

## Definition of short breaks

*“Short breaks provide opportunities for disabled children and young people to spend time away from their primary carers. These include day, evening, overnight or weekend activities and take place in the child’s own home, the home of an approved carer, a residential or community setting.*

*Provision of short breaks should be based on an assessment of the whole family addressing both their personal and social needs. Short breaks occur on a regular and planned basis and should be part of an integrated programme of support which is regularly reviewed. No short break should exceed 28 days continuous care and total provision over a year should not exceed 120 days.”*

Short break services are **additional services** required to support disabled children and their families; in other words, short breaks are services over and above the universal services expected and available to all families. The issue of ‘additionality’ is important when looking at the use of universal services.

### Different types of short breaks

#### **1. Residential Short Break Unit**

A residential short break unit is a service provided in a residential setting that may include overnight stays, day care or sessional visits. No short break stay should exceed 28 days continuous care. A small number of residential settings also provide outreach services within the child’s own home or community. Residential units may provide:

**a . overnight stays** – include all overnight stays regardless of whether or not they are longer than 24 hours.

**b . day care and sessional** services are visits or sessions that take place within the residential unit, for example tea time visits, day care at weekends and school holidays.

**c . outreach services**, in this context are services provided by the residential unit whereby staff employed by the unit go out to the child’s own home or take the child out into the community.

Residential stays also take place in hospices and in special schools. It should not be assumed that all these stays constitute a ‘short break’. In deciding whether or not this is a short break – the purpose of the stay must be considered.

The majority of children using hospices are ‘disabled children’ with multiple impairments and complex health needs rather than children with what would be considered as life limiting conditions, such as cancer.

Some special schools have a residence or hostel facility where children attending that school may stay for a few nights each week. This is defined by the school as a ‘24 hour curriculum’ rather than a short break – even if the effect for the family is the same.

## **2. Family based overnight services**

*Family based overnight short breaks are short breaks in the home of an approved carer or in the child's home that include one or more overnight stays. No stay should exceed 28 days continuous care. An approved carer may be a contract carer or a short break/family link carer.*

Overnight services may be provided by:

**Contract carers** are also known as fee paid, salaried, professional or link-plus carers. They are approved foster carers who provide short breaks 'on a full time' basis and receive a fee or salary throughout the year, even when they do not have a child in placement. In addition, they usually receive an allowance when a child is in placement in the same way as other short break carers. They are usually contracted to provide a specific number of nights per week or per year and tend to be linked with an average of five children. The children are usually cared for in the home of the carer, however in a small number of services the carers will look after the child in the child's own home.

**Short break/family link carers** are approved foster carers who receive an allowance each time a child is in placement with them. They tend to be linked to one or two children each. The children are usually cared for in the home of the carer, however in a small number of services the carers will look after the child in the child's own home.

**Overnight sitting services** are provided by 'sitters' or 'sessional workers' rather than approved foster carers. Sitters are usually employed on a casual self-employed basis and are paid a salary or hourly fee rather than an allowance. This service tends to take place in the child's own home. In some areas this service may be provided by health or agencies contracted by the PCT in order to provide short breaks to children with multiple impairments / complex health needs /life limiting conditions. Overnight care should include all overnight services, whether or not they are longer than 24 hours.

Some childminder may have children overnight – see note under day care.

## **3. Family Based Day Care**

*Family based day care services are short breaks provided by an approved carer that do not involve an overnight stay in the home of the carer or the child.*

In most areas, day care will be provided by either contract carers or short break carers. Many services will have approved carers who only provide day care (often due to their housing situation or family commitments), however, in the majority of cases it is the same carers (and therefore the same service) who provide overnight care who also provide day care. There are children who only have day care and not overnight stays.

Both day care and overnight stays may be provided by childminders. In some instances these may be short breaks, but for the majority of children using childminders this is not the case as it is a universal service provided to enable parents of both disabled and non-disabled children to go to work. It is not considered as good practice for childminders to be used instead of short break carers in order to short cut the approval process required by the fostering regulations.

#### **4. Sitting or sessional short break services**

*Sitting or sessional short breaks are services that provide care usually in the child's home on any day of the week for periods of time usually shorter than a full day.*

The focus of the care may be in the child's home or the sitter may support the child to access activities in the community. The sitter is usually employed by a registered agency, which may be the local authority, a health provider or a voluntary or independent sector organisation.

#### **5. Befriending**

*Befriending is described as a one to one relationship that enables a child or young person to access a range of community or leisure activities. A befriender is a volunteer.*

#### **6. Universal Services.**

*Universal services are those services provided to all children, young people and their families, such as children's centres, youth clubs, extended school activities and child care.*

Universal services may be either part of inclusive mainstream services or may be specialist services. Where universal services are provided in a dedicated way for disabled children and young people this is usually because this is the only way of meeting the high support needs of that group of children, for example a youth club provided for learning disabled children on the Autistic Spectrum who also have challenging behaviour.

Universal services may act in a preventative way, by reducing the demand for specialist short breaks and other services. For example, the provision of play schemes during the school holidays is likely to reduce the demand for costly overnight short break services.

All universal services have a duty to respond to the Disability Discrimination Act by ensuring that their services are accessible to disabled children and young people.

Short break services are **additional services** required to support disabled children and their families; in other words, short breaks are services over and above the universal services expected and available to all families. If parents work – non-disabled children may go to a childminder – this is child care. If a disabled child goes to a childminder for the same reason it is child care not a short break. In the same way all children should access youth clubs, extended schools activities, community and leisure facilities – however, if additional support is required (child is supported through a sessional worker service) – this may then constitute a short break.

#### **7. Direct Payments**

Any of the above service can be provided through a direct payment.

*Direct payments are not a separate type of short break service, but rather a means of arranging a short break service. Within children's services a person with parental responsibility (usually a parent) of a disabled child /young person or a young disabled person (aged 16 / 17 years) is given money to purchase their own service instead of the local authority arranging that service on their behalf. A direct payment is given INSTEAD of a service and the giving is based on an assessment of need and eligibility criteria in the same way as direct services. A direct payment may be given to purchase equipment.*