Your guide to

Leisure for people with a learning disability

mencap
The voice of learning disability
About this guide
This guide has been written for parents and carers to help them find suitable leisure activities for someone with a learning disability, including tips for overcoming obstacles and organising a day out.

The guide also contains lots of information on action you can take. Look for the What next sign for things you can do.
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Leisure for people with a learning disability

Leisure is the time we spend doing the things we enjoy. It includes a wide range of different activities, from getting involved with a sports team and visiting an art gallery to reading a book.

Leisure is valuable because it gives us the opportunity to spend time with our friends and family, to try new things and to take on new challenges.

For the parents and carers of children with a learning disability, finding suitable and accessible leisure activities can be a big challenge. Even before you’ve left the house there are a number of things to consider, such as transport, costs and finding suitable facilities. As a result, the prospect of organising an activity or a day trip can be a daunting prospect.

Certainly there are obstacles. But with careful planning and preparation, parents can help their children to get involved in leisure activities both on their own and together as a family, and might even be able to relax and enjoy the experience themselves.

“Going out to an event was a totally new experience for us. The seemingly erratic behaviour of our children to certain situations means family outings are not often considered.”
Why is leisure important?

Leisure time is important for everyone, as it provides an opportunity to spend time with friends and family, to have fun and to relax.

For someone with a learning disability, leisure time can be particularly important. Getting involved in a group or activity can be a chance to learn new skills, improve quality of life and raise self-esteem. For some people it is also a chance to express emotions and ideas that otherwise might have been difficult to talk about, and a chance to feel included in the local community.

“We spend time together reading books, shopping and going for walks, and our son has access to the special needs toy library.”

There are many different types of leisure including sport, going to the cinema, visiting art galleries, shopping and watching television. Some people prefer to spend their leisure time on their own, while others like to get involved in group activities and clubs.
Accessible toys and play equipment

Accessible toys and play equipment can provide a valuable source of learning and fun for someone with a learning disability.

Examples of companies producing these types of toys include:

**Action for Leisure**
Action for Leisure is a resource centre that supplies equipment, toys, books, journals and videos, and also offers an information service giving advice on play and leisure for people with a disability. For more information, please contact:

**Action for Leisure**
Telephone: 01926 650195

**Bag Books**
Bag Books create multi-sensory stories for children, teenagers and adults with severe to profound learning disabilities. For more information, please visit the Bag Books website at www.bagbooks.org or contact:
Bag Books
Telephone: 020 7385 4021

The Happy Puzzle Company Ltd
The Happy Puzzle Company Ltd produces fun and educational puzzles to help with dyspraxia, dyslexia, living and learning difficulties. For more information, please visit the Happy Puzzle Company Ltd website at www.happypuzzle.co.uk or contact:

The Happy Puzzle Company Ltd
Telephone 0870 873 8989

The National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries
The National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries offers services to local families and a regular toy loan facility for a small fee. For more information, please visit the National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries at www.natll.org.uk or contact:

The National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries
Telephone: 020 7255 4604

This is just a small selection of the many companies that specialise in making accessible toys and equipment. For more information, or for support in finding accessible leisure activities in your area, please contact:

The Learning Disability Helpline
Telephone: 0808 808 1111
Many schools will organise clubs and activities outside of school hours. This can be a great opportunity for your child to get involved in leisure activities with their friends in familiar surroundings. It is a good idea to speak to your child’s teachers before enrolling them in a new activity, to make sure that they will get enough support and be able to participate fully.

As a parent you may also want to find out about extended schools in your area, or Community Focused Schools in Wales. An extended school is a school that provides a range of out-of-hours services and facilities, in addition to the services all schools provide. These might take place before or after school, at the weekend or in the school holidays.

“Her teachers asked me what they could do to make the after-school clubs accessible for my daughter.”

What next?

• Read the Mencap factsheet ‘Extended schools’ at www.mencap.org.uk/factsheets
Sport

Getting involved in sports can be a great way to keep fit and active, make new friends and have fun.

Your son or daughter’s school may offer after-school sports opportunities, or you can contact your local sports centre to find out what activities they have on offer. You can also contact your county sport partnership to find out what is available in your local area, or if your child is interested in a particular sport, you can contact its national governing body.

“Our son went out to the Special Olympics, and would sometimes go out with the friends he met there.”

For information and advice on helping your child get involved in sport, you can find out more about Mencap Sport at www.mencap.org.uk/sport, which promotes opportunities at all levels for people with a learning disability and organises a number of annual events.
There are also a number of national organisations working to provide sporting opportunities for people with a learning disability:

- **The English Federation of Disability Sport** is the national body responsible for developing sport for disabled people in England. For more information, please visit the English Federation of Disability Sport website at www.efds.co.uk

- **The Inclusive Fitness Initiative** is a project supporting the fitness industry to become more inclusive. For more information, please visit the Inclusive Fitness Initiative website at www.inclusivefitness.org and search for inclusive fitness sites in your area.

- **The Special Olympics** provide year round training and competitions in a variety of sports. For more information visit the Special Olympics website at www.sogb.org.uk

- **Disability Sport Wales** runs a national development programme which is aimed at developing quality, community-based sporting and recreational activities

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**What next?**

- Read Mencap’s guide to learning disability sport for parents at www.mencap.org.uk/resources

for disabled people throughout Wales. For more information, please visit the Disability Sport Wales website at www.disability-sport-wales.org
Finding accessible leisure activities in your area

Finding accessible leisure activities in your local area can be a good way to minimise transport costs, and enables you as a parent to make sure the facilities available will meet your child’s needs.

There are a number of ways to find out about activities in your local area.

- Contact your local authority and ask for a list of accessible leisure activities in your area. You can also ask for the contact details of the arts development officer and sports development officer who will be able to tell you more about local activities.
- Ask your local authority if they can carry out an assessment of you and your family’s needs and match you to a suitable leisure facility. In some cases, they may also provide help to and from the venue, although this will depend on where you live.
- Visit your local library, college, theatre or sports centre and ask what activities are available, and what support they can offer your child.
- Contact your local parent support group, your child’s social worker, or your local disability children’s team and ask about leisure activities in your area.

“Our son was in a choir and joined the scouts when he was younger.”
There are also national organisations that provide inclusive leisure activities for people with a learning disability:

- **Gateway Award**
  The Gateway Award is a programme of activities designed for children aged eight years and older. It helps young people to develop new skills, gain independence and get involved in their local community. You can read the Mencap factsheet ‘The Gateway Award’ at www.mencap.org.uk/factsheets or visit the Gateway Award pages at www.mencap.org.uk/gateway

- **Get Together**
  Get Together supports clubs and groups to help children aged 5-16 with a learning disability get involved in out-of-school activities. For more information, please visit the Get Together pages at www.mencap.org.uk/gettogether

- **PHAB**
  PHAB supports a network of clubs across England and Wales and funds residential weeks and short stays to help people with a learning disability get involved in their community. For more information, please visit the PHAB website at www.phabengland.org.uk and find a club in your local area.

This is just a small selection of the many clubs that are available at a local and national level. For more information or for support in finding accessible leisure activities in your area you can contact

**The Learning Disability Helpline**
Telephone: 0808 808 1111
Organising day trips

Parents have told Mencap about the many obstacles that need to be overcome when organising a day trip.

Many have concerns about how their child will react to a new situation, and how members of the general public will treat their child. There are also worries surrounding transport and the cost of a day out, as well as the availability of accessible facilities, especially toilets and changing areas.

“I realise that the behaviour of my child may be an issue for some people but I don’t have a problem going out and I’m not embarrassed if he throws a tantrum. It’s the way he is and people have to deal with it.”

Day trips can undoubtedly be stressful, and the amount of organisation required means they are rarely spontaneous. However, with careful planning and access to the right resources, families can enjoy time out together and make the most of the activities and events available in their local area.
Top tips for organising a day out

1. Plan well in advance
You can find out about galleries, shows and events on the internet, in magazines or in the entertainment sections of many newspapers. Once you have an idea of where you would like to go, check out the venue’s website and call ahead to find out what facilities they have to offer. Make a list of all the things you need to find out about before you call – for example, disabled parking spaces, wheelchair access, disabled toilets and any other special arrangements you and your family will need.

Booking in advance may also save you time when you arrive at the venue, but check first whether you can get a refund if you have to cancel your visit or if you arrive later than expected.

What next?
• If you are planning a trip in London, you can visit the Arts Line website at www.artsline.org.uk and find searchable information of over 1,000 arts venues across London.

“Concessions are – it seems – widely available, but you always have to ask as it is not generally advertised.”

2. Ask about concession prices
Some venues will offer a reduced entry fee for people with a learning disability, and sometimes for their carer as well. Concessions are not always advertised and staff may not be aware of them, so it is always best to ask. Even if your child does not have a physical disability they may still be eligible for a reduced fee.
3. Find the nearest accessible toilet
As well as making sure the venue you will be visiting has accessible facilities, you may also want to find out if there are disabled toilets and changing facilities in the local area. You can find this information on the Changing Places website. You could also think about investing in a Radar key, which allows you to open accessible toilets that cannot be left permanently open.

What next?
- Check the Changing Places website at www.changing-places.org to find the locations of accessible toilet facilities.
- Visit the Radar website at www.radar.org.uk to find information on the National Key Scheme.

“Wherever I go I always make sure I take enough people to help me. On our trip to the zoo I had my mum and my friend because I know what it is going to be like – I would never attempt these things on my own.”

4. Make sure you have enough support
Wherever you are going, make sure you get as much support as you can to help you through the day. Day trips can be tiring at the best of times, so making sure you have someone there to support you can make the day run much more smoothly.
Further information and resources

Pie Guide shop
Website: http://shop.thepieguide.com

ArtsSpider
Website: www.artspider.org.uk
Contacts

England
If you live in England and would like more information on learning disability, you can contact:

The Learning Disability Helpline
Telephone: 0808 800 1111
Typetalk: 18001 0808 808 1111
Email: help@mencap.org.uk

If English is not your first language and you would like access to a translation service, please contact the Mencap Learning Disability Helpline and ask for Language Line.

Northern Ireland
If you live in Northern Ireland and would like more information on learning disability, please contact:

Mencap's Information Service
Telephone: 0808 800 1111
Email: mencapni@mencap.org.uk

Wales
If you live in Wales and would like more information on learning disability, please contact:

Wales Learning Disability Helpline
Telephone: 0808 800 1111
Email: information.wales@mencap.org.uk

Scotland
If you live in Scotland, and would like more information on learning disability, please contact:

ENABLE Scotland
Telephone: 0141 226 4541
Email: info@enable.org.uk
Website: www.enable.org.uk