

# 8 Your services



**T**here is a wide range of services available from statutory organisations, voluntary organisations and local groups. This chapter will help you find what you need.

## HEALTH SERVICES

### CHILD HEALTH CLINICS

Your child health clinic offers regular health and development reviews (see page 36) and immunisation (see pages 100–7) for your baby or child. It's run by health visitors and doctors. You can talk about any problems to do with your child, but if your child is ill and is likely to need treatment, you should go to your GP.

At some child health clinics you can get baby milk and vitamins cheaper than in the shops. If you're entitled to free baby milk and vitamins, or to low-price baby milk, you may be able to get these at your clinic.

Clinics are good places to meet other parents. Some run mother and baby or parent and toddler groups, and sell secondhand baby clothes and equipment.

### COMMUNITY MIDWIVES

Your community midwife has a legal duty to care for you and your baby for the first ten days after your baby's birth and will keep you on her books for the first 28 days if you, or the baby, need her. She can help with any problem to do with you or your baby and will give you a phone number to call at any time, day or night, if you need to.

### FAMILY DOCTORS

Your family doctor (GP) can be contacted at any time for yourself, your baby, or child. Some doctors will see small babies at the beginning of surgery hours or without an appointment if necessary, but be prepared to wait.

Some will give advice over the phone. Most doctors provide developmental reviews and immunisation themselves, or you can go to a child health clinic.

### HEALTH VISITORS

Your health visitor usually makes her first visit some time after your baby is ten days old. After that she may only see you at clinics or when you ask to see her. If you're alone, or struggling, she may make a point of coming by to see whether you need any help.

A health visitor is a qualified nurse who has had extra training to become a health visitor. Part of her role is to help families, especially families with babies and young children, to avoid illness and keep healthy. Talk to your health visitor if you feel anxious, depressed or worried about your children. She may be able to offer advice and suggest where to find help, and may organise groups where you can meet other mothers.

Your health visitor can visit you at home, or you can see her at your child health clinic, doctor's surgery or health centre, depending on where she's based. She'll give you a phone number to get in touch if you need to.

### PATIENT ADVICE AND LIAISON SERVICES (PALS)

Your local PALS provides information to patients, carers and their families about local health services. For example, they can provide you with a list of local doctors. PALS can advise you on how to get what you need from your health services and tell you about the complaints procedures. You can contact your local PALS by phoning your local NHS Trust or Primary Care Trust, asking to be put through, or phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

### LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES

#### CHILDREN'S INFORMATION SERVICE

Your local Children's Information Service (CIS) can provide information about registered childcare, free early education places and other services available in your area. You can

### REGISTER YOUR BABY WITH YOUR DOCTOR

*Register your baby with your doctor as early as possible with the pink card that you'll be given when you register your baby's birth at the local register office. Sign the card and take or send it to your doctor. If you need the doctor to see your baby before you've registered the birth, you can go to the surgery and fill in a registration form for the doctor there. If you move, register with a new doctor close to you as soon as possible (see page 133).*

*Sure Start is the Government's programme to improve services for children. It is delivering free part-time early education for three and four year olds, developing more and better childcare options in England, and bringing together these and other health and family support services (such as antenatal and postnatal care) through Local Programmes and a new network of Children's Centres. Find out more through your local Children's Information Service. Visit: [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk) Search for childcare at [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)*

contact them on 0800 096 0296 or you can search [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk) for your local CIS.

### EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

Your education department (in your phone book under the name of your local authority) is responsible for all the State-run nursery schools, nursery classes and infant schools in your area and can give you information about them.

The education department also has a responsibility to assess children with special needs and provide suitable education for them.

### HOUSING DEPARTMENTS

The housing department (in your phone book under the name of your local authority) is responsible for all council housing in your area and will run the council housing waiting list.

The housing department has a legal duty to house people in certain priority groups who are homeless (or are soon going to be) through no fault of their own. Priority groups include pregnant women and parents of children under 16.

Through your housing department you should also be able to find out about local housing associations, which also provide housing for rent.

### SOCIAL WORKERS

Social workers are usually found in social services departments. Their job is to provide support for people in need in their area who are having difficulty coping, financially or practically. A social worker may be able to get your child a nursery place,

help you find better housing, or give you information about your rights.

To contact a social worker, phone your local social services department, or ask your health visitor to put you in touch.

### ADVICE CENTRES

Advice centres are any non-profit-making agencies that give advice on benefits, housing and other problems. They include citizens advice bureaux, community law centres, welfare rights offices, housing aid centres, neighbourhood centres and community projects. Look for them under these names in your phone book, or under the name of your local authority.

### USING THE SERVICES

If you're to get the best from these services, it helps to be clear about what you want.

- Before you meet with any professional, think through exactly what you want to talk about and what information you can give that'll be helpful. You may want to make some notes beforehand and take them with you as a reminder.
- Unless your child needs to be with you, try to get a friend or neighbour to look after him or her so that you can concentrate. It's much easier to talk and listen if you're not distracted.
- If you do have to go with your child or children,

take books or toys with you to entertain them.

- Try to consider the answers or advice given to you. If your immediate feeling is 'but that wouldn't work for me' or 'that isn't what I'm looking for', then say so and try to talk about it. You're less likely to come away with an answer you're not happy with or can't put into practice.
- If a problem is making life difficult or is really worrying you, it's worth keeping going until you get some kind of answer, if not a solution. So if the first person you talk to can't help, ask if they can suggest where else you might go. Or if the doctor or health visitor suggests a remedy that doesn't work, go back and ask again.
- Some professionals aren't good at explaining things. If you don't understand, then say so. It's their responsibility to be clear, not yours to guess what they mean. Go back over what's said to you to get it straight.
- If your first language is not English, you may be able to get the help of a linkworker or health advocate. Their job is not just to translate the words, but to act as a friend and make sure that the professionals understand just what you need. Ask your health visitor if there's a linkworker or health advocate in your area.

## HOW TO CHANGE YOUR GP

You may need to change your GP if you move. You may want to change for other reasons, even if you're not moving house.

First find a GP who will accept you. See if anybody can recommend one. Your local PALS or NHS Direct can give you a list of the doctors in your area. You may have to try more than one GP before you find one willing to accept you, especially if you live in a heavily populated area. If you can't find someone after several attempts, your local health authority will do it for you and you should send them your medical card if you have it, or the address of your previous GP if not.

When you call at the surgery of the GP you've chosen, you may be asked why you want to change. You don't have to give a reason but if you do, try to avoid criticising your old GP. Say something good about the new one instead. For example, the surgery may be easier to get to, the hours may be better, the GP may have a good reputation for treating young children, the practice may be larger and provide more, or you may prefer a woman doctor or one who shares your cultural background.

Once you've found a GP to accept you, leave your medical card with the receptionist. You don't have to contact your old GP at all. If you've lost your medical card, your new GP will probably ask you to complete a form instead, although sometimes you may be asked to contact the primary

care trust (in the phonebook under the name of your primary care trust) giving the name and address of your previous GP to obtain a medical card first. If you don't know your old GP's name and address, this may take a while, but if you need treatment in the meantime, you can approach any GP, who must take you on, at least temporarily. It's best to say from the beginning that you need treatment now if you're also asking to be permanently registered with that GP.

## FINDING OTHER HELP

The help you want may not come from the services of professionals. There are many other sources of help available to parents – not only family and friends, but also many different kinds of local groups and voluntary organisations.

### LOCAL GROUPS

To find out about local groups, try the following:

- Ask your health visitor or GP.
- Ask at your citizens advice bureau or other advice centre, your local library, your social services department, or your local Council for Voluntary Service (in your phone book, maybe as Voluntary Action Group, Rural Community Council or Volunteer Bureau).
- Look on noticeboards and for leaflets in your child health clinic, health

centre, GP's waiting room, Sure Start Local Programme or Children's Centre, local library, advice centres, supermarket, newsagent or toy shop.

- Look through the list of national organisations (pages 147–50). Many run local groups.

In many areas there are now groups offering support to parents who share the same background and culture. Many of these are women's or mothers' groups. Your health visitor may know if there's such a group in your area. Or ask at places like your local library, your citizens advice bureau or other advice or community centre, your local Council for Voluntary Service or your Community Relations Council (in your phone book, maybe as Council for Racial Equality or Community Relations Office).

### STARTING A GROUP

If you can't find a local group that suits you or can't find the support you need, think about setting it up yourself. Many local groups have begun through a couple of mothers (say with crying babies or sleepless toddlers, or just fed up and lonely) getting together and talking. You could advertise on your clinic noticeboard or in a newsagent's window or local newspaper. Or ask your health visitor to put you in touch with others in the same situation as yourself. You don't have to offer any more than a place to meet and a few cups of coffee.

*'I think looking after children is the hardest job going and the one you get least preparation for.'*