

# Choosing out of school activities for children and young people with additional needs: information for families

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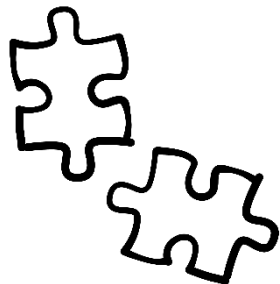
Outside of school or work, it does everyone good to have some ‘downtime’ activities that require a different set of skills or are just fun. It can help to widen your social circle, meeting new friends and mixing with different groups of people. When your child has additional needs, it can be difficult to find suitable out of school activities, which can be adapted for their needs. This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) gives some suggestions for how to find activities for your child when they have additional needs. An Easy Read information sheet is included for your child.

Doing one or two activities outside of school or college can widen your child’s social circle. They will meet new people and build their confidence, especially if the activity is independent of the rest of the family. It can be difficult to know where to start when finding out of school activities, especially if your child has additional needs.

## What does your child like doing?

It’s a good first step to start thinking about the things that interest your child.

- Do they enjoy music? Do they like making music or singing, or do they prefer to listen to it?
- What about nature – are they keen on the environment or natural world?
- Do you they enjoy practical things, like making stuff or doing activities?



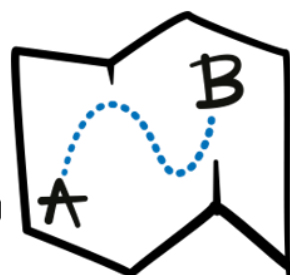
- How comfortable are they with other children of a similar age? Are they happier with boys and girls, or is it preferable for them to do activities with children of the same gender?

This should give you a few ideas of things to try.

If they’re interested in sports, have a look at our *Sport and exercise when your child has additional needs* information sheet, available from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (Pals) team or on our website.

## Try different things

It can take some time to find an activity that suits your child – we all remember some activities from childhood we enjoyed less than others. Find various options for your child – you don’t need to spend money on them at the start, so see what you can do for free before you commit yourself.



## See what activities are available locally

There are lots of websites you can search to find activities close to home but your local public library can be helpful too. They usually keep directories of local activities and clubs so can point you towards some.

Talk to your local team too – they will know which local activities their other patients have enjoyed. If you belong to a faith organisation, they may know of local activities as well.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo) at your child's school can also be a source of valuable local information.

## Safety first

When you are checking out activities for your child, see if it is a member of a national organisation and whether everyone involved has had a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to make sure they are allowed to work with children.

## Don't stop your child doing things for fear they'll hurt themselves

Of course you are bound to worry when your child does things you might think are dangerous or risky. However, so long as you follow your doctors' advice, use any safety equipment for the activity and follow the rules, there are ways to include everyone in being included.

## What to do if an activity is not open for your child

There may be occasions where an activity organiser don't seem keen for your child to join – this is most often due to misconceptions about children with additional needs rather than anything else. Offer to work with them to adapt an activity so your child can take part – perhaps you could share information with them, such as your Hospital Passport, or even go along the first few times until they get to know your child better.

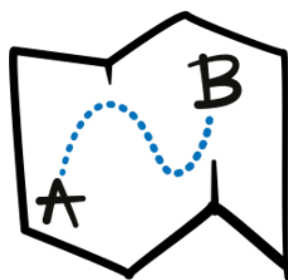
## Won't this all cost money?

Many activities, particularly those run by local authorities will be free or low-cost but some will attract a fee – for uniform, equipment or attendance. You could use a proportion of your child's benefits (Disability Living Allowance) to contribute or look for charitable sources of funding too, depending on your circumstances.

There is also a discount card called the Max Card, which is for looked after children and families of children with additional needs. It offers free or discounted entry to lots of attractions and venues throughout the country. More information is available at [mymaxcard.co.uk/](http://mymaxcard.co.uk/)

## Final words

- Think about what your child likes or enjoys already.
- Visit the public library or talk to local teams and your child's SENDCo for ideas.
- Check out the activity before you introduce your child.
- Learn to let go – it'll be scary when your child does activities on their own but it will help them in the long run.



## Further information and support

Talk to your doctor, nurse, physio, play specialist or occupational therapist for activity ideas for your child. They can advise you about any safety concerns or specialised aids your child may need.

**Mencap** – call their helpline on 0808 808 1111 from Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm or visit their website at [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

The **National Autistic Society** – call their helpline on 0808 800 4104 from Monday to Friday from 10am to 3pm or visit their website at [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

**Scope** – call their helpline on 0808 800 3333 or visit their website at [www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

**Activity Alliance** is a charity that aims to increase activity for everyone with additional needs. Have a look at their website at [www.activityalliance.org.uk/](http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/)

**SENDirect** is a directory and information service run by Contact (previously known as Contact a Family) for children, young people and families with any type of additional needs. Search their directory for national and local organisations at [www.sendirect.org.uk](http://www.sendirect.org.uk)

**Phab** (which used to stand for Physically Handicapped Able Bodied) is an organisation that brings together children, young people and families with and without additional needs to do joint activities. They have local groups too, so have a look at their website at [www.phab.org.uk](http://www.phab.org.uk) for further details.

**Thrive** is the main horticultural (gardening) therapy organisation in the UK. As well as offering courses, they also do more local activities to encourage gardening to improve quality of life. Visit their website at [www.thrive.org.uk/](http://www.thrive.org.uk/) for further details.

**Wildlife Trusts** encourage everyone to become more engaged with the natural world around them. They often have local branches which do activities outside in the fresh air. Visit their website at [www.wildlifetrusts.org/](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/) for more information.

Lots of libraries offer **music sessions** at reduced cost and there are voluntary choirs and music groups in many areas too. Ask at your local public library for details of what's available. Making Music also has details of groups at [www.makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list](http://www.makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list)

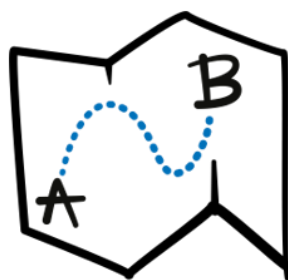
**Scouting** is now open to boys and girls – there is usually a local group that your child could join. Further information about scouting when your child has additional needs is available at [www.scouts.org.uk/information-for-parents/scouts-with-additional-needs/](http://www.scouts.org.uk/information-for-parents/scouts-with-additional-needs/)

**Girlguiding UK** is still just for girls – they have age-based sections called Rainbows, Brownie, Guides and Rangers – again, there is usually a local group for each age group. Girlguiding UK is committed to being inclusive, adapting what they do and how they do it so every girl can take part. Visit their website at [www.girlguiding.org.uk/information-for-parents/](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/information-for-parents/) for further information.

## Doing stuff out of school



Doing something that isn't school or work can be good for us.



	It can be a hobby, a club or something else that interests you.
	You could meet new people.
	You could learn new things.
	Think about what you like already and see if there's a club for it.
	Some things are for boys and girls together.
	Some things are for all ages of children and young people.
	It may take some time to find something you enjoy.
	Try lots of different things.
	See what there is to do near your home – ask your parents to help.
	Ask if you could go along a few times to see if you like it before you join.
	If you don't like something, tell someone you trust about it.
	Enjoy yourself and have fun!

