



Mapping Disability

Engaging disabled people:
the guide

A practical guide for organisers
of grassroots community sport

People Play



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Introduction

As organisers of grassroots community sport, you do a vital job in making sport and exercise accessible for everyone.

We know how challenging it can be to engage with diverse communities with a range of needs.

This guide supports you to communicate and engage more effectively with audiences that include disabled people.



It contains hints and suggestions on how you can motivate disabled people and how you can reassure them that their needs will be met.

Throughout the guide we have used posters to demonstrate how you might put our suggestions into practice.

We've also developed a poster template that can be adapted for your needs making it simple to get your message out there.

We've developed our image library so it contains more pictures of disabled people taking part in sport.



However, there is no need to rely only on posters to get your messages across. Use different ways of communicating to engage your audience. These general principles can be applied to most types of communication.



Terminology

What do we mean by disabled people?

There is a broad legal definition in the UK:

“A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities” (Equality Act 2010).

Almost one in five people in England consider themselves as a disabled person. Disabled people come from all walks of life and a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds.

The term disability covers a wide range of different conditions and impairments, far too many to name individually. For more of an in-depth look at impairments look at our resource [Mapping Disability: The Facts](#)

Although disabled people is widely used as a catch-all phrase, some groups and individuals do not identify with the term. How many older disabled people do you know who say – “I’m not disabled. I am just old”?

It is not necessary to know or understand different impairments or long-term health conditions. It is much more important to know and understand the sorts of things that get in the way and prevent disabled people from taking part in everyday life. **This guide aims to give practical help with this.**



With thanks to ‘Access for All: Inclusive Communications’, by the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS). For more information and useful resources, [click here](#)

Research

How do we know what disabled people want?

Our suggestions are based on recent research commissioned in partnership with Sport England and the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS). It was conducted directly with disabled people with a range of impairments and health conditions.

These pointers are not instructions. They are more of a guide on what disabled people have told us appeals to them.

Remember that everyone is different and there is no single approach that works for everyone.



As well as the collaborative research study between Sport England and EFDS the recommendations in this document are also based on EFDS' 'Talk to Me' report, released October 2014.

This report outlines 10 principles that sports providers can follow to help make their sport or activity more appealing to disabled people.

The 10 principles - Talk to me to get me active...



1. My channels

Use communication channels that I already trust e.g. social media, local media.



2. My locality

Travelling to get to activities can be a significant barrier for disabled people. I would much prefer opportunities to be closer to home.



3. Me, not my impairment

Many people do not identify with being disabled and are put off by advertising that focuses on disability.



4. My values

Everyone has values. Understanding what my values are and linking an activity to these can make taking part more appealing.



5. My life story

As people grow older our values change. Keep me interested over time through new ideas.



6. Reassure me

Some disabled people fear standing out and need to be reassured that any activity we attend will be welcoming and suitable for our needs.



7. Include me

Some disabled people need to know we are good enough to take part. Providers should make sure that people with varying ability levels feel included in sessions.



8. Listen to me

Disabled people can be limited by our impairment and should be able to discuss our needs in a safe and private environment before starting an activity.



9. Welcome me

An unpleasant first experience can prevent anyone from taking part again. Ensure that my first experience is enjoyable so I'm likely to return.



10. Show me

Engage disabled people who are already involved in your activity to promote it to others.

First of all, three key ideas to inform all of the decisions you make

There are three key things that disabled people told us again and again. These are worth bearing in mind when you are planning the activity and when you're developing your communications about it.



Disabled people don't want to feel labelled or segregated, and often prefer to take part in general classes, i.e. not in a specific class for disabled people. Of course activities for people with specific impairments or health conditions are right for some and still have an important role to play.



Sometimes the only support disabled people may need is to know that they can go at their own pace, stop and take a breather when they like without everyone making a fuss and to know the session leader won't put them under any inappropriate stress or strain.



So that they can feel confident about this, disabled people may want to chat to the leader in advance. It's very important that this can happen in private and without a fuss being made.

These ideas inform our suggestions throughout.

Who do you want to reach?

This is a vital first question to ask before designing publicity.

The way you advertise a class or event will mean that people will make assumptions about what the class or event will be like. The class or event will need to live up to these expectations.

Engaging with disabled people about your activity will be much more effective if you have a clear idea of **who** the activity is aimed at and **how** the session will be run.

Disabled people told us they find advertising about activity or sport more engaging when it really captures the feel of what it will be like to take part in that particular session.



For example...

- Is it a general class for disabled and non-disabled people to take part together, or is it for people with a specific impairment?
- Is it for beginners, or for those more experienced?
- Is the emphasis on pure enjoyment or a more competitive edge?
- Is it targeted at young people, or women only?



Who do you want to reach?

Some things to think about:

- Bear in mind that not every activity needs to appeal to or accommodate everyone.
- In fact, saying that an event is suitable for everyone is not generally true and can mean it doesn't really appeal to anyone.
- Be realistic about who can take part and think through how the session will be run.



Consider the following:

Location

Is the location / venue accessible for those with mobility issues, or visual or hearing impairments?
Is it accessible by public transport?

Coaches

Your coaches don't need to be disability experts. But are they open to working with people to understand their different needs?
For example can they be contacted by people outside of sessions?

Activities

Is it possible to adapt the activity for those who might need to go at a slower pace, take frequent breaks or have limited mobility? Can this be done in a way that doesn't single anyone out or put others at a disadvantage?

Structuring your publicity – using a poster as an example

(Remember – you can apply these tips to other forms of communication, not just posters).

To engage and communicate information quickly, posters and other materials need to avoid an overload of information. They also must be accessible. Using a standard structure like the below can help.

1

Use **ONE** bold, attention grabbing **headline**. This needs to be larger than everything else.

2

Include an **engaging image** / set of images (there will be more suggestions on images later).

3

Use a **supporting message** that explains clearly **who** is welcome to take part. Keep it concise – lots of explanatory text is overwhelming and won't be read.

4

Offer a way to ask any questions / have a conversation with the instructor or organiser. Provide more than one form of contact, such as a phone number and an email address.



5

Offer a way to find out more via a **website link** (some disabled people will want a very clear idea of what the activity is like without having to contact anyone).

6

Ensure **practical details** (e.g. date, time, location) are punchy and stand out.

Logos on posters reassure customers and reinforce the legitimacy of the session.

We'll now look at each of these in more detail...

Step 1

What sort of messages work best as a headline?

This is the key message that you want people to see on the poster. It should motivate them to find out more.

Only have one and put it at the top and larger than everything else.

Keep it short and punchy.



What kind of messages are most motivating?

Messages that...

Convey the emotional pay-off

Being active feels great!

Appeal to an existing passion for the activity

Love football?
Want to tackle a new challenge?

Use humour to show that you don't have to be an athlete to take part in activities

I'm slow but I'm lapping everyone on the couch

Step 1

What sort of messages work best as a headline?



What kind of messages are less motivating?

Messages that...

Urge / command to do

Suggest seriousness or competitiveness

Appeal to an individual's ability to perform great things

Focus on disability

Take part!
Get active!
Get the habit

Serious about football?
Want to play more?

Find your superhuman

Disabled?
Want to take part in sport?



Step 2

What sort of images work best?

Images are incredibly important to get people engaged with your information.



What kind of images are more likely to motivate / encourage interest or attendance?

Use photographs (rather than illustrations) and make sure that these...

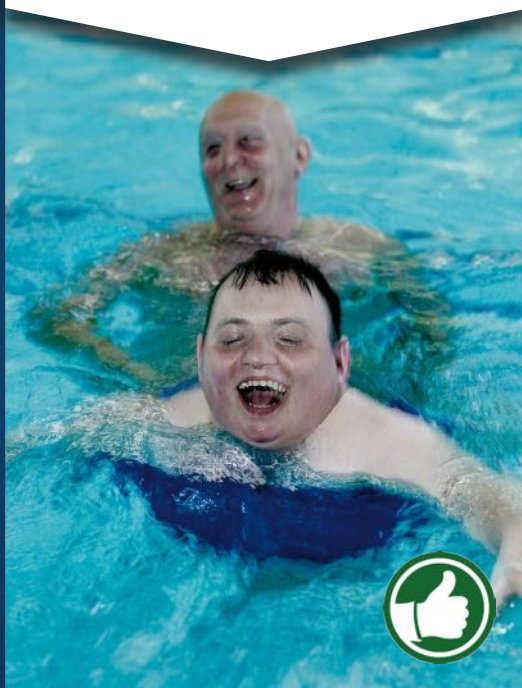
Show the activity clearly and in action

...so people can see what it's going to be like to take part



Show the facial expressions of those taking part

Genuine / natural expression of enjoyment



Show regular people taking part

As opposed to athletes, e.g. not very slim or obviously toned people, and not in professional sports clothes



Step 2

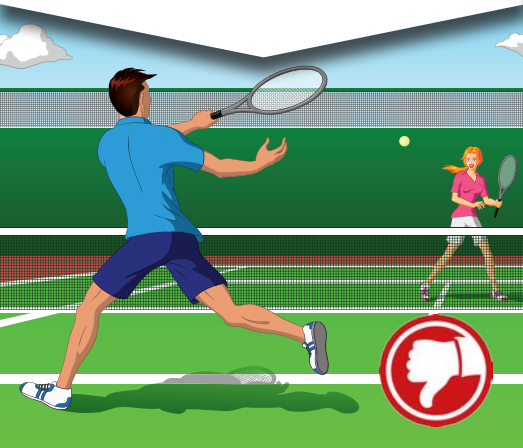
What kind of images don't work?



What kind of images appeal less?

Illustrations

People found it difficult to engage with illustrations, it was harder to put themselves into the action



Very abstract or close-up images

These don't show the activity clearly so it's harder to imagine what the activity will be like



Images showing very fit people or high-speed activity

These often made people feel the activity would be beyond their abilities



Watch out!

Take care with the number of activities you try to promote through a single poster:

- If only one photo is shown, people often assume that only one activity is on offer (even if many activities are listed further down the poster).
- Therefore, if more than one activity is available, it is a good idea to make this obvious by showing photos of a variety of activities.
- Don't try to include too many activities. Up to a maximum of four is enough to show that different activities are offered. More than this can make the poster too busy or confusing.

Step 2

What sort of images work well?

The photos also need to get across the idea that the activity is relevant to disabled people without making them feel labelled.



What kind of images have the widest appeal to disabled people?



A mix of disabled and non-disabled people particularly those showing friendly interaction.



More subtle depictions of disability rather than just people in wheelchairs. This can be seen as too obvious a shorthand for disabled people.



Other pictures could include people with prosthetic limbs, people wearing hearing aids, people sitting down to do sport, or people with multiple impairments.



Sometimes however, it is appropriate to use images of people with specific impairments doing sport, or a whole class of disabled people, if it is a sporting class specifically designed for this audience.

Step 3

Supporting messaging: what's the best way of saying who the activity is for?

This is the text underneath the headline and smaller than the headline. It needs to clearly explain who is welcome to take part. Keep it short and punchy. Lots of text is overwhelming and won't be read.

What phrases feel relevant to disabled people and reassure them that their needs will be taken into account?



Flexible activities
– adapted to your abilities



Activities at your own pace

These phrases acknowledge everyone is different and has their own pace and ability, rather than singling out those with impairments or health conditions.

Also remember that your photographs can do some of the work for you, in signalling (subtly) that the session is suitable for disabled people.

What phrases feel less relevant or were received less well?



Activities for people with additional support needs



Activities for disabled people

These phrases implied a lack of ability or a need to be supported or looked after.



Inclusive

This is a common word used within the sport sector to describe an event or activity that is suitable for everyone however the **general public doesn't understand it.**





It reminds people of all-inclusive holidays, suggesting all activities will be included, or even that food or drink will be provided. **It does little to reassure them that they would be welcomed into a session.**

Step 4

What's the best approach for communicating practical details?

It's really important for practical details (the time, date, location, cost of activities and a point of contact) to be communicated as clearly as possible – if people need to look too hard for them it can stop them engaging.

It is helpful for these details to be shown:

-  In a box, separated from the rest of the information.
-  Together, so people don't have to look in different places for time and location etc.
-  In short, punchy sentences and bullet points, rather than full sentences.
-  In strong colour contrast and accessible typeface and size, e.g. simple fonts such as Arial, and using minimum size 12.

**When:**

Saturday sessions

When:

Sunday sessions

Where:

Swiss Cottage Sports Centre, NW3 3NF

Where:

Talacre Sports Centre, NW5 3AF

Information:

There will also be other sessions on week days at sports and leisure locations near you.

Extras:

Please contact goodpractice@example.gov.uk or check out example.gov.uk/goodpractice



Sessions will take place in Swiss Cottage Sports Centre NW3 3NF on Saturdays and Talacre Sports Centre NW5 3AF on Sundays.

There will also be other sessions on week days at sports and leisure locations near you.

For more information about Active for all please contact badpractice@example.gov.uk or check out example.gov.uk/badpractice

Step 5

Offering ways to find out more via a website link



Some disabled people will want to be able to get a very clear idea of what the activity is like, without having to contact anyone. Younger people and people with mental health problems particularly spoke about the important role of online information in reassuring that an activity would be for them.



Your online information needs to be consistent with what you said on posters or in any other communications, in terms of who the activity is for and how it is talked about.



Also, your website will often be a better place for the more detailed information which people said they wouldn't read on a poster.



Can you build in opportunities to take a sneaky peek?

Disabled people said they would often try and watch sessions ahead of time but felt the need to be secretive about it. They also said they would grill others for details about what the sessions were like. Any ways you can think of to make it easier for people to look ahead and ask questions are likely to be well received.

For instance, can your website include videos of real sessions?

Can your posters include an invitation to watch a class on YouTube or similar?

Can people come and discretely watch a session in action?

Step 6

Offering ways to ask questions



Provide more than one form of contact, such as a phone number **and** an email address.



Answer queries as quickly as possible – people can get disheartened if they don't get a quick reply.



If possible, try and normalise the idea of getting in touch to talk about specific needs – it could be as simple as:



Any questions?



Tell us what **YOU** need from a session.



Everyone's different so tell us how we can make this work for you.



Ensuring a positive first experience

So you've succeeded in engaging with someone and they decide they want to try an activity.

You want them to have a positive first experience so that they want to come back.



Four things to help ensure a positive first experience

- 1 Actively suggesting first timers come and watch or take a sneaky peek on YouTube / social media sites, at a pre-recorded class.
- 2 Providing an opportunity to talk privately with, or email, the instructor/organiser before the session.
- 3 Ensuring a session is run so that it is totally acceptable to rest, sit down and watch, or leave and re-join the class.
- 4 Let individuals know in advance if support will be available, or if they can bring their own.

Remember...

The experience of taking part in the session should match the expectation you have created through your communications.

Ensuring a positive first experience



...and four things to avoid

- 1 Asking individuals about their needs in front of other group members.
- 2 Changing the pace of a whole class to fit in with a specific person's needs. This can be embarrassing for the individual if they are obviously the reason for the change.
- 3 Giving a disabled person special attention or favouritism.
- 4 Separating disabled people from the rest of the class.



More information on accessibility

When creating visual communications, there are certain things you can do that will help make your communications accessible for everyone, so they can be used for lots of different audiences.



Some things to think about...



The size and font of the text you use.

Zumba is here!
Zumba is here!
Zumba is here!
Zumba is here!



The **colours** you use – some colour combinations are more accessible than others.



When taking information online, adding **plain text descriptions** to any images you use, where possible.

Image of 2 climbers scaling wall



Other formats
– e.g. could you add a video of a BSL interpreter to your web page?



You can find more information on all of these aspects here...

‘Access for All: Inclusive Communications by the English Federation of Disability Sport’ (EFDS):
To view as an accessible PDF, [click here](#)
To view on YouTube, [click here](#)





Taking it online



The ideas we have put forward in this toolkit also apply to information you put online.



To recap – all information should:

-  Use photographs to **show the activity or activities clearly** and the **fun of taking part**.
-  Make it clear **which activities are available** via text and/or photos.
-  Make it clear **who the activity is for** in prominent messages and photos.
-  Show clear **practical information** and **ways of getting in touch**.



Taking it online



The ideas we have put forward in this toolkit also apply to information you put online.



When taking it online remember...



Be consistent about the audience you are targeting and the vibe of the activity across the different kinds of communication.

For example...

If you design posters showing that an activity is just for fun and for a particular audience then any information you put online about it should communicate in the same way.



Having information online is a great opportunity to **reassure** those potentially taking part by providing **more information about what the class will be like.**

You could:

- Show a YouTube link of a previous class.
- Show photographs of people and coaches with some information about them, and friendly and encouraging messages for those potentially taking part in the future.



Keep accessibility in mind when publishing information online – check out the [‘EFDS guidelines’](#).

Advice for deliverers/coaches

A note upfront...

You don't need to be a disability expert. It is much more important to know and understand the sorts of things that get in the way and prevent disabled people from taking part in everyday life and to be willing and able to speak openly to people about their needs.

Before the session...



Be contactable if possible by phone and email – remember it can take a lot of courage even just to get in touch and ask questions, so respond swiftly and warmly when you can.



Offer to **speak in private** to anyone that contacts you about their specific needs.

During the session...



If appropriate to the activity, **run a class flexibly** so that people can take breaks, sit down, leave and re-join, without there being any fuss.



While it's difficult, **keep in mind throughout the class what people have told you** about their needs (several disabled people told us that due to a busy schedule/session coaches had forgotten what their specific needs were).

After the session...



Ask the class members (privately or individually) for **feedback** on how they found the session and how future sessions could further help them. Some will be happy to give feedback there and then others may prefer to email, so offer this option too.

Findings from research with supporters

EFDS and the National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSOs) have commissioned research amongst supporters of disabled people and the main findings are given below:

- Disabled people often have smaller social circles than non-disabled people and they place great trust in those they know.
- In some cases disabled people rely on supporters for practical or emotional help, or sometimes both.
- It is important to understand how communications are perceived by supporters too.
- The full report 'Supporting me to be active' can be found [here](#).



Considering supporters...



Supporters are often very protective, and concerned about the disabled person being put in an unpleasant situation.



Where the target audience may have supporters it is important for communications to reassure supporters and give them confidence that the disabled person will not be put in any difficult situations.

Final checklist

In planning your activity, have you...



Decided who your activity is for, what it will involve and what the vibe of the session will be?



Identified what can be done to accommodate different needs?

Does your communication:



Convey the **emotion and pure enjoyment** of taking part through messages and or photos?



Make it clear **which activities are available**, via text and/or photos?



Make clear **who the activity is for** in prominent messages and photos?



Give clear **practical details** in a punchy format?



Say how to find out more via the website and social media presence and through talking to or emailing an instructor/organiser.



Keep in mind the **accessibility** of your communications – **check out the 'EFDS guidelines'**

Structuring your publicity – using a poster as an example



Active Body, Healthy Mind
Improving our mental wellbeing through sport and exercise

It's good to learn something new

Being Active Feels Great

Active Body Healthy Mind offers supported sport and physical activity sessions to people experiencing mental ill health in Oxfordshire.

With a wide range of fantastic sessions available designed to fit around your life, you're bound to find something you'll enjoy!

Sessions on offer include:

- Badminton
- Canoeing
- Cricket
- Cycling
- Exercise classes
- Gym
- Rambling
- Running
- Squash
- Swimming
- Table Tennis
- Tennis

To have a chat and find out more:
01865 263742
www.oxfordshiresport.org/AM

OXFORDSHIRE SPORTS PARTNERSHIP | mind for better mental health | LOTTERY FUNDED | SPORT ENGLAND

2

engaging image

1

attention grabbing headline

3

supporting message

4

contact details

5

website link

6

practical details



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