

# LEISURE

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.  
Clinical information has been approved by West Sussex practitioners.



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 just to be themselves and to daydream.

**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.





## LEISURE

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 information on leisure:** Amaze has a 'Fun things for all ages' fact sheet that lists lots of different local leisure activities for kids with additional needs and our handbooks and website give advice and info on making friends and joining in. Call **01273 772289** or visit [www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/fact-sheets](http://www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/fact-sheets)
- **The Compass Card:** This is 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 and Hove or West Sussex, or who are looked after by social services in these areas. Call **Amaze on 01273 772289 (Brighton and Hove) or 0300 123 9186 (West Sussex).**
- **Carer's Centre:** the Young Carers Project at the **Carer's Centre (01273 746222 or [www.thecarerscentre.org](http://www.thecarerscentre.org)),** runs activities for children who share the experience of living with a sibling or parent who is ill or disabled.
- **Cherish:** youth and holiday clubs and activities for young people aged 13-25 with learning disabilities in Brighton and Hove. Call **01273 295192 or 295530.**
- **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](http://www.extratimebrighton.org.uk)



## LEISURE



- **Family Fund:** (01904 621115 or [www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk)): you may be able to get help to pay for activities and short breaks from the Family Fund
- **The Family Information Service** has details of local after school activities, holiday play schemes and clubs. Visit [www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk](http://www.familyinfobrighton.org.uk) or call **01273 293545**.
- **Gig buddies:** match adults who have a learning disability with a volunteer who has similar interests, to go to gigs and events together. Visit [www.gighbuddies.org.uk](http://www.gighbuddies.org.uk)
- **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: [www.amazebrighton.org.uk/services-and-support/parent-support-groups](http://www.amazebrighton.org.uk/services-and-support/parent-support-groups)
- **Short breaks:** Children with more significant disabilities may be eligible for short breaks via the **Integrated Child Development and Disability Team**. 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 social work team on **01273 265780** or read our companion fact sheet on 'Short breaks'.

### Further information and useful links

- **'Short Breaks' and 'Fun Things for all Ages' fact sheets:** Our companion fact sheets give further advice on leisure and getting a break. And our 'Direct Payments' fact sheet talks about using funding to arrange your own care. See [www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/fact-sheets](http://www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/fact-sheets)
- **Disabled Go:** a national website with access information for many areas of the UK. Visit [www.disabledgo.com](http://www.disabledgo.com)
- **The English Federation of Disability Sport:**(01509 227 750) has information on sports opportunities for disabled children. Visit [www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)

