

# OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

*For children with intellectual & developmental disabilities*

This document will familiarize you with some of the main considerations, public benefits, and resources that are relevant for children age 0-18 with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) in King County. If you want to learn more, have questions, or would like to talk about your situation please contact The Arc of King County.



**For Questions, contact The Arc of King County**

**Phone: 206.829.7053      Email: [ask@arcofkingcounty.org](mailto:ask@arcofkingcounty.org)**

**TTY: 1.877.666.2348**



## EDUCATION

**Early Intervention Services (aka Birth-to-Three Services)** are available for children under age three who have delays in their development. Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that guides how Birth-to-Three services are provided. The IDEA permits Family Cost Participation (FCP) for some Birth-to-Three services. The FCP includes the use of a family's public or private insurance. Under some circumstances, FCP may also include family fees. FCP services are available to all eligible children, regardless of their ability to pay. Talk to your Family Resource Coordinator for more information about the financial resources available to you. Services begin with a developmental evaluation. Anyone can initiate or request an evaluation; a medical referral is not needed. Based on the results, Birth-to-Three specialists and parents develop an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) which is used to help enhance your child's development. The IFSP might include therapies such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, or speech therapy. The IFSP might also include special education instruction, infant mental health services, and more. The Birth-to-Three team works closely with the family as full partners to support the child's development. Each family is assigned a Family Resource Coordinator (FRC) who manages the services and helps connect the family to other community resources. Services may occur in the family home, at a child care center, or other community settings. For more information about Birth-to-Three services including where to start, service providers, etc. visit the [King County Developmental Disabilities webpage](#).

Early Intervention Services end on the child's third birthday. At least three months before your child's third birthday, a transition planning meeting will be held: You will meet with a school district representative as part of the meeting. They will explain what will happen to determine if your child qualifies for preschool special education services. If your child qualifies for preschool special education services, **as determined by the school district**, services will be provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) A meeting with a school district representative will not be scheduled if you do not wish to receive preschool special education services. Your FRC will explain the process and your options as this transition approaches.

**Head Start** programs promote school readiness of infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children from low-income families. These federally funded services are provided in a variety of settings and include early learning, family support and parent involvement, and child health coordination and nutrition. At least 10% of Head Start slots need to be filled by children with disabilities. A child can receive BOTH Head Start and Early Intervention services at the same time. For more information, please visit The Department of Children, Youth, and Families' [Head Start and ECEAP page](#).

**The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)** is a state-run program that focuses on the well-being of the whole child by providing comprehensive services for children ages 3 to 5, including early learning, family support and parent involvement, and child health coordination and nutrition. All children who qualify for preschool special education services are eligible for ECEAP, though space is not guaranteed. The state is in the process of expanding ECEAP to meet need. For more information, please visit The Department of Children, Youth, and Families' [Head Start and ECEAP page](#).

**Preschool special education services** support children ages 3 to 5 in a variety of settings, including regular early childhood programs like Head Start and ECEAP, separate special education classes or schools (often called developmental programs), other provider locations, or in home settings. Placement is decided by the IEP team, but federal law shows a preference for educating students with disabilities in regular classes, alongside peers without disabilities, with supports in place. School districts coordinate services and must provide qualified preschoolers a free and appropriate public education in the least restricted environment. Contact your [local school district](#) to learn about services in your area. Please see The Arc's [Early Learning Placement Guide](#) for information on the placement process for preschool.

**Regular early childhood programs** include public and private preschools, transitional and regular kindergarten, and community-based childcare where at least 50% of the children served do not have disabilities. Regular early childhood programs, with supports provided in the program, are the most integrated setting in the continuum of alternative placements for preschool special education services under IDEA. General education staff coordinate with special education staff to support children with disabilities. Some programs use co-teaching models.

**Developmental preschool** is a term used by many Washington school districts to describe separate classes or schools for preschoolers with disabilities. They are taught by special education staff. Usually, they do not meet the definition for a regular early childhood program – either because they only include children with disabilities or only include a few peers without disabilities. Some do have a 50-50 mix, however, and are inclusive of children with and without disabilities.

**Special Education** services are provided by public schools to students age 3-21 who have significant learning difficulties, physical disabilities, or behavioral challenges. Special Education includes specially designed instruction (SDI) which is intended to provide additional support for students in order to access the same education as their peers. Students must be determined eligible for special education services through an evaluation process. Once eligible, the school team, student, and parents collaborate to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which describes the specific services and supports the school will provide so that the student can access a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Special Education services are governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law that describes the required process, roles and responsibilities, and student and parent rights. See The Arc of King County's [Special Education Resource List](#) for local, state-wide, and federal resources to help families understand the special education system and advocate for their child.

When a child is receiving Early Intervention Services, as they approach age three the Family Resource Coordinator (FRC) will work with the family to determine if the child will be eligible for Special Education when they turn three. If the child is eligible, the FRC and school district will work with the family during the transition from the Early Intervention system to the Special Education system.

If a child is three years or older and did not receive Early Intervention Services and the child is not yet in school, the family can request an evaluation for Special Education services through their school district's "Child Find" program. Do an on-line search for the Child Find contact information for your school district, or contact The Arc of King County.

For children already in school who do not receive special education services, the family can request an evaluation any time. They should submit a written request for a Special Education Evaluation to their school principal, school psychologist, and classroom teacher explaining exactly why an evaluation is requested. The school is required to provide a response to the request in writing.

**504 Plans** are an alternative to an IEP and are provided to students who do not require specialized instruction. 504 Plans are a result of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a civil rights statute mandating all federally funded programs provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities to participate with their non-disabled peers. In the school system, 504 Plans describe individualized accommodations that will allow the student to participate in the general education school curriculum. 504 Plans do not provide specially designed instruction for students and offer less support than IEPs.

**High School Graduation Requirements** recently changed. Now, the student will receive the same diploma as their peers whether they receive special education services or not. Here are the general high school graduation requirements in Washington State. Note that each school district determines graduation requirements that must abide by state rules but could be ever more extensive.

- Student must earn certain course requirements (24 credit framework) during high school years, includes:
  - 4 English
  - 3 Math
  - 3 Science
  - 3 Social studies
  - 1 Career and technical education
  - 2 Health fitness
  - 3 Electives
  - Note: These are state requirements and individual School Districts may have more strict requirements
- There are many different pathways to graduation which could include any number of the following:
  - Having and updating a plan for high school and post-high school starting in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade identifying educational goals for their next 4 years of high school. This also includes identifying skills or interests for higher education and/or career
  - Earning at least level 3 the WA State Smarter Balance assessments in math and English language arts (ELA) to determine the student's readiness for college and/or career
  - Using a combination of these options to meet math and ELA requirements:
    - Earning 3 or higher on Advanced Placement (AP, International Baccalaureate (IB), or Cambridge assessments in both math and ELA, or earning at C+ in the course
    - Passing a transition course in both math or ELA that students can transfer the credit in college
    - Earning minimum score on SAT or ACT set by the State Board of Education (SBE) in both math and ELA
    - Earning Duel credits – at least 1 in ELA and math at high school in duel credit courses (eg: Running Start)

- Earning standard score on military exam ASVAB by meeting minimum eligibility criteria to serve in a branch of the armed services
  - Completing Transition Course or Program, or completing Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses
- For students with IEPs, the IEP team decides when requirements are met or if they have to modify the requirements for the student.



## RECREATION

All children need engaging activities that promote their development, provide opportunities for friendships, and challenge them to learn new skills. Recreational activities can include organized sports, after-school programs, summer camps, or interest groups (e.g. art club, ballet, girl scouts /boy scouts, etc.). Recreation can also include play dates, trips to the park or store, or engaging activities at home. No matter what the activity is, the most important thing is whether your child and your family enjoy it.

Organized recreation activities tend to fall into one of two categories:

**Inclusive Programs** are activities where children with and without disabilities participate together. Children with I/DD should have the opportunity to participate in the same activities as any other child, unless the quality of the program does not meet the child’s need or they do not enjoy themselves. Inclusive programs include activities like before and after-school care, sports teams, interest groups, summer camps, etc. We encourage families to involve their child in the same activities as their siblings, neighbors, and local community as much as possible. If you are concerned that participation might be challenging, we encourage parents to speak to the program coordinator to discuss your concerns and brainstorm ways the program can accommodate/support your child’s success. It helps to focus on your child’s strengths and to approach the conversation with a willingness to collaborate with the program to ensure success.

**Specialized Programs** aka Adaptive Programs are activities specifically for children with special needs. Often these programs have a greater staff-to-child ratio and some additional training to support the unique needs of their participants. Specialized programs are often offered through community centers or Parks and Recreation programs. There are other various organizations that offer specialized programs throughout the county as well. Visit The Arc of King County’s [online Resource Guide](#) for a list of specialized programs in your area. Also, visit our online [Community Calendar](#) for events for people with disabilities and their families in the community. Seattle Children’s Hospital Center for Children with Special Needs publishes an annual [Summer Camp Guide](#) for children with different forms of disabilities and medical needs.

Informal activities could include things at home or in the community and can be as creative as your mind allows. Here are some examples of activities:

**At home:**

- Practice cooking – anything from baking cookies, making a sandwich, popping popcorn, etc.
- Arts and crafts

- Imaginary play – set up jumps and pretend to be horses in a horse show
- Couch + blankets + pillows = living room fort
- Bike riding. You can try out various styles of Adaptive Bikes at [Outdoors for All](#).
- Make up songs and have your own concert (or karaoke!)
- Dance Party!
- Write letters to your favorite celebrity
- Play dates
- Tea parties
- Board games and card games
- Blocks, Legos, or even PVC pipe building projects
- Sensory play – water, Play Doh, whipped cream, sand, Jello...
- Backyard swing sets are always fun

#### **In the Community:**

- Go to the playground. Visit our [online Resource Guide](#) for a list of accessible playgrounds in King County.
- Catch a movie. [Check out these upcoming “Sensory Friendly” movie locations and times.](#)
- Check out the [Seattle Sensory Garden](#).
- Take a dip at your local swimming pool.
- Try rock-climbing at one of the indoor rock climbing gyms.
- Build sand castles at the beach.
- Enjoy our local nature trails... you could even go camping!
- Paint your own pottery
- Zoo! Aquarium! Science Center! – Many local organizations offer sensory-friendly events tailored to the unique needs of children with special needs. Check out our [community calendar](#) for upcoming events.
- Who doesn't love bowling?!?
- Berry picking
- Just take a stroll through the mall, grocery store, or local shopping center

Kids are kids, regardless of abilities. Every kid learns and grows through fun and play. Struggling to find new or creative ideas? [Vroom](#) is an on-line resource for parents with fun and easy activities that parents can integrate into their regular daily schedule to promote brain development.



## **CARE**

**Child Care** - Sometimes finding childcare for a youth with special needs can be challenging. We first suggest that families utilize the same child care for all their children, with and without disabilities. This could include a pre-school or day-care program, after school program, Boys and Girls Club, community center, etc. If your child needs additional support to be successful in the child care program, we suggest that parents approach the program coordinator to brainstorm strategies that both the program and the family can do to ensure success.

Children with disabilities are protected from discrimination by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In terms of child care, this means that providers must consider reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids and services in order to include a child with special needs in their program. There are some limitations to this rule, and we recommend that families and providers work together to find mutual solutions. For more details regarding the ADA and childcare, see [here](#).

[Child Care Resources](#) maintains a list of accredited in-home and center-based child care providers. They also offer training for child care providers to improve their skills to accommodate children with autism and other special needs. Connect with Child Care Resources (1-800-446-1114) to locate providers near you with the interest and skills to include children with special needs into their program. When calling, ask to be connected to the specialist staff who focuses on resources for children with special needs.

Families utilizing the [DSHS Child Care Subsidy Program](#) who have a child with special needs can utilize the Special Needs Child Care Subsidy Rate which could help pay for additional support in the child care program. Talk to your Family Resource Coordinator for more information about the financial resources available to you.

**Respite Care** is different than child care. Respite care allows the parent or primary caregiver to take a break from caregiving duties for a short amount of time. By utilizing respite care, the parent is better able to manage the challenges of raising a child with special needs. Respite care is NOT childcare or babysitting which means it cannot be used to supervise the child while the parent(s) is working. Respite care can only be used during times when the parent would otherwise be directly caring for the child (e.g. evenings, weekends, school breaks). Often, recreational activities serve as respite care as well. Respite care could include any of the following:

- Extracurricular activities like after-school-care, sports, or interest groups
- One-on-one support from a family member, friend, or paid provider
- Overnight or weekend care at someone's house or a camp
- Summer camp (either day-camp or overnight-camp) and school break camps

[Lifespan Respite Washington](#) maintains a list of respite care providers. They also offer Respite Vouchers for unpaid family caregivers. This means, if you care for or support a child with a chronic condition and receive no reimbursement from the state to provide such care, you could be eligible to receive the Respite Voucher. Vouchers are available based on funding and need. Contact Lifespan Respite (425-740-3788) to learn more about the vouchers and how to access them.

Various community organizations offer special events to provide a few hours of respite for parents. See The Arc's [Community Calendar](#) for upcoming events.

Families of children with I/DD may be able to access respite care paid by the state through the [Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\)](#). See below for more details about DDA. To qualify for state-funded respite care, the child with I/DD must have already applied to and been accepted into DDA, and the family must have explicitly asked for respite care. DDA conducts an assessment to determine how much respite care the family is eligible for (eligibility is need based, not income based). Once an assessment is complete, DDA could award the family with a "Medicaid Waiver", which means DDA has agreed to pay a certain amount for specific

services/activities in the community, including respite care services. The family then has to find a DDA contracted “provider” which can be any of the following:

- A one-on-one provider contracted by DDA to provide respite care. This person could be a family member or friend over age 18 who is legal to work in the United States and can pass a background check. The family could also use an agency to find a respite care provider. Check out our [online resource guide](#) for such agencies.
- Community-based programs such as sports teams, interest groups, etc. The program must have a Respite Contract with DDA in order to be reimbursed by the state for their services. Contact your DDA Case Manager for a list of programs near you or check out our [online resource guide](#).
- Overnight, weekend, or multiple days of respite care can also be available. There are different camp programs and respite care organizations that provide round-the-clock care for a pre-determined length of time. Talk to your DDA Case Manager for a list of programs.
- “Emergency Respite” refers to situations in which the young person with special needs is at risk of being removed from the home, often due to challenging behaviors. In these situations, families must speak with their DDA Case Manager to explore the possibility of the child receiving care outside of the family home for up to one month to help stabilize the situation.

**Personal Care** - If your child requires significantly more help compared to kids the same age with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) such as dressing, hygiene, eating, mobility, etc. AND the child is eligible for Medicaid, they can receive Personal Care (PC) services. Personal care is a publicly funded program managed by DDA that requires an annual assessment. See The Arc’s resource titled [Understanding Personal Care for Children](#) for details about eligibility, services, and the assessment process. Based on the assessment, DDA agrees to pay for a certain number of hours per month for personal care services. The family then finds a “provider” contracted by DDA to deliver the services. This person could be a family member or friend over age 18 who is legal to work in the United States and can pass a background check. The family could also use an agency to find a personal care provider. Check out our [online resource guide](#) for such agencies. When the individual with a disability is under age 18, the parents CANNOT become the paid “provider”. However, if the individual is 18 or older, the parents can be paid to deliver care.

Like respite care, personal care is NOT child care or babysitting. The purpose of personal care is to help the child with identified ADLs. Personal care can be provided in the family home or in the community (including childcare settings). Parents do NOT need to be present when personal care is being provided.



## DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY ADMINISTRATION

### **What is the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)?**

[DDA](#) (previously known as DDD) is the state level administration within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) specifically for people who meet its criteria of developmental disability.

### **Why should I connect with DDA?**

- To access services such as Personal Care (PC), respite care, behavioral support, adaptive equipment, home modifications, and more.
- Even if you don't need services now, it is best to enroll as early as possible. DDA provides life-long support and services that many individuals rely on in adulthood. This way you will have quicker access to assistance should you need it. Eligibility determinations takes several months.
- If your child received Early Intervention Services, they were automatically enrolled in DDA. However, EVERY child is exited from DDA at age 4 and must re-enroll.

### **How do I know if I am enrolled in DDA?**

- Call 206.568.5700 with the name and birth date of the person who has a disability.
- If you are not enrolled, then ask DDA to mail you an application, or download one from [DDA's Eligibility webpage](#). Contact The Arc of King County for questions or support with the application process.

### **What DDA services are available?**

DDA services are always changing. Contact The Arc of King County for information on current services and eligibility requirements. DDA has many services and each one has its own eligibility requirements which might include family or individual income, citizenship status, and level of support needs. People often hear about DDA "Waivers". "Waivers" are a specific bundle of different services based on the individual's need. Waivers can be confusing and sometimes difficult to access. Contact The Arc for more specific information.

### **How do I navigate the DDA system?**

- If you are enrolled and are not getting services, you are on the 'No Paid Services' caseload. Call 1.800.974.4428 to request a waiver in order to receive services.
- If you have questions about the services, you are getting or want to know more about services available you can visit the DDA website, contact your case manager, or contact The Arc of King County.

### **What if I'm not eligible for DDA?**

At times, people are eligible for DDA, but they did not provide the correct documentation to qualify. Contact The Arc of King County if you have been denied DDA eligibility or you are not sure if you might be eligible. The Arc can provide information about the appeal process if needed, or non-DDA resources should you be denied.

**More information about DDA:** [www.dshs.wa.gov/dda](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda)

### **What is King County Developmental Disabilities Division (KCDDD)?**

People frequently confuse DDA and KCDDD. DDA is the state-level agency, [KCDDD](#) is the county level division that provides specific services to those who are already eligible/enrolled in DDA. KCDDD oversees all of the Early Intervention services in King County, the [Behavior Support Team \(BeST\)](#) through NAVOS, employment services, and more. Generally speaking, families of children age 0-18 may never interact directly with KCDDD, although some of the services they utilize might be funded or have oversight from KCDDD.



## MEDICAL

**Health Insurance** is complex. Certain doctors, therapies, and prescriptions may or may not be covered, depending on the insurance provider and plan. However, many things may be covered by health insurance that families are unaware of including developmental evaluations, doctors and medical specialists, and therapies.

The [Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors \(SHIBA\)](#) can help families understand their options and rights regarding health insurance. [Washington Autism Alliance & Advocacy \(WAAA\)](#) can help families of children with autism and other disabilities advocate with their health insurance companies to ensure coverage for necessary treatment and therapy. Connect with The Arc of King County for information on doctors, specialists, and places to access things like developmental assessments, autism diagnoses, etc.

The Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588 and [parenthelp123.org](http://parenthelp123.org) provides the most up-to-date information about state-sponsored health insurance, food programs, family support, and a wide variety of other resources. Call Center staff can help families understand and apply for a variety of food and health resources in Washington State. Bilingual staff speak Spanish, and other languages are served using an interpreter line. Available Monday-Thursday 8:00-5:30 and Friday 8:00-5:00 or visit online at [parenthelp123.org](http://parenthelp123.org).

Certain public benefits depend on the child's medical coverage. Services through DDA such as personal care and respite care rely on Medicaid eligibility. There are very specific eligibility requirements for Medicaid including family income and the individual's citizenship status. Please don't hesitate to contact The Arc of King County to discuss your situation. For children under age 18, Medicaid eligibility occurs in one of two ways:

- Family income is below a specific threshold (in this case the child might also qualify for SSI – see below for more information)
- The child is determined to be “Categorically Needy” based on their disability and the DDA assessment

Once a person is determined eligible for Medicaid, they must select a “provider” or company to deliver the actual health insurance benefits. [Look here for information on the various providers.](#)



## THERAPIES

There are many different types of therapies as well as methodology for the delivery of the therapy. It is helpful to talk to your therapists, doctor, Early Intervention Provider, school team, and other parents to get a sense of the different types and styles of therapies. Below is a list of common therapies that children with I/DD may receive. Sometimes children will receive these therapies as part of their Early Intervention and/or Special Education program. Children can also receive these therapies privately using their medical insurance or private pay.

**Speech Therapy** helps the child develop and refine their communication skills. This includes how the child understands other people's communication (“receptive” communication) and how they communicate to others

(“expressive” communication). Speech Therapy may involve use of alternative communication methods such as sign language or assistive technology, also known as AAC (e.g. iPads or other computerized devices).

**Physical Therapy (PT)** helps the child develop and improve their major muscles and whole-body activities (aka Gross Motor Skills) such as range of motion, strength, endurance, balance, coordination, etc.

**Occupational Therapy (OT)** helps the child develop their “Fine Motor Skills” such as using a fork, handwriting, and typing. OT can also help with activities of daily living such as tying shoes and using buttons and zippers. OT may also address sensory processing challenges.

**Behavior Support – ABA Therapy** is an evidence-based teaching strategy commonly used to teach children with autism and similar disabilities different skills including academic, daily living, communication, and appropriate behavior and coping skills.

**Social Skills** – Children with I/DD often struggle to make friends due to challenges with their ability to communicate and interact with others. Many of the above therapies will integrate social skills development to support the child’s success in making friends and interacting with their family, teachers, and community. There are also specialized social skills groups; contact The Arc of King County for groups near you.

## FINANCIAL

### [Social Security Administration \(SSA\) Cash Benefits](#)

Social Security benefits require a certain level of citizenship status. For questions about this, please contact The Arc of King County.

#### [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#)

SSI is a cash benefit for people with disabilities who also have a low income. Children under the age of 18 can qualify for SSI if their family income is below a specific threshold based on family size, family assets, and the child has a documented disability. [See here for SSI eligibility criteria.](#) [Apply online](#) or in person.

Once the person with a disability reaches age 18, SSI eligibility will be based on their own income and assets.

#### [Social Security Disability Income \(SSDI\)](#)

If a parent has retired, passed away, or become disabled, their child with I/DD may be eligible for SSDI. That person will get benefits based on their parent’s work history. Also known as Child Disability Benefits (CDB) or Social Security Disabled Adult Child (SSDAC). [Apply online](#) or in person.

### **How do I apply for benefits?**

Begin the [application process online](#). After SSA has reviewed this information they will contact you for more information. You can also call 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday to set up an appointment. Applications are regularly denied, even though the applicant is actually eligible for services. If this happens follow the appeal process rather than applying again. Go online to get the forms and

information you need, but then you should call to make an appointment in order to actually apply. If you are successful with your appeal, you will receive back pay from the date of application. Contact The Arc of King County for questions about the application and/or appeal process.



## FUTURE PLANNING

**Future Planning** refers to planning ahead for your child and your entire family. When a child has special needs, it is even more important to be prepared to ensure there is a system of support for your child across their lifetime.

Common things to consider when future planning:

**Special Needs Trusts** allow an individual with a disability to save money without jeopardizing their life-long public benefits such as Medicaid, SSI, and DDA Waivers. Special Needs Trusts can be established at any time of the individual's life and there are different types of trusts depending on the situation and need. Most Special Needs Trusts are set up through an attorney. The Arc of King County maintains a list of local disability attorneys who can assist with the process. For people who have applied and been found eligible for the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), the [Developmental Disabilities Life Opportunities Trust \(DDLOT\) aka Endowment Trust](#) is a low-cost option that does not require an attorney to set up. For additional information about Special Needs Trusts, see The Arc of King County's [resource document](#) or contact us with questions.

**Wills** – Often, parents and extended family members want to leave an inheritance to their loved one with a disability. It is important to consider whether this inheritance will jeopardize the individual's access to life-long public benefits such as Medicaid, SSI, and DDA Waivers. We recommend that a family consult with a disability attorney when establishing a will to ensure the inheritance is directed in a way that will not negatively impact the individual with a disability. Often, people will direct their inheritance into a Special Needs Trust to avoid any issues.

**Guardianship** – For all children under the age of 18, their parents are considered legal guardian with the right to make all legal, medical, and financial decisions regarding the child. Parents may choose to name a friend or family member as guardian, should they no longer be able to fulfill the role. This must occur in a will and requires support from an attorney. In some cases, it is necessary to get medical guardianship when the child is under 18. Children over the age of 13 have the right to privacy on topics related to mental health, sexual activity, pregnancy and substance abuse. Medical guardianship is an option for children with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 18 who need help making safe, informed choices. Contact The Arc of King County to discuss your specific situation.

When an individual turns 18 they are considered a legal adult with the right to make their own decisions, regardless of disability. Some adults are unable to make safe choices in their own best interest and require additional support to ensure their financial and personal wellbeing. This could be accomplished through shared decision making, establishment of a Power of Attorney, or identifying a legal guardian. See here for information about [guardianship](#) and [alternatives to guardianship](#) for adults with disabilities or contact The Arc of King County with questions.



## FAMILY NEEDS

When a child has a disability, all members of the family may have their own questions, concerns, and challenges. Families commonly struggle to balance the needs of each family member, as they often focus on the child with a disability. Below are some ideas and resources for different family members.

**Parents** often have many questions and concerns when they have a child with disabilities. Connecting with other parents who share similar experiences is often the most valuable resource for a family. The Arc of King County's [Parent to Parent program](#) is a great way for parents to connect with other parents. There are also many great support groups, including [online support](#), play groups, special needs PTAs, etc. where parents can connect with each other.

**Just for Dads** – Moms and dads often experience their child's disability differently and also see their role within the child's life differently. While moms may be drawn to "support groups" and opportunities to connect emotionally with other moms, dads sometimes prefer information, resources, and a road-map to help support the child. The Arc of King County's [Parent to Parent program](#) offers many ways that parents can connect with other parents, including activities specifically for dads. The [Washington State Fathers Network](#) is also a great resource for dads including meet up groups, a Father's Day camp out, and more. The Arc and the Fathers' Network co-facilitate a [Dads Only Facebook Group](#).

**Siblings** have a longer relationship with an individual with a disability than anyone else. They also have a very unique experience growing up with a sibling who has special needs. Some brothers and sisters take on the role of a protector while others feel frustration that their needs always seem to come second to their sibling. "[Sibshops](#)" are a great resource for siblings to connect with other kids who have similar families as well as process their emotions about their family situation in a safe and productive way.

**Extended Family** such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents often want to support their loved one with a disability but are unsure how. Sometimes the extended family can come off as overly opinionated or unsupportive as a result. Extended family members are a very important natural support system and collaborating together to ensure all members of the family get attention and care can relieve stress for parents. The Arc of King County offers activities to encourage extended family members to provide meaningful support.



## INFORMATION, RESOURCES, AND ADVOCACY

Making connections with individuals, families, and organizations who understand your child and family situation are critical. These connections will help you learn about resources and services, as well as provide useful ideas and support to help you, your child, and your entire family be successful throughout life. Here are some programs within The Arc of King County. Other groups and organizations can be found on [The Arc of King County's online resource guide](#).

**[The Arc of King County's Programs:](#)**

**Information & Family Support** - *We listen. We empower. We connect.*

**We listen** to individual and family stories without judgement. Our team understands the unique challenges and joys found within the intellectual and developmental disability (I/DD) community and is available to listen to concerns and suggest resources or support.

**We empower** individuals and families by providing tips and tools to locate, access, and navigate the various I/DD resources and services in King County. We also empower individuals and families by showing them that they are not alone in their journey.

**We connect** individuals and families with resources as well as with each other to develop a network of support.

**Parent to Parent Program**

Our Parent to Parent (P2P) program is the most valuable resource for families. P2P is based on the philosophy that parents of children with disabilities can be helped by other parents who have traveled the road before them. We understand the emotions, myths, and realities of parenting a child with a disability. We are willing to listen and share our own experiences. We provide many opportunities for parents to connect with other parents through on-line groups, in-person meet ups, family activities, and workshops. P2P also offers a Helping Parent program in which we link parents with a trained “mentor” parent who shares similar life experiences and has volunteered to provide a listening ear, ideas, and support to others. In addition to helping connect parents with each other, our P2P program is the hub of information regarding local resources and support in King County.

**Advocacy Programs at The Arc of King County**

Your voice matters. Through our advocacy programs we help individuals with developmental disabilities and their families connect with policy makers and use their voice, experiences and expertise to inform and improve resources and services. Inclusion and equity fuel our work.

**King County Parent & Family Coalition** is led by and for parents and family members (e.g. siblings, grandparents, etc.) of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**Community Change Champions** is led by and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our motto: *Our Rights Are Civil Rights: We are the Movement.* We promote the civil rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by empowering activists to be fully included in their communities.

**For Questions, contact The Arc of King County**

**Phone: 206.829.7053      Email: [ask@arcofkingcounty.org](mailto:ask@arcofkingcounty.org)**

**TTY: 1.877.666.2348**