

Referrals and Asking for a Second Opinion



The Child Brain Injury Trust is a national charity supporting anyone affected by childhood acquired brain injury. The following information has been developed to help the reader understand more about brain injury and some of the associated issues. Every effort has been taken to ensure the information is accurate and up to date. If you require more immediate support or assistance please contact our Helpline 0303 3032248 or email helpline@cbituk.org where we will be able to respond to your specific enquiry and or offer support.

Referrals and Asking for a Second Opinion

Referrals

A paediatrician may already be involved with your child so there may not be a need to be referred to one at this stage. If your child requires specialist involvement for a need that has not been previously identified, it would usually mean a referral (by a paediatrician, if they are already involved, or you GP) to the nearest hospital specialist.

At the point of referral it is useful to find out from the referrer who the specialist is and what they specialise in. Find out how long the referral is likely to take (i.e. the waiting list) and who you should contact if you don't hear anything within this time. Before you meet the specialist it is helpful to write down any questions that you might have because it is easy to forget questions at the appointment and it can be difficult to make contact with the specialist in between appointments. It might be worthwhile considering taking someone along with you who can write notes about what has been said. If any tests are recommended for your child or are being taken, make sure that you understand what is involved, the risks, how accurate the tests are, and why they are needed.

You are entitled to ask for a copy of the notes from the appointment (sometimes referred to as a Clinic Letter). Usually this is sent out automatically but not always. Having a written copy of the meeting serves as a reminder of what has been said and is helpful when you come to explain things to other members of the family.

Asking for a second opinion

Unless a professional specialises in acquired brain injury, or has worked with children with an acquired brain injury and recognises the lifelong issues, it is likely that knowledge will be limited. For parents, knowledge and understanding develops through experiencing your child's condition – you suddenly find yourself having to become an expert in your child's care without formal qualifications or any idea where to turn for support.ⁱ

If you have concerns over your child's diagnosis or the treatment that has been suggested, you have a right to ask for a second opinion.ⁱⁱ You should not feel guilty about making this request but if your reasons have something to do with an issue that can be resolved by the doctor then it is likely that he or she will try to sort out the issue in the first instance. A doctor should always respect a patient's wish to obtain a second opinion unless there are clear reasons why not. In the event that a second opinion conflicts with the original opinion these differences should be discussed with you and the options outlined.



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ⁱ S. Kirk, C. Glendinning. Supporting 'expert' parents - professional support and families caring for a child with complex health care needs in the community. [International Journal of Nursing Studies](#), 2002;39 (6): 625-635.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect/guide/parent-carers/Pages/Diagnosis-and-support.aspx>