



# The Rights of Children with Disabilities to Get Services at Daycare

## What is a disability?

Generally, the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) define a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Major life activities include, but are not limited to:

- Caring for oneself
- Seeing
- Hearing
- Sleeping
- Walking

Major life activities also include the operation of a major bodily function. Like functions of the immune system, digestive, bowel, endocrine and reproductive functions.

## Can a day care provider say they won't take a child with a disability?

In general, the law says that private businesses can't discriminate against people with disabilities. Most day care centers are private businesses. Day care centers run by schools or community organizations also have to follow the law.



## What if a church runs the day care center?

Some churches rent space for a day care center. If a church rents the space, then it has to work with the day care organization to make the building accessible. If the church itself provides the day care, then it may or may not have to make the program accessible. If this question comes up, call the Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) or another lawyer for help.

## What if the day care provider says it can't afford services for my child?

A business can refuse services because of *undue burden*. Undue burden means it would be so hard to follow the law, the business would go under. The ADA and the MHRA have different rules for defining undue burden. They look at the size of the business, the cost of the services and many other factors.

If making changes (accommodations) makes it financially or practically impossible for a business to keep operating, they can say that it is an undue burden, and they may not have to make the changes.

A small business that spends extra money to serve disabled people can often get a tax break. If a day care center says it cannot afford to serve your child, tell the owners they can apply for a tax break. The break may offset their costs.

### **Does a day care center have to change the building so my child can go there?**

Usually yes, unless it costs too much (see above) or a church runs the center. But if it is a new building, (built or remodeled since 1992) then the rules are strict. They have to make *reasonable accommodations*. This means making changes so that people with disabilities can use the building or services the same as people who do not have disabilities.

For older buildings, the rules are more flexible. Again, ask a lawyer to help you if this question comes up.

### **Does the day care center have to provide an interpreter for my deaf child?**



Sometimes yes, sometimes no. For every-day activities, you can teach workers some basic signs. They can learn signs for play, bathroom, etc. When reading stories, they can include a deaf child by showing pictures. Parents usually have good ideas about how to include their child in the program. Talk to staff and suggest things they can do.

The day care center should get an interpreter for special activities like field trips or visitors.

### **My child needs more services at day care than others the same age. Does the center have to give us extra services?**

The day care center may not have to give you extra services. Extra services for your child might mean that all the other children get less attention. In that case, the center doesn't have to do it.

For example, if you have a six-year-old child who needs help eating, staff cannot put them in the room with the babies. Your child should be with children the same age. But in that room, your child might not get the help they need.

If your child needs services that other children the same age do not need, call your county social service agency. You may be able to get a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) or other services to help with day care. A PCA is someone who helps with the activities of daily living, like eating, dressing, toileting and bathing.

**If I get a PCA or someone to help with extra services, does the day care staff still have to work with my child?**

Your child should get the same services as every other child in the group when possible. If all children get help washing their hands, then your child should get the same help. If the staff helps other children color pictures or play with toys, they should help your child too. The day care staff cannot ignore your child. They can't expect the PCA to do everything.



**If the day care staff thinks my child is a threat to the safety of other children, can the center turn us away?**

If your child is a direct threat to others, the center can refuse to serve you. For example, if your child bites other children, or runs out into the street if not watched, that might be a threat to safety. You might need a PCA to give your child the extra services to be safe.

If the day care staff changes the way they do things, sometimes the problem goes away. For example, they can change the schedule. Or if a certain game causes trouble, they can play a different game when your child is at day care.

If the center has tried and cannot find any way to keep everyone safe, then it can turn you away.

**What if only 1 or 2 day care centers in my town take children with disabilities and those places are full?**

If a day care center already takes children with disabilities and can't take more, then it can refuse to take your child. For example, if the center already has 4 children with behavior problems, it is not discriminating against the disability. The center just can't take another child.

Try to think of ways to work with a day care center. If you can find a way for your child to be in the program without making extra work for the staff, then even a day care center that has not had children with disabilities before might take your child.

A PCA for your child might make the difference. You could also give the staff very detailed instructions about food. Or, you could offer to pick your child up early or have them in special education programs for part of the day. If you and the day care center work together, you may be able to get care for your child without having to get legal help.

## If I can't find a day care provider for my child, can I get legal help?

Call the Minnesota Disability Law Center. If we can't find an advocate for you, we may be able to give you advice and suggest other places to go for help. An advocate is someone who is on your side and helps you understand the law and fight for your rights. An advocate can be a lawyer or anyone else who understands your problem and can help you.

### How can I contact the Minnesota Disability Law Center?

The Minnesota Disability Law Center provides free legal help to people with disabilities in Minnesota. Contact us at:

Minnesota Disability Law Center  
430 First Avenue North, Suite 300  
Minneapolis, MN 55401-1780

Voice: (612) 332-1441  
TDD: (612) 332-4668  
Toll Free: 1-800-292-4150

New Client Intake: (612) 334-5970

[www.mndlc.org](http://www.mndlc.org)



*Preparation of this Fact Sheet was financed in part by grant number 90DNO133 from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Projects of National Significance, under provisions of Public Law 106-402. The content of this Fact Sheet does not necessarily reflect the position of policy of the Administration on Developmental Disabilities or the Minnesota Department of Administration.*

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