



What is Respite? How do I find a respite support worker? What should I consider when hiring a respite support worker?

Respite is defined as short-term, temporary relief for those providing care to family members who might otherwise require placement in a facility outside the home. However, many use the term 'respite worker' to refer to babysitters for children with special needs. It is implied that some special training and experience is needed to support children who need a respite worker, rather than simply a babysitter.

At the Provincial Autism Centre we receive many inquiries as to how to locate a respite worker for a child with autism. Families can find out their eligibility for funding for a respite worker first by contacting their local office of the Department of Community Services. Here is the link to information on Direct Family Supports offered by the Department of Community Services <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/disabilities/DirectFamilySupport.html>

To find your local office: 1-877-424-1177

Finding a respite worker that fits your needs can be challenging. Families must consider how to hire someone, check references and manage their workers. It can be especially difficult for families dealing with more significant behavior support challenges to train and keep workers. Just as important is figuring out what the respite worker will do with your child. Will they stay in your home or go out or both? Will they pursue recreational activities and fill the role of 'big brother or big sister', or will they be teaching life skills and community skills- or both? It is important to help a child with autism understand what this relationship means to them so clarifying what exactly that role will look like is important to reduce anxiety coming from gray areas (EG. If the respite worker is set up as a 'buddy' for someone with autism, consider the impact if the person moves on to find another job). It is usually better to be clear and precise about what the person will be doing (John will take you out every Thursday night to go to the Games Workshop. Susan is coming in on Saturdays to help you clean your room and then you will make lunch together and go to the playground)

There are agencies that will help you find a respite worker. Here in Nova Scotia go to www.respite.ca to find a respite support agency in your area. There is a provincial respite committee that is active in finding respite solutions for families. Email nspartnershiponrespite@gmail.com for more information.

See other side for more information on respite workers



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When hiring a respite worker there are many things to take into consideration: What skills or qualifications do I want? What values are important to us? What training? How can I ask interview questions to find out if the candidate has the values and qualifications I want? What sort of references should I require and how do I check references effectively? How many hours a week can I offer a respite worker and at what rate of pay? Respite is meant to be a break for families- what are you going to do to ensure you get that break when your child is with a respite worker?

Some families do not need a respite worker. Some can explain social and communication differences to a regular babysitter, if no special support skills are needed to keep the child or others safe. Having the same babysitter as other siblings can help protect the self-esteem of children who get lots of reminders every day that they are different. It can also be a lot more simple using a neighborhood babysitter and it will free up respite workers with more training for those that need higher levels of support.