



# UNDRESSING DISABILITY

enhance the uk

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## Parenting guide for adults with an impairment

### Summary

With around 1.7 million disabled parents in the UK, mostly with physical and sensory impairments (source: [www.bestbeginnings.org.uk](http://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk)), Enhance the UK (ETUK) has undertaken a variety of research activities to bring this Parenting Guide to you. Our aim is to provide useful information to help you on your parenting journey. You may be someone with a disability or impairment looking to start a family. You may already have your bundle of joy. Either way, within this guide you'll find information, advice and guidance, that may be of value at this equally exciting and daunting time in your life.

We are sure you'll appreciate that with there being such a wide spectrum in regards to disabilities, we couldn't possibly provide detailed information on each and every one. Within this guide you'll find clickable links to additional resources for you to access, dependent upon your own situation and circumstance.

It's transparent there are a lack of structured resources and support networks available for disabled parents, from initial family planning right through to raising your family, but that has not stopped many disabled individuals from becoming amazing parents.

### Where to start

We all know the story of the birds and bees, so we'll skip that bit, but there can be real concerns for disabled people when thinking of starting a family, such as: -

- **Planning my Pregnancy - am I going to be able to have a child?** If this is a concern you have, ask your GP to refer you to a healthcare professional. They can help you safely plan your pregnancy as there are some people who carry additional health risks when pregnant and may need to make some lifestyle changes or change medication. Use Facebook groups or online forums to search for people in similar situations and read about their experiences. Discuss any concerns with your Family Planning service at your GP surgery.
- **I can't have vaginal sex due to my disability; how can I have a child?** There are several assisted fertility options available if you are in this situation, such as IUI (Intrauterine Insemination). Discover more via the links below.
- **I want to have a child, but I don't have a partner yet?** For many disabled people, finding where to meet the "right person" can be a challenge – but know that with confidence it is a challenge that can be overcome. ETUK and their team of sexpeers have created the Love Lounge where you can access free advice on all things sex, love and disability. C
- **I don't have a partner but would like to start a family as a single parent.** Just like non-disabled people, there are options for people wishing to become parents on their own, such as adoption, sperm donation or surrogacy. Obviously, there are certain criteria for these options, but being disabled may not exclude you, eligibility is looked at on a case by case basis. Some useful links for these options are noted below.
- **I am in a same sex relationship and we would like to start a family.** Just like non-disabled people, there are options for same sex couples wishing to become parents, such as adoption, surrogacy, sperm or egg donors. Obviously, there are certain criteria for all these options, but being disabled may

not exclude you, eligibility is looked at on a case by case basis. Some useful links for these options below.

- **Will my child be born with a disability?** A worrying topic for many disabled parents and understandably so. Some genetic testing is available depending on your individual circumstances; however, this is a broad topic that is best discussed and explored with your healthcare professionals.
- **Can I afford to have a child?** This is a question all parents ask whether disabled or not. Later in this guide we provide some information on how you can explore financial information in more detail.

## Useful links for where to start

- [Social Care](#) – This Social Care and Support Guide can help with gathering information on day-to-day living because of illness or disability and provides a number of options and where you can get support.
- [NHS – Intrauterine Insemination](#) (IUI) may be an option if you are unable to have vaginal sex due to your disability, if you wish to become a single parent, or if you are in a same sex relationship.
- [Sperm Donation UK](#) is one company that could be a useful place to start your investigations on whether sperm donation is right for you.
- [Egg Donation UK](#) is one of the UKs leading egg donation clinics.
- [First for Adoption](#) can help find adoption agencies in your area.

**Disclaimer:-** *The links provided above, and anywhere within this guide are not endorsed by ETUK and ETUK have no engagement with, or first-hand knowledge of using these companies. It is advisable that you undertake your own due diligence on any companies you wish to engage with.*

## Pregnancy

You've successfully conceived (CONGRATULATIONS!) and now you have approximately 9 months to grow your baby. This can be both exciting and worrying in equal measures – for every mother. Your regular antenatal appointments will commence and depending on your own circumstances, you may be under consultant care by an obstetrician.

During these appointments, you should be confident in requesting any additional help you see fit to support you in line with your disability or impairment. From research undertaken, this additional support is not freely offered, but under the Disability Discrimination and Equality Act 2020, reasonable, positive steps must be taken to remove the barriers you may face because of your disability. This is to ensure you receive the same services, as far as this is possible, as someone who is not disabled. The Equality Act 2010 calls this the duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Attending a local antenatal group can be a great way to meet other expectant parents, however, it would sadly appear these are very standardised in their approach and don't necessarily take into account parents with a disability. Some parents have reported that contacting the antenatal group beforehand to advise of your individual circumstance has proved helpful, noting when they arrive on the course that the leader has provided some more specific guidance or advice for the parents.

Some key things you'll need to consider before baby comes along are:

- Where baby will sleep, it needs to be easily accessible for you?
- How are you getting to and from the hospital?
- Identify your support network, who will you ask for help when the time comes to have your baby?
- How will you bring baby home from hospital?
- How will you transport baby – in a sling or a pram?
- Will you be able to hear when your baby is crying or making noises to alert you to their need? If not, what will need to be in place for you to monitor baby safely?

## Welcoming your baby into the world

The day has come when you welcome your new baby into the world and, like every single parent in the world, you think – wow! I'm responsible for another human! Try not to be overwhelmed, you'll be great.

## Ask for help

One of the most common themes from all parents we have engaged with was “ask for help”. Asking for help should never be seen as a sign of weakness, and nearly every parent we spoke to reiterated this and wished they had asked for help earlier than they did.

A few suggestions of where to ask for support are noted below: -

- Social Care
- Friends
- Family
- Facebook groups and online forums
- Antenatal classes
- GP surgery
- Health Visitors
- Occupational Therapists
- Specialist support groups

It's normal to worry about whether we're good parents, whether we are disabled or not. Did we handle that situation right? Could we have done that differently? Am I a good enough parent? In these situations, you may find it helpful to seek that guidance, support and advice from your support network, health visitor, healthcare professional, etc.

Another common theme amongst the disabled parents we engaged with, was the fact that parents with impairments seem to raise fabulously independent, empathetic children, who see others without barriers or judgement – just how beautiful is that? However, it's also important to recognise that some children may, at times, feel a sense of resentment towards their disabled parent(s), especially if they assume a carer role, something that can be difficult and isolating as well as creating a nurturing, empathetic individual.

## Financials

Unfortunately, at the age of 26, disabled people in the UK are four times more likely to be out of work or not in education compared to non-disabled people (source: Department of Work and Pensions). But it goes without saying, disabled or not, our kids have the potential to cost us a significant amount of money. Financial support may be required, especially if you are not currently employed. There are various schemes in place to help new parents, eligibility can vary, so you will need to investigate further to check what you are entitled to. Here are some of initiatives that may help you financially, this list is not exhaustive, but should prove helpful in identifying what funding is available: -

[Maternity Pay](#)

[Shared Parental Leave & Pay](#)

[Paternity Pay & Leave](#)

[Maternity Allowance](#)

[Sure Start Maternity Grant](#)

[Child Benefit](#)

[Free childcare for 3-4 year olds](#)

[Child Tax Credits](#)

[Universal Credit](#)

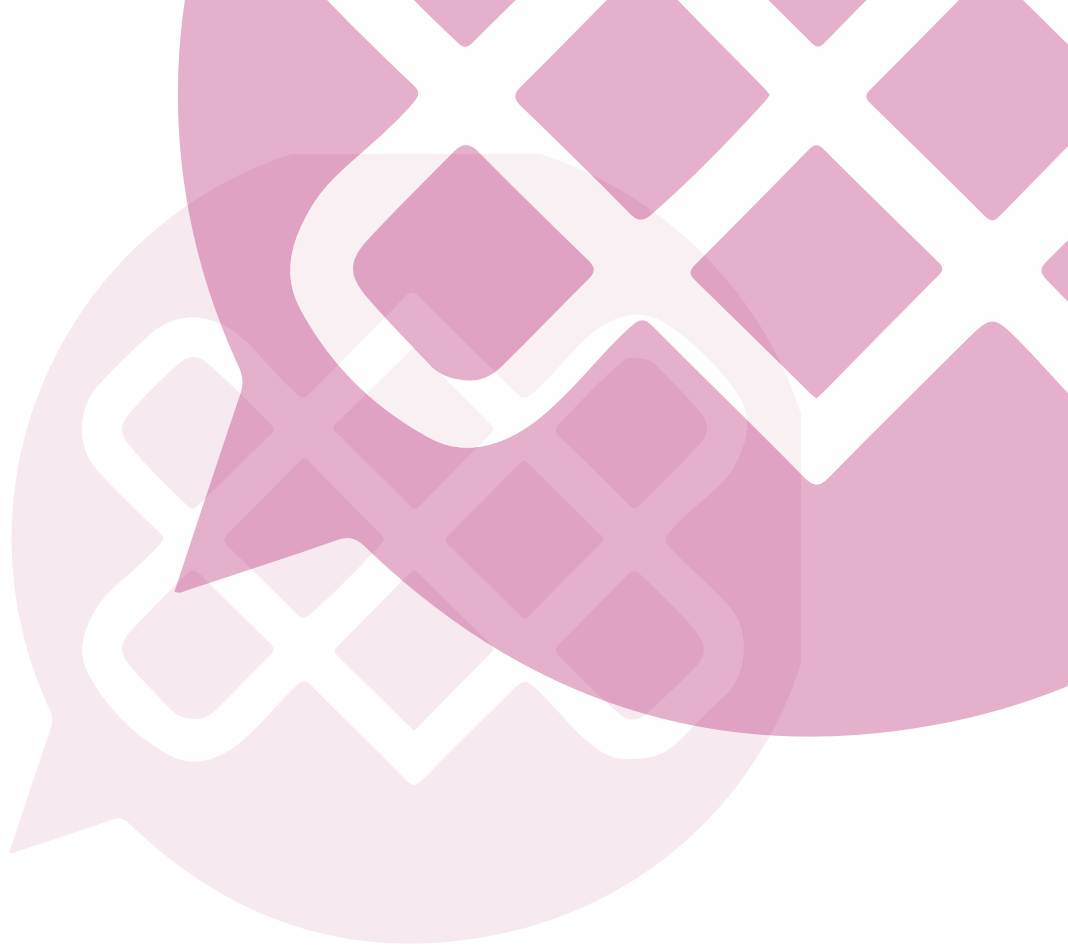
[Disability Grants](#)

[Various Alternative Grants](#)

## Parenting Hacks

There is a distinct lack of “baby stuff” out there, designed specifically for parents with a disability. And unfortunately, some of the products with wonderful claims, leave you a little underwhelmed. Another frustration is many products deemed ideal for parents with disabilities are only available via Healthcare professionals and not sold direct to the public. It is therefore always worthwhile trying to engage with an Occupational Therapist either via the NHS or privately to explore tools available to them on your behalf, that you may otherwise not be aware of. Accessibility of this information and these tools in the future is high on our agenda – there is certainly a huge gap in the market and a lack of visibility. It's no surprise then why the disabled parents amongst us end up coming up with our own parenting hacks!

Keep an eye out for some parent hacks resources and blogs from the Enhance the UK team.



# About us

'Undressing Disability' is a global campaign which aims to raise standards in sexual health and sexual awareness for disabled people. Issues around sexuality and sexual frustration are frequently raised by disabled people who feel that they have less opportunity and ability to explore their sexuality than others. Through a lack of understanding, education and a general lack of services, disabled people frequently cannot access the support that would make it possible for them to make the sorts of choices about their lifestyles that most of us take for granted. As part of our campaign we run the Love Lounge, an online forum providing free advice on all things sex, love and disability. We also have free downloadable resources. As a user-led charity, our aim is to change the way people view disability, which often involves removing the 'fear factor' that so often surrounds the subject. We support businesses to be more inclusive by providing disability awareness training, British Sign Language workshops and accessibility audits, amongst other things.

e: [hello@enhancetheuk.org](mailto:hello@enhancetheuk.org)

w: [www.enhancetheuk.org](http://www.enhancetheuk.org)

#undressingdisability



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CHANGING SOCIETY'S VIEWS ON DISABILITY