

Supporters' roles in engaging disabled people

Like any audience, when engaging disabled people in activities, it is important to think about influencers. It is not just disabled people alone who need to be aware of the opportunities that exist for them.

This includes supporters, whether in a professional or personal capacity. A supporter is someone who provides ongoing support to a disabled person. For example, assisting with shopping, household tasks or providing advice and encouragement when trying new activities. A supporter can be anyone from a spouse, family member, friend or professionally paid assistant.

We have created a number of engagement resources that encourage you to think about the ways to include disabled people. This sheet provides top tips on how to engage disabled people's supporters.





Supporters importance

Our past research suggests that disabled people often have much narrower social networks.

The people in these networks can have much stronger relationships with the disabled person and a greater level of influence in their decision-making. Eight in ten supporters said they would have some role in helping a disabled person decide to take part in sport or activity.

Many things can affect the supporters' level of influence in encouraging disabled people. Most notable is the relationship they have with the person. Parents often have more influence than professional assistants do. Also, consider the supporters' activity levels. Active disabled people have supporters who are more active.

Supporters' role in encouraging disabled people to be active

Supporters not only influence the decision of whether a disabled person is active, but they also offer a range of emotional and physical support to enable them to be active. This includes:

- Being a motivator or inspirer.
- Offering logistical and organisational support (e.g. transport).
- Acting as a cheerleader or encourager.
- Acting as a researcher, finding new activities.
- Being a confidence builder or consoler.
- Providing hands on support and environment management.

Key information for supporters

Research shows there are a number of things that supporters may need to know about before suggesting an activity. These include:



Safety: For the disabled person and other participants.



Environment: From the venue's general attitude and focus to approachable, caring and willing staff and other workforce.



Participants: Is the activity inclusive (disabled and non-disabled people) or specifically for disabled people? Which is more appropriate for the individual?



Facilities: From the actual sports equipment and facilities, through to venue set-up and accessibility.



Focus: Is the activity's emphasis on fun? Is it social and does it involve a lot of movement and/or relaxation?

Harness the supporter's power

It is important to ensure that the supporter is aware of opportunities available for disabled people. Ensuring relevant information is available to answer their concerns is important. In order to engage them, you should consider the following:



Imagery

- Use images that do not suggest an activity is too difficult. Show people having fun and happy being active.
- Professional carers prefer imagery that overtly shows disability. It enables them to quickly determine the relevance of an activity. This kind of imagery is not as well received by parents and family.



Language

- Not all supporters will understand what an 'inclusive' offer may mean. So use supporting messages and images to help explain. Show a mix of disabled and non-disabled people together.



Stories and experiences

- Use examples of disabled people who are already engaged in the activity.
- Give feedback from other supporters who have had a positive experience.



Contact information

- Make sure it is clear supporters can contact you through a variety of channels with further questions.



Place information where supporters will find it

- Online searches are the first port of call. Maximise exposure by using the most relevant search terms and post your activities on local forums.
- Use local promotion opportunities. Try doctor surgeries, supermarket noticeboards and posting leaflets.
- Word of mouth among supporters is key, they trust recommendations from other people in a similar situation to themselves.



Understand supporters' motivations

- Is there an opportunity to be involved in the session? The more active the supporter, the increased likelihood of them encouraging the disabled person to be more active. The **Inclusive Activity Programme** equips you with the skills to engage disabled people and people with long-term health conditions more effectively in activities.
- Is there a chance for respite? E.g. a café on site, the possibility to drop off the disabled person safely and leave them to take part.
- Is there an area for supporters to come together in a setting to share experiences?



Find all our research on our website, this sheet is part of our engagement resource.

Read all the sheets here activityalliance.org.uk/engagement

 activityalliance.org.uk  **01509 227750**  info@activityalliance.org.uk

This document is available in Word format. Please contact us if you need support. Activity Alliance is the operating name for the English Federation of Disability Sport. Registered Charity no. 1075180