



What If My Child Has Special Needs?

4Cs of Alameda County | www.4calameda.org

Your child may have a disability or chronic illness. Or she may just have difficulties that don't seem typical for children her age. (It may be helpful to ask for an assessment from experts - see "resources"). Either way, you want to find child care providers who will work with your child as a unique individual, provide the special care he needs, and include him in a safe, enjoyable program where he can learn and grow. Here are some answers to questions you may have:

YOUR CHILD'S RIGHT TO CARE

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) gives your child the right to participate in any child care program. Providers are required to make reasonable accommodations to help your child participate in the program as long as it's not an "undue burden." For example, they may provide large-print books, learn some sign language, or alter the space to make access easier. For more information on your child's rights under the ADA, go to the Department of Justice website www.ADA.gov or call the ADA information line 1-800-514-0301.

HOW WILL THE CHILD CARE PROVIDER KNOW HOW TO GIVE MY CHILD THE SPECIAL SUPPORT HE NEEDS?

The provider's best resource is **you**. You know the most about how to help your child play, learn, and feel comfortable. It's important for you to share that information with anyone else who cares for him. Before enrolling your child, you and the provider should have a detailed conversation about his needs and how to meet them. When your child is in care, it's important that you and the provider check in with each other frequently to share information and ideas and, if needed, problem-solve together.

It's also very helpful if you arrange for others involved with your child's care, such as doctors or therapists, to share information and ideas with the child care provider. In addition, 4Cs of Alameda County provides resources to child care providers to help them care for children with special needs.

DO I NEED TO FIND A SPECIAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES?

Not unless your child's health care providers or therapists recommend it. Most children with special needs benefit from an "inclusive" child care program, where children with and without disabilities participate together in the same routines and play experiences. Learning and playing with a variety of children will give your child valuable opportunities to interact with peers, develop social skills, and grow more relaxed and confident.



HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT CHILD CARE PROGRAM?

- For referrals to licensed child care providers in your area, call the 4Cs referral line, 510-582-2182.
- For more suggestions, see 4Cs Tips on "Choosing Child Care."

WILL OTHER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WELCOME MY CHILD?

Including children with and without disabilities in the same program benefits all the children. They become aware of the similarities and differences between themselves and their peers, and they have a chance to learn that everyone makes an important contribution to the group. In addition, all children benefit when caregivers are committed to responding positively to individual strengths and needs.

If the child care provider is enthusiastic and committed to inclusion, children and parents are likely to mirror that attitude.

DO PROVIDERS NEED TO HAVE SPECIAL SKILLS TO CARE FOR MY CHILD?

Yes and no. Most of the things a provider needs to do for a child with special needs are just different ways of doing what any good child care provider does: paying attention to each child as an individual and making sure she can participate in her own way. Many providers in Alameda County have received some training on including children with special needs.

HOW CAN I TELL WHETHER THE PROGRAM IS RIGHT FOR MY CHILD?

For general ideas about choosing a child care provider, see 4Cs Tips on choosing child care. Particular questions you might want to consider:

- Do you feel welcomed and comfortable? Does the provider seem interested and positive? Ask questions about your child?
- Does the provider have any special procedures or policies for involving children with disabilities?
- Does the provider emphasize the importance of communication between caregivers and families?
- Does the program have a regular daily schedule?
- Do the caregivers seem attentive to the children?
- Does the provider have training or experience in caring for children with special needs?



RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Regional Center of the East Bay
www.rceb.org or 510-383-1200

Assessments and services for people of all ages with developmental disabilities. Has Early Start program (510-618-6195) for 0-3-year-olds at risk for developmental disabilities.

Special Education Services for Children ages 3-21 years

Contact your local school district for more information on special education services and to request an assessment for your child.

California Children's Services

www.acphd.org or 510-208-5970

Specialized medical care for children with eligible medical conditions.

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)

www.dredf.org or 510-644-2555.

Advocacy around special education laws and services provided by school districts.

Family Resource Network

www.frnoakland.org or 510-547-7322

Free information, referrals, advocacy, and parent-to-parent support for children with special needs.

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care (ACCESS),

1-800-491-9099 Evaluations, services, information, and referrals for those with mental health, drug or alcohol problems (all ages).

Friends of Children with Special Needs

www.fcsn1996.org or 510-739-6900

Comprehensive program, advocacy and support network for people with disabilities and their families, in English and Chinese.

Asian Community Mental Health Services

www.acmhs.org or 510-451-6729, Dev. Dis. Unit, Consultation, case management, and parent support groups for Asian and Pacific Islander people with disabilities and their families.

La Familia Counseling Service Developmental

Services, 510-887-0661 Case management, advocacy, and training for primarily Latino people with disabilities and their families.