

FAMILY TIPSHEET: Respite

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In this tipsheet, you will find information on:

- What is respite
- Finding the perfect support worker
- Interviewing and hiring a support worker
- Training a support worker



What is respite?

Respite care provides a short planned break from the physical and emotional demands involved in caring for a family member who has a disability. Respite creates greater opportunities for all family members to live actively and participate in community activities and allows parents/guardians time for themselves. (www.respiteservices.com)

During this break, a respite/support worker can:

- Take your family member on a community outing e.g. park, zoo, mall, restaurant
- Teach your family member to make a snack
- Play basketball or go for a walk with your family member
- Play board games or watch TV with your family member
- Take your family member to an arts program

Why are short breaks (respite) important?

- Short breaks give children with disabilities fun things to do with friends or other people.
- Caring for someone else can sometimes be stressful. Short breaks help families re-energize themselves so they can maintain healthy and positive relationships.
- Respite includes time that a child may spend with a respite/support worker and could also be a program that the child goes to, like a summer camp or overnight program.

The Grocery Foundation Family Resource Centre can provide you with information on a number of respite services. Two places to start are www.respiteservices.com and www.hollandbloorview.ca/respice



Finding the perfect support worker

A respite worker can support a child in activities and help them learn. This tip sheet provides information on what to think about when looking for a support worker.

When starting your search, think about:

The **qualities** you want in a support worker. You can look for a worker who is:

- Kind and gentle
- Responsible
- A “people person”
- A good teacher
- Careful and considerate

What **activities** your family member will be involved with, including:

- Sports
- Music
- Playing games
- Cooking
- Learning to do things for themselves

When you need a support worker:

- What time of day?
- What day of the week?
- How many hours?
- What time of the year?
- How often do you and your family want the support worker?

Choosing the right people to interview

Consider someone who has **experience** working with children, youth or teens:

- Swim instructor
- Camp counsellor
- Retired teacher
- College or university student or mature high school student

Consider someone who **already knows and gets along with your family member**

- This might be a neighbour, a family friend, or a student who your family member knows from school

Consider **workers for different activities** for your family member. For example:

- A worker who likes sports, so they can go to a stadium game
- A worker who enjoys music, so they can go to a concert
- A worker who does not mind getting dirty to do gardening
- A worker who understands sign language
- A worker who might be good with technology to help with a communication device

Think about **how long this person might stay** and work with your family:

- Students may leave for summer break or if they get a job
- Someone doing part-time work might leave if they get full-time

Think about what **skills** you want the worker to have:

- First Aid/CPR
- Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) Training
- Driver's license, vehicle and car insurance
- Able to give medication
- Able to help with toileting (e.g. changing diapers)
- Any other skills you can think of

Where to look for a support worker

- Contact www.respiteservices.com about their respite worker list
- Go to www.hollandbloorview.ca/respite for more information about Holland Bloorview's respite program
- Ask resourcecentre@hollandbloorview.ca for the 'Community Respite Opportunities' tipsheet
- Talk to other families about where they find their support workers
- Make a flyer or electronic posting for local high schools, colleges and universities (on their websites or in person)

Interviewing and hiring a support worker

People will call you to find out more about the job you are offering. Spend some time thinking about the questions you want to ask.

Telephone interview

- Speak to more than one worker
- As yourself if the person has the qualities you are looking for
- Listen for attitudes, flexibility, sincerity and enthusiasm
- Choose two or three applicants for a face-to-face meeting
- Trust your feelings when choosing the final candidate
- You can involve the person who is being cared for in the phone conversation

Personal interview

- First meeting: You can invite potential respite workers to an in person meeting at a public place, such as a coffee shop. This will give you time to find out if this person will be a good match to work with your family member.
 - How do they react to your questions?
 - Do you feel that the person is sincere and flexible?
 - Does the person interact well with people?
 - You can involve the person who is being cared for in the meeting
- Second meeting: You can meet potential workers at the location where respite will be taking place, and spend the time getting to know them better. (e.g. home, community centre, program, etc.)
 - Make a list of questions for the meeting
 - Ask them to bring a copy of their resume and references
 - Ask questions and watch how the person reacts
 - Involve the person who is being cared for in the meeting, and watch for their comfort level or reaction, and listen to their opinion
 - Trust your feelings too

Questions to ask the applicants

- How did you hear about the job?
- Why are you interested in this job?
- Tell me about your previous work experience with children or people with disabilities.
- How do you think this work fits your experiences and skills?

- When are you available?
- Do you drive? Do you have a car? Do you have insurance coverage? If yes, what type of insurance coverage do you have?
- Would you be willing to have a police check?
- Can you commit to working with us for ____ months?
- This is the pay range. Would _____ dollars an hour be acceptable?
- Can you provide me with two personal or work references?
- Do you have any questions for me or for my family member?

Things to talk to the worker about

- Your family member's life and activities
- Information about your family, routines and schedules
- Possible activities that you would like your family member and the worker to do together
- Information about your community
- How to handle "what if this happens?" situations
- Training the worker on how to support a child or teen with a disability
- Their pay and pay schedule
- Contract that describes the worker's role, start and finish times and pay
- Coverage of costs: food while working with your family member, transportation costs when travelling with your family member

Choosing the right person to hire

It is good to have several people to choose from. Make your choice after you look at all the important information:

- Is the worker the right fit for your family member?
- What is the person like? Are they fun to be with, active and pleasant?
- Do they have the skills to work with your family member?
- Do they learn quickly?
- Are they understanding and accepting of differences?
- Are they responsible, reliable, flexible and trust-worthy?
- Can the person work when you need them?

As back-up options, ask other candidates if you can call them if you need them.

Training a support worker

The child or teen being cared for may have a disability, like cerebral palsy, developmental disability, brain injury, or autism spectrum disorder. Each person with a disability communicates, learns and understands differently. They may also have different interests. A support worker may not know exactly how to support your family member in the best way yet, but you can teach them!

Sharing information

- Create an 'All About Me' book, infographic, or slideshow to help the worker understand what is most important about your family member
 - If you need examples of 'All About Me' books, infographics, or slideshows, please contact resourcecentre@hollandbloorview.ca
- Include and show the worker how to be involved in family activities and routines
- Ask and agree together on ways to communicate with each other – whether it be in person, by phone, social media, or through email.
- Share information about your family member, including:
 - Likes, dislikes and routines
 - Health, safety, or medical information, therapy programs
 - Equipment or supports
- Be a coach to the support worker and encourage questions
- Share information about community connections and resources

Supporting your respite worker

- Communicate clearly with your worker and in the way that you both agreed on
- Make sure your worker is comfortable with how much you pay
- Recognize the worker's skills
- Finish the shift with the support worker by talking about their day
 - Go over any problems and help find solutions
 - Check in with the worker and ask if they have questions
 - Ask about successes: did they teach your family member something new?
 - Give some feedback about something positive that you noticed
- Offer to review the support worker's experience every few months
 - Ask them if there is something they would like to learn
 - Ask if they need help with something and how you can help
 - Ask if they have ideas for new activities

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