sure to speak to the person who has the authority to resolve your problem.

### ◆ Protect Your Rights

Do not accept a verbal (in person or over the telephone) denial of your request. Submit a written application and ask for a written decision.

### ◆ Know Your Appeal Rights

Request clear information about your appeal rights in case you disagree with the written decision you receive.

### ◆ Ask for Help

Don't give up. If you need assistance, contact an advocacy organization.

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*Adapted from the Advocacy Center, New Orleans, LA, USA*

# LIFE AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY: ACCESSING SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

★ All families need support. Sometimes this support comes from grandparents, other relatives, babysitters, schools and communities. Parents of children with disabilities sometimes need support to enable their child to be raised at home and participate in community life.

When you have a child with a disability, it is natural to first seek support from disability specific programs and services. While this will be necessary, parents should remember to access supports and services that are available to families in general. For example, if you work and need child care you should consider having your child included in a regular child care program. These programs can access additional supports to help look after your child and ensure they are learning and growing along with other children.

If your community league, local recreation centre or other community organizations offer recreational activities, then you should consider registering your children according to their interests. Many of these groups can modify their programs to accommodate children with disabilities and there may be additional supports available to help arrange for your child's participation to the maximum extent possible. Look for programs available to children in general first, then to the inclusion of your child.

Parents of children with disabilities sometimes need support to enable their child to be raised at home and participate in community life.



Parents quickly learn, as described earlier, that they may have to search out disability specific programs or associations to learn about the full range of supports and services available. Lists of services and supports change regularly and are provided by multiple sources.

While this can be frustrating at times, it can be best addressed by being connected to a parent and/or disability specific organization, a caring professional, and designated provincial and local information sources.

# ALBERTA GOVERNMENT SERVICES

## Alberta Supports

The **Alberta Supports Contact Centre (ASCC)** gives callers information on a number of government services available provincially and in the local community for children with disabilities and their families.

Information and referral agents are available toll free weekdays from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by calling 1.877.644.9992.

### Alberta Supports Contact Centre

1.877.644.9992

Available toll free  
weekdays  
from 8:15 a.m.  
to 4:30 p.m.



## Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)

The FSCD program works with families to identify the supports and services that will best meet the unique needs of each child and family. The intended outcome of the program is that families have supports and services that enhance their ability to meet the needs of their child.

Along with providing information and referrals, FSCD provides funding for a wide range of supports and services, based on each family's individual needs that may include:

- individual and family counselling;
- respite services;
- aide supports;
- child care supports;
- specialized services for families of children with severe disabilities;
- out of home placements; and
- assistance with some of the disability-related costs for:
  - > attending medical appointments;
  - > clothing and footwear; and
  - > health-related needs such as dental care, medical supplies, ambulance and prescription drugs, formulas or diets.

Families are responsible for all of the costs typically associated with raising a child. Families must access any other relevant supports, services and resources available to them, including insurance coverage, health benefits plans and other government or community programs, before FSCD will fund a similar service.

For more information about how to access services through the FSCD program, visit **[www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disabilities](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disabilities)** or call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.



# WHERE CAN I GET ASSISTANCE WITH MY CHILD'S CARE?

★ Families of children with disabilities may be able to access respite services and assistance with certain types of care through a variety of programs. The type and level of services available will vary according to program requirements and the severity of the child's disability.

## Respite Services

The level of attention and supervision required to care for a child with a disability can sometimes be overwhelming and exhausting for families. Respite care provides parents with a break from the care and supervision demands of children with disabilities by offering short term care and supervision support.

The FSCD program may help with extraordinary care demands by providing in home or out of home respite, 24 hour respite, homemaker support and/or domestic child care services. These types of supports are provided based on each family's unique needs and circumstances.

Respite services for children with complex medical needs may be available through the Alberta Health Services Pediatric Home Care program. Contact your public health centre for information about the types of respite services available in your community.

For more information, visit **[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)** or call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.

## Child Care Support

Every parent has child care needs, but parents of a child with a disability are often faced with extraordinary care and supervision requirements. Several provincial programs exist that may be able to help with child care support.

### ◆ Inclusive Child Care Program

Children with disabilities can receive support from the Inclusive Child Care Program in approved child care centres, family day homes and preschools.

Inclusive Child Care Programs create flexibility to meet the individual needs of children with special needs or disabilities within these child care settings. Support may include training for child care staff, consultation on programming or inclusion, resource and referral information and/or funding for additional staff.

For more information, call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.



### ◆ **Child Care Subsidy Program**

Alberta Children and Youth Services provides financial assistance to eligible lower income families using:

- > Licensed day care centres
- > Licensed group family child care
- > Approved family day homes
- > Licensed out of school care centres
- > Licensed pre schools and
- > Approved early childhood development programs

Subsidy rates vary by program type and the age of the child receiving child care.

For general inquiries about child care subsidy, call 1.877.644.9992. For more information about available child care options, visit **[www.humanservices.alberta.ca/childcaresubsidy](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/childcaresubsidy)**

Subsidies are also available through the Kin Child Care Funding program. This program will subsidize the costs of child care by a non custodial relative (e.g. grandmother).

For more information, call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.

### ◆ **Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)**

The FSCD program may help families of children with disabilities when their child is unable to receive child care in a child care setting due to the nature or extent of the child's disability.

For more information, call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.

## Health Related Supports and Services

### ◆ Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL)

AADL may assist with providing basic medical equipment and supplies to people with a chronic disability or illness and individuals who are terminally ill. This program may help families pay for special equipment and supplies, such as wheelchairs, respiratory equipment, bathing and toileting equipment and hearing aids.

For more information, contact Alberta Aids to Daily Living at 780.427.0731 (310.0000 toll free) or visit [www.health.alberta.ca/aadl](http://www.health.alberta.ca/aadl)



#### ◆ **Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB)**

The Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB) is a premium free health benefit plan that provides basic dental and optical services, emergency ambulance service, essential diabetic supplies and prescription drug coverage for children under 18 in lower income families.

Parents must apply to receive the ACHB. The program looks at the number of children in your family and your family's income to decide if your children are eligible.

For more information or for an application form, contact the ACHB at 1.877.4.MY.KIDS (1.877.469.5437) or visit **humanservices.alberta.ca/achb**

#### ◆ **Health Link**

Health Link Alberta is a provincewide medical advice and information line that can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Highly trained registered nurses will provide you with advice and information about health symptoms and concerns that you or a member of your family may be experiencing. They can also help you find appropriate services and health information.

To contact Health Link, call toll free 1.866.408.LINK (5465). In Edmonton, call 780.408.LINK (5465) and in Calgary call 403.943.LINK (5465).

#### ◆ **Mental Health Services**

Mental health services for children, including children with disabilities, are provided through local health areas. These services include promotion of mental health, early identification and intervention, assessment and diagnosis, treatment, independent living support, psychiatric consultation and outreach and education for children, youth and their families.

For more information, contact the Mental Health Help Line at 1.877.303.2642.



## What Financial Supports are Available?

### ◆ **Child Disability Benefit (CDB)**

CDB is a tax free benefit for low and modest income families who care for children under age 18 with a severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment. The CDB is a monthly supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit. To qualify for a CDB, your child must also qualify for the Disability Tax Credit. See Form T2201 – Disability Tax Credit Certificate for an explanation of the eligibility criteria.

For more information, contact the Canada Revenue Agency at 1.800.387.1193 or visit [www.cra-arc.gc.ca/benefits](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/benefits)

### ◆ **Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Program**

If you are eligible for Employment Insurance benefits and you need to care for, or arrange care for, a gravely ill child, you can collect income support over a span of six months.

You are eligible for benefits of up to six weeks, plus the standard two week Employment Insurance waiting period, for a total of eight weeks.

For more information, visit [http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/ei/types/compassionate\\_care.shtml](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/ei/types/compassionate_care.shtml)



#### ◆ **Employee Benefits Package**

If you are employed, your employee benefits package may provide income support or other assistance for specialized health and dental services or medical equipment. Check with your employer, employee assistance department or union representative for details about your specific plan.

#### ◆ **Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)**

The FSCD program helps with some of the extraordinary costs of raising a child with a disability. Financial supports are available to help parents reduce the impact of disability related costs.

For more information, visit **[www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disabilities](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disabilities)** or call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.



# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MY CHILD IS READY FOR SCHOOL?

★ In order to access early intervention programs for your child, it's important to plan ahead and make contact with your school and school authority early. This also gives the school time to prepare a program for your child and get the necessary funding and supports in place.

In most cases, your child will be able to attend your neighbourhood school and have a program designed to meet their individual needs.

By staying in close contact with your child's teachers and principal, you will be able to monitor your child's progress, share ideas and help set goals for your child's education. Open communication and planning will also help during transitions between grades and schools to ensure programs are in place and children adapt more easily to the changes.

For more information, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/ecs.aspx>, call Inclusive Learning Supports at 780.422.6326 (310.0000 toll free) or contact your local school or school authority.



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### Program Unit Funding (PUF)

PUF is provided to school authorities, including school jurisdictions and approved Early Childhood Services (ECS) operators for children with severe disabilities/delays who require additional support beyond that offered in a regular ECS program.

The funding is available to school authorities for a maximum of three years for each eligible child who is at least two years, six months of age on September 1st and less than six years of age on September 1st. To receive PUF, the child must be eligible according to the Special Education Coding Criteria. For more information, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/special/ecs.aspx>

For more information, call the Early Learning Branch at 780.422.9423 (310.0000 toll free) or contact your local school or school authority.

## Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD)

Under RCSD (formerly Student Health), school authorities, Alberta Health Services, Child and Family Services Authorities and other key partners work together to provide support services to kindergarten and school aged children with special health needs.

These services may include audiology, clinical nursing, emotional or behavioural supports, speech language therapy and physical, occupational and respiratory therapy. It's important to plan ahead and make contact with your school and school authority early.

For more information, contact your school, school authority or find your local RCSD partner at <http://education.alberta.ca/apps/studenthealth/partnerships.asp>



# CONTACT INFORMATION

★ The Alberta Supports Contact Centre (ASCC) gives callers information on a number of government services available provincially and in the local community for children with disabilities and their families.

Information and referral agents are available toll free weekdays from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by calling 1.877.644.9992.

◆ **Health Link Alberta**

Toll free: 1.866.408.LINK (5465)

Calgary: 403.943.LINK (5465)

Edmonton: 780.408.LINK (5465)

◆ **Mental Health Help Line**

1.877.303.2642

[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)

◆ **Child and Family Services Authorities Directory**

Call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.

[www.humanservices.alberta.ca](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca)

◆ **Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)**

Visit [www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disabilities](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disabilities) or call the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at 1.877.644.9992 and ask for your local Child and Family Services Authority.

◆ **Early Childhood Services and Special Needs**

Includes information on schools and school authorities  
[www.education.alberta.ca](http://www.education.alberta.ca)

◆ **Alberta Aids to Daily Living**

780.427.0731 (310.0000 toll free)  
or visit [www.health.alberta.ca/aadl](http://www.health.alberta.ca/aadl)



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