

LEISURE

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



Like everyone else, disabled children and young people want to spend free time with friends doing things they enjoy. Although it may require a bit of thought and planning and quite possibly some additional support to make leisure activities work, it's well worth the effort. It will improve the whole family's quality of life.

The leisure basics

Encourage your child to harness their strengths or interests and try new things. It's hard to be sure what they'll enjoy if they haven't tried it!

Try to do some things as a family; it's easy to concentrate too much on your special child and get the balance wrong. If your child's needs make it hard to 'fit in' with ordinary family activities, joining up with other families who have children with similar needs to yours can help you feel more relaxed and confident about trying new things.

Be open to mainstream activities and 'special' ones; sometimes children and young people want to be like their non-disabled peers and distance themselves as much as possible from their differences or disabilities. At other times the same children may only feel confident alongside disabled peers.

Don't overdo it. Not every moment of your child's day has to be filled with something educational or therapeutic. Children need time and space to be themselves.

It's meant to be fun. It's easy to get hooked up on rules and protocols, structure and learning outcomes and these may be important, but if you ask children and young people what matters, they just want to have fun with friends.

Call ahead. If you're away from home, it's worth ringing disability organisations in the area you're visiting to find out what's going on. Contact big attractions before you visit – many offer concessions and special passes, so you avoid the queues.

Remember disabled young people really enjoy just 'hanging out' with mates at the shops, cafes, the park, the beach and clubs. You could find out about Direct Payments to help your teen organise their own support to enable them to do this. Or you could look out for local buddy schemes - see the 'Ask about' section below.

Choosing leisure activities

Ask your child what they want to do and avoid influencing their choices or encouraging them to do what adults think is best.

Ask other parents about safe places to go and fun things to do, especially when they have children with similar needs to yours.

Don't dismiss a club because parents are required to stay. Some of the best activities may be organised by other parents and volunteers who may not be able to take responsibility for supervising children going to the loo, for example. And these are often the places to meet other parents and exchange tips.



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You are likely to have many 'what happens if' and 'how will you' questions when visiting a new leisure activity. What will you do if my child cries? How will you respond if my child has a seizure? Of course you are itching to be reassured by the answers. But if you ask all your questions at the same time, it may knock a club's confidence about including your child. So just ask the really important ones.

Sometimes it's more useful to sit and see how a session runs. Written policies are fine, but what happens in practice is more important. Upsets that go unnoticed and grown-ups who seem more interested in their own news than the children's should ring alarm bells.

Making leisure activities work

Have five or so 'helpful things about your child' to hand that you can share with the leisure provider. You can write your list with your child, encouraging them to think about what's important to them. You might also make another list of more personal or medical information that's shared only on a 'need to know' basis.

Encourage your child to think about how they would like to be introduced and whether they'd like to do this themselves.

If you observe anything that worries you, discuss it. You shouldn't necessarily be worried by difficult or challenging situations; how they are managed is what matters.

Expect it to take some time for your child to settle and others to get to know them; accept there are bound to be hiccups along the way. Making friends and learning new skills takes practice and even old friends fall out sometimes. If things don't get off to a good start or hit a bad patch, take a deep breath and stay encouraging.

If you can't find the sort of leisure activity your child would like to do, you could set up your own club. Drawing on the energy and good will of other parents or disabled young people can help make it happen. You don't need to be a charity to attract funding, but it helps to have a constitution or 'some rules', a bank account and to be clear about what you want to do and the difference it will make.

Ask about

- **Amaze** – the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with special educational needs and disabilities for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk, call **01273 772289** or visit our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk>
- **The Compass Card** – a free leisure discount card (administered by Amaze) for 0 to 25 year olds with significant additional needs who live or go to school in Brighton & Hove or West Sussex, or who are looked after by social services in these areas. Call Amaze on: **01273 772289** (Brighton & Hove) or **0300 123 9186** (West Sussex) or go to www.compasscard.org.uk
- **Carer's Centre** – the Young Carers Project at the **Carer's Centre (01273 746222** or www.thecarerscentre.org), runs activities for children who have a sibling or parent with an illness or disability. sibling or parent who is ill or disabled.
- **Cherish** – youth and holiday clubs and activities for young people aged 16-25 with moderate or severe learning disabilities in Brighton & Hove. Call **01273 295 171**.



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- **Extratime** – inclusive after school and holiday clubs for children and young people (one to one support available). Call **01273 420580** or visit **www.extratimebrighton.org.uk**
- **Family Fund** – (you may be able to get help to pay for activities and short breaks from the Family Fund. Call **01904 550055** or visit **www.familyfund.org.uk**).
- **The Family Information Service** – has details of local after school activities, holiday play schemes and clubs. Visit **www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk** or call **01273 293545**.
- **Parent support groups** – there are lots of local groups where parents and children can get together with other families of children with similar needs. Some are for any child with a disability, some are for kids with specific conditions. View a list of local groups at: **amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/info-advice-parent-carers/survival-strategies/parent-support-groups/**
- **Short breaks** - children with more significant disabilities may be eligible for short breaks via the **Specialist Community Disability Service**. If so, you may be able to choose to get this help as Direct Payments and spend it on activities that your child enjoys. You will need a social care assessment first. Call the **Specialist Community Disability Service** on **01273 295550** or read our companion fact sheet on 'Short breaks'. If your child is over 18, you can also contact adult social care via the Access Point (**01273 295555**).

Further information and useful links

- **Amaze's fact sheet on *Short breaks and respite***. Download from **<https://amazesussex.org.uk/resources/fact-sheets>**
- **AccessAble** – website with a detailed access guide to places such as shops, restaurants, toilets and hotels across Britain. [was Disabled Go]
- **The English Federation of Disability Sport** – has information on sports opportunities for disabled children. Visit **www.efds.co.uk** or call **01509 227 750**.
- **Local Offer** – the local authority's online listing of all the services and support that are available to families with children with SEND in the area. Visit **new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities**

