

# Everyone included

**T**he law requires childminders to make reasonable adjustments to improve access for disabled children, which can sound daunting, but it need not mean big changes to your practice. There is plenty of support and training available, and if you treat each child as an individual, find out as much about them as you can, and adapt your existing activities, you will find that looking after disabled children can bring a rewarding new dimension to your career.

## Gather information

Ben Tipler, a childminder from Cardiff, works with his wife Rosie and joined the Cardiff Community Childminding

Network in September 2009. He takes Tom, age 7, who has cerebral palsy, on an outing every Friday afternoon after school. Ben says, "I was a bit apprehensive to begin with because Tom has limited mobility and communication, but I was keen to broaden my childcare experience. I knew that I could give Tom an enjoyable time, and his family would get a break, too."

Ben found out as much as he could about Tom from his family and his one-to-one carer at school. He also did his own research about cerebral palsy

Below: Helen Wynne (centre) and husband Dean with some of their minded children

Mel Parks hears from three childminders in Wales who have adapted their childminding practice to meet the needs of disabled children.

and talked to other childminders in the area about their experiences of looking after disabled children.

Helen Wynne, from Wrexham, works with her husband Dean and specialises in looking after children with additional needs. They are both members of the Wrexham Children Come First network. Helen was going through the registration process to become a childminder in 2004 when she found she was pregnant. Her son, Dyfan, was born with complex medical and physical needs signifying a rare condition: chromosome 8 deletion.

Helen says, "No one knows more about Dyfan's condition than me, and I've made a book about him for his other carers. I have included full details



about his condition, the equipment he uses, family, medication, allergies, his personality, his likes and dislikes, favourite toys, songs and television programmes, words he can say and words you may not understand he is saying." Helen suggests asking parents to create a book about their child, and also visiting the family house to see the child in their own environment with any adaptations that have been made for them.

### Adapt existing activities

Before Ben takes Tom anywhere, he does a lot of forward planning. He says, "I visit places like soft play centres on my own for a risk assessment first. I ask questions like: Will there be enough floor space? Is it going to be suitable for a 7-year-old child? What's Tom going to get out of the experience?"

Joyce Duffy, from Caerphilly, has been childminding disabled children for 11 years. She has not made any changes to her home and instead adapts her usual activities to include all the children. She says, "I might use a scarf for throwing and catching, larger holes for threading needles when doing crafts, or booster chairs so a child can join in with mealtimes and other activities. One idea I use to help children to communicate is to have laminated pictures around the house so that a child can point to what they want."

### Be resourceful

Helen has slowly made adjustments to her home, but she says that it is not always necessary for looking after disabled children. She says, "We have a ramp so that children can move freely between the house and garden, but I have created a lot of equipment myself. For example, sensory boxes with items gathered from car boot sales and around the house."

Helen has also attended Communication Friendly Spaces training, which focuses on the childcare environment, where she gathered lots of ideas. She says, "We made a den called The Haven, which I use to give the children one-to-one time. It helps both with their communication skills and their concentration, because there are no distractions. It is peaceful and relaxing in there and can be changed when the children decide to create a new one."



Above: Joyce Duffy and her daughter Laura  
Right: Helen's improvised playhouse



### Utilise support

All the childminders agree that the support of their community childminding network is important to them, with training and advice, as well as skills and ideas sharing. But if there isn't a community network in your area, speak to your local Early Years team to see how they can help.

There are plenty of training courses available on specific conditions or on more general topics, such as managing difficult behaviour. The childminders also all use sign language or Makaton to help their communication with the children. Courses are often free to childminders, but if not, you may be able to gain some funding through NCMA's Gail Hall Memorial Fund (see box, right), which paid for Helen to attend a visual impairment awareness course.

### Individuality

When working with disabled children the most important thing is to treat each child as an individual. Helen says, "Don't let the disability scare you, and don't feel sorry for the child. If you're doing your job right, the child won't think there's anything different about them."

Joyce agrees and says, "See the child first and not the disability. Assess what they can do, and adapt your play plan to suit them." ●

### Funding available

The Gail Hall Memorial Fund offers bursaries to members of NCMA enabling them to undertake training in caring for and working with disabled children and children with special educational needs. To find out more about the fund, contact Jeannette Elliott on 020 8290 2531 or email [GHMF@ncma.org.uk](mailto:GHMF@ncma.org.uk).