My Active Future: Including every child

Research summary

activityalliance.org.uk
Current landscape

- 1 million disabled children in England
  - 8% of 12 million children (DWP Family Resources Survey, 2017/18)

Sport England Children and Young People Survey 2018/19:

- 3.3 million (47%) of all children lead active lives
  - Meet CMO guidelines: do an average of at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, across the week
- 2.1 million (29%) of all children are less active
  - Do less than 30 minutes of physical activity per day on average

Disabled children are less active across all age groups
Other research suggests disabled children experience differences in participation, quality of provision, and have more negative experiences
My Active Future: research

**Aim:** Explore differences in experience and perceptions of sport and physical activity among disabled and non-disabled children.

- Attitudes
- Enjoyment and participation
- Barriers and motivations
- Parents’ perceptions

**Method:** EdComs, specialist education research agency, conducted quantitative and qualitative research phases:

- Online survey with 760 disabled children/parents, 923 non-disabled children/parents
- Stakeholder workshop with 26 organisations
- Exploratory focus groups
- In-depth interviews
- Creative workshops
My Active Future: Key findings
Activity levels: Disabled children are less active

30% of disabled children are less active, compared to 21% of non-disabled children.

Disabled children’s activity levels decrease significantly as they get older.

Significantly higher than non-disabled children.
71% of disabled children enjoy being active, compared to 82% of non-disabled children.

All children enjoy being active less with age, but this happens earlier in childhood for disabled children.

Significantly lower than other Key Stages.
Participation in school

Only **one in four** (25%) disabled children take part in sport and physical activity all of the time at school (compared to 41% of non-disabled children).

**One in five** (20%) disabled children do not like PE lessons and games at school (compared to 9% of their non-disabled peers (9%).

This increases to 30% by Key Stage 4.
Participation outside of school

Proportion of children who have been active in each setting in the last year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Disabled children</th>
<th>Non-disabled children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go to a park or play area</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to a leisure center or swimming pool</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play at home or in your street</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play at a friend’s house</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to afterschool clubs</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to classes like karate or dance</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play for a sports team</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to a club like Brownies or Scouts</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to competitions</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less likely than non-disabled children to be active at:
- Parks or play areas
- Leisure centres
- A friend’s house
- Afterschool clubs
- Activity classes

Take part to similar levels at:
- Home or on their street
- Clubs like Brownies and Scouts
- Sports competitions

Significantly lower than non-disabled children.
## Inclusive activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A mix of children with and without impairments</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with similar impairments</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with all kinds of impairments</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By themselves</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with no impairments</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Inclusive activities are preferred, but there is still a need for other provision.
- Children are more likely than adults to want to take part in pan-disability activities.
- Those who prefer disability-specific or pan-disability activities often had negative experiences of taking part with non-disabled children.
Motivations to be active

All children have the same top motivations to be active:

• Improve physical health, have fun, spend time with friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disabled children</th>
<th>Non-disabled children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Helps them to have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Improves physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>To spend time with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other reasons are important too...

**Proportion of children who choose each as one of their top three reasons to be active**

- Helps them have fun: 50% (54% for non-disabled children)
- Improves their physical health: 46% (62% for non-disabled children)
- Helps them spend time with friends: 37% (45% for non-disabled children)
- Improves their confidence: 33% (30% for non-disabled children)
- Gives them a sense of pride or achievement: 24% (26% for non-disabled children)
- Improves their mental health: 21% (23% for non-disabled children)
- Helps them to be more independent: 20% (16% for non-disabled children)
- Helps with their impairment: 19% (N/A for non-disabled children)
- Gives them a sense of belonging: 17% (11% for non-disabled children)

- Gives them a break: 14% (14% for non-disabled children)

Disabled children are **more likely** to feel these factors are important too:

- A sense of belonging
- Be more independent
- Help with their impairment

Significantly higher/ lower than non-disabled children.
Barriers to being active

Disabled children face different barriers to non-disabled children.

Top barriers for disabled children:
• Their impairment (40%)
• Not feeling comfortable (37%)
• Wanting to do other things (29%)

Only 8% of disabled children say they have no barriers (compared to 24% of non-disabled children)
Full list of barriers for disabled and non-disabled children

Proportion of children who choose each as one of their top three things that stop them being active

- Their impairment, health condition, illness or disability
  - Disabled children: 40%
  - Non-disabled children: N/A

- They don’t feel comfortable
  - Disabled children: 37%
  - Non-disabled children: 19%

- They want to do other things
  - Disabled children: 29%
  - Non-disabled children: 39%

- It costs too much money
  - Disabled children: 27%
  - Non-disabled children: 37%

- Getting there and back
  - Disabled children: 23%
  - Non-disabled children: 28%

- Getting hurt
  - Disabled children: 20%
  - Non-disabled children: 11%

- Not knowing what to do when playing sport
  - Disabled children: 20%
  - Non-disabled children: 9%

- They don’t know what they would like
  - Disabled children: 19%
  - Non-disabled children: 19%

- They are worried about how they look
  - Disabled children: 18%
  - Non-disabled children: 9%

- They don’t know what is available
  - Disabled children: 16%
  - Non-disabled children: 23%

- Their friends or family don’t want to
  - Disabled children: 16%
  - Non-disabled children: 24%

- No barriers
  - Disabled children: 8%
  - Non-disabled children: 24%

Significantly higher/ lower than non-disabled children.
‘Feeling uncomfortable’ is linked to other barriers...

- Worried how I look
  (18% compared to 9% of non-disabled children)
- Getting hurt
  (20% compared to 11% of non-disabled children)
- Not knowing what to do
  (20% compared to 11% of non-disabled children)
Loneliness

Disabled children are twice as likely as non-disabled children to be ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ lonely (72% vs 36%).

Disabled children are more likely to:

• Have no-one to talk to
• Feel left out
• Feel alone
Barriers change with age

Worried about how they look:
- Key Stage 1: 8%
- Key Stage 4: 27%

Being often lonely:
- Key stage 1: 14%
- Key Stage 4: 29%

Their impairment:
- Key Stage 1: 37%
- Key Stage 4: 47%

Negative past experiences building up over time
- Being shouted at or misunderstood by deliverers
- Being teased or laughed at
- Inaccessible facilities
- Injuries and accidents
- Not being able to join in with family and friends
Parents’ perspective and perceptions

Parents of disabled children want and need more support:

- **Nine in ten** parents say their child’s activity level is important to them
- **7 in 10 (73%)** want to take part in more activity with their child
- **Less than half (49%)** feel they have enough support to help their child to be active
  - More common among parents in lower socioeconomic groups
Barriers for parents

Proportion of parents who choose each as one of their top three things that stop them helping their child be more active

- Worry about child’s impairment: Parents of disabled children 33%, Parents of non-disabled children N/A
- The cost of equipment or sessions: Parents of disabled children 31%, Parents of non-disabled children 37%
- Lack of suitable places or facilities: Parents of disabled children 26%, Parents of non-disabled children 27%
- Lack of support or understanding from those working in sport: Parents of disabled children 24%, Parents of non-disabled children 6%
- Worry about child not being able to take part: Parents of disabled children 20%, Parents of non-disabled children 7%
- Worry about child not enjoying activity: Parents of disabled children 20%, Parents of non-disabled children 19%
- Worry about child’s safety: Parents of disabled children 19%, Parents of non-disabled children 14%
- Lack of support or understanding from teachers/school: Parents of disabled children 16%, Parents of non-disabled children 8%
- Schedule is too busy: Parents of disabled children 15%, Parents of non-disabled children 25%
- Don’t know what is available: Parents of disabled children 13%, Parents of non-disabled children 16%

All parents worry about cost and suitable places.

Parents of disabled children have additional barriers:
- Worry about their child’s impairment
- Lack of support from deliverers and schools
- Worries about inclusion

Significantly higher than parents of non-disabled children.
## Support needs for parents

**Proportion of parents who choose each as one of their top three things that would help them support their child to be active**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Needs</th>
<th>Parents of Disabled Children</th>
<th>Parents of Non-Disabled Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free/trial sessions</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More information about what is suitable for my child</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical support during an activity</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from my child's school</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support for equipment</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More information on what is available</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping with getting too and from activities</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from medical professionals</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from friends and family</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advice from medical professionals is important for some.

Parents of disabled children want:
- Free or trial sessions
- More information on what is suitable
- Practical support during activities
What do children want?
Disabled children told us what one thing would support them to be active

“Don’t shout if we don’t understand the first time.”

More understanding and acceptance from others

“Give me more choices of what to do, so I can pick what I like the sound of.”

More choice
“Have people to help me, because mummy can’t do it all.”

Independence and practical support

“When those who are really good make fun of me, it hurts my feelings and I don’t want to do it anymore.”

Less pressure

“It would be good if we had a sport mentor or if we spoke to someone like us who had done different sports. I think I’d try and give it a go then.”

More motivation
Recommendations

Our findings reinforce the activity gap between disabled and non-disabled children.

Four key themes emerged as important areas for action to ensure more disabled children enjoy an active future:

1. Engage with and listen to all children
2. Build confidence and independence from a young age
3. Engage leaders on the need for inclusion and show them how to create comfortable environments
4. Support and encourage parents to help their child to live an active life