

Reaching Out to disabled parents



How to make your group accessible to disabled parents

Contact a Family understands the enormous benefit of local and national support groups for parents and carers of disabled children. Support groups give parents an invaluable opportunity to meet, talk and share experiences and knowledge. However, some parents find it more difficult than others to access the important service local and national groups offer because they need additional support. The reasons for this vary – it may be because a parent does not speak English as their first language, because a family lives in a rural or isolated area or because a parent has a disability themselves.

The overall purpose of this guide is to highlight some of the issues around accessibility and suggest practical ways your group can become easier to reach. It is intended to be used by any local or national support group, regardless of their size, scope or the services they provide. We are aware that parent support groups come in all shapes and sizes and one approach does not fit all. Some suggestions will only be feasible for established groups with a large membership and income. However, we are conscious that many groups have limited resources. Consequently, we have included a broad range of tips and ideas which groups can take away and adapt, according to their size and the resources they have available.

Acknowledging that there may be some parents who find it difficult to access your group's services and taking steps to include these parents does not have to involve massive restructuring. Some simple adjustments may be all that is needed and be of enormous benefit to parents who would otherwise be isolated.

Contact a Family fully appreciates that through caring for their own child, many support group members will be deeply aware of the accessibility issues surrounding disability and the barriers people with disabilities face. However, as every group's membership and experiences vary, some issues might be less familiar than others; for example, a support

contact a family

for families with disabled children

209-211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN

Tel 020 7608 8700 Fax 020 7608 8701

Web www.cafamily.org.uk e-mail info@cafamily.org.uk

Freephone Helpline 0808 808 3555

(Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm, Mon 5.30pm-7.30pm)

Textphone 0808 808 3556

incorporating

The Lady Hoare Trust

group for parents caring for children with mobility difficulties may not be as experienced in the needs of people with a visual impairment. We welcome feedback about this guide from parent groups and if your group has any further examples of good practice that we may be able to add, please do get in touch.

Nobody can deny that there are challenges in creating a group environment which is truly inclusive. However, being aware of the issues involved, and being committed to including all parents, is an important step to making it a reality.



Contact a Family's Group Action Pack

This guide is part of Contact a Family's Group Action Pack. It is also one of a set of three guides to help local and national groups work with all parents to provide a fully inclusive service. Other guides in this set are **'Reaching Out to Fathers'** and **'Reaching Out to Black and Ethnic Minority Families'**.

Our Group Action Pack guides explore a range of issues associated with starting and developing a parent support group and provide further information on topics which are of relevance to this guide, including fundraising, running meetings and producing newsletters, leaflets and websites.

All the Group Action Pack guides can be downloaded free of charge from the Contact a Family website at: <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/GAP.html> .

You can also request copies by telephoning our freephone Helpline on 0808 808 3555.

Ensuring your group promotes equality in everything it does

It is good practice for all groups to have an equal opportunities policy. An equal opportunities policy outlines how you will make sure your group is open to everybody. It shows your group has a commitment to ensuring all people are treated fairly and have the same opportunity to access high quality services. If your group applies for funding, there is a chance the funder will ask whether you have an equal opportunities policy and they may also want to see a copy.

An equal opportunities policy does not have to be very long; the most important thing is to make sure it is useful to your group and is used. Writing the policy is also a helpful way of seeing what your group can practically do to include all parents.

A good starting point is to write a statement which outlines why your group has an equal opportunities policy – you could also print this statement on your group publicity. An example might be:

“Our group believes in the importance of equal opportunities and we are working towards being fully inclusive. We aim to ensure that no family is excluded from our

support group meetings, events and activities on the grounds of age, gender, health, sexuality, class, family status, means, ability, colour, ethnic origin, culture, religion or belief.”

Looking at other groups' policies might give you some ideas about how to set out and word your policy. If you would like to see Contact a Family's equal opportunities policy, please contact us and we will send you a copy. However, it is important that your group's policy is about what **your** group wants to achieve and the practical things your group can do.

Useful Resource

Brighton Resource Centre produces a guide for groups on how to write an equal opportunities policy. Copies can be downloaded from their website at:
<http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk>

Alternatively, you can contact Brighton Resource Centre at:

Address: Prior House, 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton, BN2 0GY
Telephone: 01273 606160
Email: info@resourcecentre.org.uk

What the law says

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

The Disability Discrimination Act says it is against the law for service providers to treat people with disabilities less favourably than other people. When people think of “service providers” things that spring to mind include shops, banks and public venues. However, the DDA counts anyone providing support, training or advice as a service provider and this includes voluntary and community organisations like parent support groups.

The DDA says that all service providers have to make “reasonable” adjustments to their premises, policies and practices so that they do not discriminate against people with disabilities. Whilst this can seem very daunting for parent support groups, do not worry, the key word used by the DDA is “reasonable”. What is reasonable for one service provider (like a large charity with its own premises, or a high street chain of shops) would not be reasonable or appropriate for another (such as a small local parent support group which meets in members' homes).

For information about the DDA 1995, or if you have any questions, contact:

The Equality and Human Rights Commission
Telephone: 08457 622 633
Textphone: 08457 622 644
Website: <http://tinyurl.com/yrqbmz>

Information produced by groups

Most support groups produce information of some kind for families and/or professionals. Generally, this information takes one or more of the following forms:

- Newsletters
- Leaflets
- Medical information
- Posters
- Website
- Publicity material for family events, AGMs and conferences

Information can take many different formats, for example, it can be produced on paper, displayed electronically on a computer or recorded onto audio tapes, CDs or DVDs. Consider the current format your group's information takes. You may have to adapt this (or add a brand new format) in order to make your information accessible to disabled parents. However, this does not necessarily have to be expensive or time consuming.

If your group produces information that is accessible for disabled parents make sure you tell people! Mention it on all your group publicity and also let new group members know.

Information on paper

When producing written publications on paper, it is important that they can be read by parents with visual impairments. Writing your newsletter, leaflet or other materials in a size 14 font will make them easier for everybody to read, using a size 18 font (size 22 is even better) will mean people with partial sight will find them easier to read.

Others things you can do to make a difference are:

- Use a plain, clear font like Arial, Helvetica or Tahoma (these are often called Sans Serif fonts)
- Avoid using italics or underlining
- Use matt paper rather than glossy – the reflection from glossy paper makes it harder to read
- Use strong contrasts in colour - black print on white, cream or yellow paper

If your group uses a computer to produce information, it is easy to alter the size of the text and save copies onto a disc or onto your hard drive. The information can then be printed off easily if it is requested by a parent with visual impairments. Otherwise, a photocopying shop can enlarge publications for you. However, ensure the copies are of a high quality.

Producing materials in Braille can cost a lot of money and may not be necessary if the information can be given in a different way, such as on audio tape. If your group has the resources to produce information in Braille however, there are organisations that can help, like Adept Transcriptions (see below for contact details).

Useful Resources

Adept Transcription Ltd

Adept is a disability equality consultancy that produces and distributes information in Braille, Large-Print, Audio (CD or Cassette), Audio description (voice over descriptions for videos or DVDs) and other alternative formats.

For further information, visit: <http://www.adept-uk.org.uk/fastrack/index.php> .

Tel: 01525 373974
Email: transcription@adeptuk.org
Web: <http://www.adept-uk.org>

See it right is a series of guides from RNIB giving practical advice on how to produce accessible information. For further details contact RNIB Customer Services on:

Tel: 0845 702 3153
Minicom: 0845 758 5691
Website: <http://tinyurl.com/byd3k>

Information on screen

As more and more parent groups are setting up their own websites and sending newsletters via email, it is important to look at some of the ways they can be more accessible for disabled parents.

Features like flashing images can make some websites difficult to read for people with visual impairments. The layout and the colours used on screen can also be a barrier. It is important that your website is flexible and parents can easily adjust the way it looks to suit their own needs.

Case study

Umbrella is a registered charity working to improve services and facilities for disabled children and their families living in Southern Derbyshire.

The homepage of Umbrella's website has a tool at the top which helps parents change the size of the text on screen, the layout and the colours used. To see it in action go to: <http://www.umbrella.uk.net/> .

Some parents with visual impairments or learning disabilities use computer programmes that read out the words on the screen. This is usually called "text to speech" software. The

way a website is designed, or the way an email newsletter is set out, can affect how well this software works. Contact a Family uses the Text Email Newsletter Standards (TEN Standard), Version 1.2 to make sure our email newsletters can be read by text to speech software.

Useful Resources

AbilityNet

AbilityNet gives free information and advice about technology that can assist disabled people. As well as providing assessments and supplying technology, they also produce a wide range of factsheets, including information on how to make websites accessible.

Copies can be downloaded from:

http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/athome_resources .

Alternatively, contact AbilityNet on:

Tel: 0800 269 545

Email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk

Website: <http://www.abilitynet.org.uk>

MENCAP

Mencap produce a guide on how to make websites more accessible to people with learning disabilities. Copies can be downloaded from:

<http://www.mencap.org.uk/download/webaccess.pdf> .

Alternatively, copies can be ordered from the Learning Disability Helpline on: 0808 808 1111.

Judge Health Project

The Judge Health Project provides guidance to help support groups produce and design good quality websites. You can find their guidelines at: <http://www.judgehealth.org.uk> .

Minervation

Minervation build websites for health care organisations across the UK and Europe. They also offer a free online tool that will assess how accessible your group's website is to disabled people. The tool can be downloaded from their website at:

<http://tinyurl.com/2cgq5g> .

Text Email Newsletter Standard (TEN Standard)

For information about how to improve the readability of your email newsletters, visit:

<http://www.headstar.com/ten> .

Information on audio tape/CD

Making a publication like your group's newsletter available on audio tape could make a big difference to parents with visual impairments, learning disabilities or low literacy levels. It is something your group can do easily and relatively cheaply, as long as you have some time and a tape recorder. New computers now also come with the technology to record onto CD. Ask whether any of your members own such a computer or have access to one.

As long as the recordings are clear and relatively short and you are responding to individual requests, producing your own audio tapes and CDs should not be a problem. However, if you would like to record a long publication or you have a lot of material (such as a range of factsheets), you might have to use an outside organisation to make the recordings. Your group will be charged for this so it will only be possible if you have the funds available. You will also have to bear in mind how quickly the information will go out of date.

Case study

Ataxia UK have been recording their magazine, The Ataxian, on tape since 1997. The process is co-ordinated by one person who arranges a team of speakers to make the recordings – the speakers include teachers, actors, singers and preachers. Each one is sent a copy of the magazine and a reading profile in advance and the recordings are made at home, during one evening. A personal hi-fi system and microphone are used to make the recordings onto C90 cassettes. Once a master copy has been made, a tape duplicator is used to re-record all the cassettes that are needed and these are then forwarded to the Ataxia UK office for distribution.

If you would like to know more, the Ataxia UK office can be contacted by telephone on: 020 7582 1444 or by email at: enquiries@ataxia.org.uk.

Useful Resources

Plain English Campaign

The Plain English Campaign is an independent organisation promoting the use of clear, uncomplicated language. They produce a range of guides on how to write in plain English. Copies can be downloaded from:

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/guides.htm> .

Or you can contact them at:

Address: PO Box 3, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4QP

Tel: 01663 744409

Email: info@plainenglish.co.uk

MENCAP - Am I Making Myself Clear?

MENCAP produces a guide on how to make written information more accessible to people with learning disabilities. Copies can be downloaded from:

http://www.mencap.org.uk/download/making_myself_clear.pdf .

Alternatively, copies can be ordered from the Learning Disability Helpline on 0808 808 1111.

www.easyinfo.org.uk

This website gives guidance on making information more accessible for people with learning disabilities. It offers news, information, guides and an online forum.

Support group meetings and events

Depending on whether you are a local or national group, the number of times you meet during the year will vary. Local groups meet more frequently (anything from once a week to once a quarter) than national groups, who usually meet once or twice a year at their AGM or annual Family Day. This means that the meeting venues used by groups vary a lot, as does their purpose. Some groups will be able to do more than others to make sure their venue is accessible to disabled parents. However, it is still important to look at what your group currently offers and ask your members whether anything can be done to improve access to your meetings and events.

Always ask!

If you are a local group, you probably already know whether any of your parents have particular needs or a disability. It's always worth checking every now and then though and don't forget to ask new members. If you are a national group getting together at an AGM or Family Day, you should always ask about people's access requirements on a booking form. This also applies to local groups organising events which may attract new families. The earlier you have this information, the more chance you have of meeting disabled parents' needs.

Questions relating to disability that you might like to ask are:

1. Do you use a wheelchair or have mobility difficulties?
2. Do you require parking close to the venue?
3. Will you be bringing a personal assistant or guide dog?
4. Do you require a sign language interpreter or lip speaker?
5. Do you require an induction loop?
6. In what format would you like to receive information at the meeting? In ordinary print, in large print, on tape, on disc?
7. Do you have any further requirements or is there anything else you think we should be aware of?

Things to think about

Transport to your meeting place

- Consider whether a lack of transport may be preventing disabled parents from attending meetings or events. Some disabled parents may find access to public transport difficult.

- Be aware that some disabled parents might use community transport - this might not run at the time your group meets and could be preventing disabled parents from attending your meetings.
- If group members with cars are willing to give people lifts, make sure this is highlighted in your group's publicity.

Parking facilities at your meeting place

- Are car-parking facilities available either on-site or close to the meeting venue?
- Are there designated bays for people who hold Blue Badges?

Using public venues

- Some groups use public venues such as churches, community halls, hotels and conference centres to hold meetings and events. Remember that all public venues should be following the Disability Discrimination Act and taking reasonable steps to make sure they are accessible to disabled people. It is always worth checking with the venue to see if there are any potential access issues that need to be addressed. Wherever possible, visit the venue beforehand so you can see it for yourself.
- Ask whether staff at the venue have been trained in disability and accessibility awareness. Will a member of staff be able to assist with any issues you may have on the day of your meeting or event?
- Some venues might not provide signage for your meeting or event, or if they do, it might not be accessible for disabled parents. It is a good idea to make some signs of your own to have as a back-up. If you are doing this, ensure the signs are in a large, clear font and use black print on a white, cream or yellow background. Wherever possible, signs should be placed at a level so they can be easily read by wheelchair users.

Accessibility audits

Many venues have something called an "accessibility audit" to see whether there are any physical barriers preventing access to people with disabilities. It's a good idea to check whether the venue your group is using has had one of these and how they acted upon the results.

You can also do your own mini audit by considering the following questions about your meeting place or event venue:

1. Is there level or ramped access to the building from the car park?
2. Is there level or ramped access to all meeting areas within the building?
3. Do all stairs have handrails?
4. Are the doors wide enough to allow comfortable access for wheelchair users?
5. If your meeting room is not at ground floor level, is there a lift that wheelchair users can use with ease?
6. Is there an accessible toilet?
7. Is a loop system installed?

Meeting rooms at your venue

The type of room your group uses for meetings will depend upon the services you offer and the resources you have available. The following suggestions would not be appropriate for a very small, informal group meeting in members' homes, but might be useful for larger groups holding bigger meetings and events.

- Make sure there is plenty of space between and around rows of seats in the room or around tables and chairs. Try to have the room as clutter-free as possible.
- Be aware that you might have to provide a loop system and microphone for parents who have a hearing impairment. Does the meeting venue provide this equipment in each meeting room you are using? Always check this equipment works – you may need to enlist the help of a deaf parent to do this.
- Is there plenty of good clear lighting (preferably daylight) in the room, or rooms, you are using? This will help everyone by enabling people to read any written materials you give out. It will also allow people to see a sign language interpreter, if one is going to be present.
- Is the room set out in such a way that everyone can see everything they are supposed to? Is the seating arranged so a sign language interpreter can be seen clearly?

Using sign language interpreters

If any of your group members have a hearing impairment, you may be asked to provide a sign language interpreter or a lipspeaker. This is especially important if your group has arranged to have speakers and presentations at an AGM, conference or other meeting.

- You need to book sign language interpreters well in advance as there are very few and they are in big demand.
- Sign language interpreters can cost a lot of money. However, your group could get in touch with local colleges to see whether any student Communication Support Workers would be willing to act as interpreters at your meeting. Are any of your group members able to take on this role as well?
- If you are running an all day meeting or event, you may need more than one interpreter. Interpreters should also have regular breaks so this will have to be timetabled into your programme for the day.

Useful Resources

RNID Communication Services

RNID Communication Services produce information about the different types of communication support for people with hearing impairments. This can be found at: http://www.rnid.org.uk/howwehelp/our_services/communication_services/ .

They also offer a facility for booking sign language interpreters, lipspeakers or any other communication service.

For further details contact:
RNID Information Line
Telephone: 0808 808 0123
Textphone: 0808 808 9000
Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk

Speakers and facilitators at your meeting

- Make sure speakers are fully informed about the support that might be given to group members during their presentations. For example, let them know if they will need to use a microphone connected to a loop system, or if a sign language interpreter is going to be present.
- Get copies of presentations, speeches and hand-outs well in advance. If you are using sign language interpreters, they will need to be given copies in plenty of time. This also enables you to produce materials in different formats if needed (see pages 04-06 for information on how to produce accessible information for disabled parents).

Refreshments at your meetings

- If you are providing refreshments at meetings or family events, try to have tables and chairs in the refreshment area, with plenty of space in between. It can be very difficult for wheelchair users and people with mobility problems to gather food and eat it without a table and chair.
- It is also helpful to have cups with and without handles available, as well as drinking straws.
- Remember that if a disabled person is bringing a personal assistant, you will need to include them in your catering numbers.

Open Meetings

Every now and then, some local groups hold completely open meetings to let the local community know about the group. If your group chooses to do this, you will not know who is attending in advance and consequently you will be unaware of people's access requirements. In these cases it is especially important that your venue and any materials you produce are as accessible as possible. You will need to plan for every eventuality; otherwise disabled parents may not be able to access your meeting.

Promoting your group to disabled parents

By making your group information and meetings more accessible, your group is sending a positive message to all members of the community. However, if you do not tell people about the steps you have taken, disabled parents may assume that they will be unable to access your group.

- State clearly how accessible your group is on all the publicity you produce. If your venue is fully accessible to wheelchair users, or you are able to produce your information in alternative formats, say so.
- If your group has an equal opportunities statement, put this on your leaflet, newsletter and website.
- Contact your local community hall, or Local Infrastructure Organisation (your Council for Voluntary Service or Council for Voluntary Action), to find out if there are any groups for disabled people meeting in your area. Some members of these groups might be parents of disabled children themselves, so let them know about your group.
- If you use pictures and photographs on the information you produce, try to include images of disabled parents. This will send the message that disabled parents are welcomed and valued in your group. If you are using photographs of group members, please remember to get their signed consent to allow you to do this. You can request a copy of Contact a Family's consent form by calling 0808 808 3555.
- Use Contact a Family - we can add your group's details to our database which will enable our Helpline to refer parents to your group. Let us know how your group can include disabled parents so we can reflect this on the database. We can also help promote your group through the Local Parent Support Group Network and email newsletters.

Useful contacts

AbilityNet

Tel: 0800 269545

Email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk

Website: <http://www.abilitynet.org.uk>

Brighton Resource Centre

Prior House, 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton, BN2 0GY

Tel: 01273 606160

Email: info@resourcecentre.org.uk

Website: <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk>

Disabled Parents Network

81 Melton Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham, NG2 8EN

Tel: 08702 410450

Text: 0800 018 9949

Email: information@disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk

Website: www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

FREEPOST MID02164, Stratford upon Avon, CV37 9BR

Tel: 08457 622 633

Textphone: 08457 622 644

Website: <http://www.drc-gb.org/index.asp>

GAIN for Wales (Getting Accessible Information Now)

RNIB Cymru, Trident Court, East Moors Road, Cardiff, CF24 5TD

Tel: 02920 450 440

Email: gainforwales@rnib.org.uk

Website: <http://www.gainforwales.com>

MENCAP

123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT

Helpline: 0808 808 1111

Minicom: 0808 808 8181

Email: information@mencap.org.uk

Website: <http://www.mencap.org.uk>

RNIB

Royal National Institute of the Blind

105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0845 766 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Website: <http://www.rnib.org.uk>

RNID

19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Telephone 0808 808 0123
Textphone 0808 808 9000
Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk
Website: <http://www.rnid.org.uk>

Scottish Accessible Information Forum

Royal Exchange House, 100 Queen Street, Glasgow, G1 3DN
Tel: 0141 26 5261
Textphone: 0141 26 8459
Email: info@saifscotland.org.uk
Website: www.saifscotland.org.uk

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