How to Guide

Communication

active sussex

www.activesussex.org

Introduction

"These guides are based on real experiences from organisations working to get children and young people active. They highlight common challenges, share lessons learned, and offer practical tips from those already making a difference.

Every child's relationship with movement is different, and their needs can change over time. That's why it's important that, as deliverers and facilitators, we understand the challenges young people face in getting active. By listening, learning, and adapting, we can make sure every young person has the chance to take part in a way that works for them.

Sussex is full of incredible organisations working hard to create opportunities for children who might otherwise miss out. Through our Children and Young People Forum and Play Their Way Coaches Collective, we've seen just how much people want to share ideas, tackle challenges together, and support one another. These guides are here to continue that conversation.

This guide is for anyone working with children and young people – whether you're a project lead, a coach, or supporting sessions in any way. The insights and advice here can help make your sessions more inclusive, engaging, and successful.

We hope you find them helpful - whether it's a small tweak to how you run sessions or a new idea that sparks something bigger. However you use them, thank you for everything you do to help children and young people feel included, supported, and excited to move."

Andy Wright,
Strategic Relationship Manager for Children & Young People at Active Sussex.

Communication

The way you communicate can make or break your sessions. But why does it matter so much? Good communication helps everyone feel included, understood, and excited to take part. It keeps young people engaged, reassures parents/carers, and makes everything run more smoothly. Without it, things can get messy - children might miss key details, parents/carers may feel out of the loop, and sessions could end up half-empty.

But there's so much more to communication than just reminders and sign-up forms. You need to make sure young people, parents/carers, and schools feel connected. That might mean explaining things in a way that works for children with additional needs, checking in with young people during a session, or working with schools to celebrate progress. Whether it's a quick chat, a social media post, or a follow-up text, the way you communicate builds trust - and helps make sure everyone wants to come back.

"Communication is one of the most important skills a coach can have. It is not just about being able to demonstrate skills and knowing your sport's tactics. It is about creating a relationship with the person in front of you. Knowing what makes them turn up to your session each week and understanding what motivates them to keep turning up."

– UK Coaching

Common challenges: What can get in the way?

A coach sends an email about a venue change, but half the group doesn't see it. On the day, parents/carers turn up at the wrong place, confused and frustrated, and some children miss out on the session.

Another group runs a brilliant event but doesn't ask for feedback. They don't realise some young people found parts of it too fast-paced, missing the chance to make small changes that could have improved sessions.

A coach explains an activity during a session, but a child with additional needs struggles to follow along. Without a visual guide or a quieter space for explanation, the child feels lost and decides not to come back next week.

A new session is launched, but sign-ups are lower than expected. The coach realises too late that they haven't used the right communication channels. Flyers were left unnoticed in community centres, but a simple WhatsApp message through the school's parent group could have reached the right audience.

These communication slip-ups are easy to make but can lead to frustration, missed sessions, or children feeling left out. The good news? Small tweaks in communication can keep everyone in the loop and make sure no one misses out.

All of these problems could have been avoided with some extra planning - thinking ahead about funding, marketing, and communication can save a lot of stress later on.

Solutions: How to make it work

Before activities

- **Review your communication tools:** Before making a plan, take stock of what you already have - do you have a social media page? A website? An email list? Flyers in local shops and schools? Knowing your starting point helps you make a plan. Also, think about who you know - local press contacts, community groups, parents/carers, and schools can help spread the word if you develop those relationships.
- **Plan ahead and give yourself enough lead time:** If you're starting a new session, aim to have all marketing and communication materials ready at least six weeks before the launch. This gives you time to check what's working and push promotion further if needed. Two weeks before the start date, review your sign-ups - if numbers are low, step up promotion through social media, schools, and community groups.
- **Help children know what to expect:** New experiences can feel overwhelming, so giving children a heads-up on what to expect can help. A video showing the session space, who will lead it, and what activities will take place can help children feel more comfortable before they arrive. You could also share photos of the venue's entrance or a short video walkthrough from the car park or road to the entrance, so families know exactly where to go when they arrive. A simple checklist of what to bring - like a water bottle, comfortable clothing, or small change for lockers - can also help them feel prepared.

> **"We share a video that allows children to know what to expect – who they'll meet, what the session will be like, and how it all works. We try to give as much info as possible so they feel ready and comfortable before they arrive."**
>
> *– Lucy Chadburn, Brighton and Hove Girls Mountain Bike Network*

- **Put parents/carers at ease:** Parents and carers want to know their children are in safe hands. Make sure they can easily find information about your safeguarding policies and procedures, and let them know who to contact if they have any questions. An important safeguarding question you should be asking for any session you run is whether everyone (children and parents/carers) knows how to report a concern and if it's clear who they should speak to. A quick chat or a friendly message can go a long way in helping them feel reassured. Both children and parents/carers should also know who's in charge of other important areas, like first aid too.

> **"Parents want to know their children are looked after, and clear communication about safeguarding can really help put their minds at ease. Making sure parents know your policies, who to contact with concerns, and what steps you take to keep children safe builds trust and confidence in your sessions. There are great tools out there, like the CSPU self-assessment and buddle health check, that can help clubs make sure they're covering everything."**
>
> *– Lauren Rickson, Sports Welfare Officer, Active Sussex*

Tip

Check out these useful links to help with the safeguarding and welfare of your sessions:

CSPU Self assessment tool: **https://thecpsu.org.uk/sports-safeguarding-tools-introduction/**

buddle health Check: **https://buddle.co/tools/health-check**

- **Make your marketing feel open and welcoming:** If your sessions are for everyone, say so! Let families know if you can adapt activities, what support is available, and any training your team has had. Simple details like whether food is provided, if first aid is available, or even letting parents know sanitary products are on hand can make all the difference. If you're designing new posters, flyers, or social media content, check with young people first. What looks good to you might not connect with them. The colours, wording, and style should appeal to them - not just the adults designing them.

Help through buddle

Are you looking to improve your marketing and communication?

Check out buddle to discover more information on how to promote your group to the right people in the right places, and get more sign-ups.

Visit **buddle.co/learning-and-support-resources/develop-and-grow/marketing-and-communications**

> **"We wanted to make sure our marketing really spoke to teen girls, so we tested two completely different flyer designs - one with a chilled vibe and another with a bright, party feel. We also paid close attention to the images, making sure they felt inclusive and relatable so young people could actually picture themselves in the session. Seeing what worked best gave us a much clearer idea of how to get more girls signing up."**
>
> *– Emma Bailey, Active Hastings*

- **Use real voices in your marketing:** Hearing from other young people can be powerful. If you've already run sessions, include quotes from children on posters and flyers to encourage new sign-ups. No sessions yet? A message from the coach about what to expect can help reassure families.

- **Get the word out where young people will see it:** Social media, school newsletters, and youth club flyers can all help spread the word, but instead of guessing, ask young people directly. Where do they look for information? What would catch their attention? Would a QR code, WhatsApp update, or a poster in their school work best? Getting their input makes it much more likely they'll see and respond to your promotion.

- **Join local community groups:** Community groups on Facebook, WhatsApp, or local forums can be a great way to reach more people. Join these groups and be active in them by commenting on their relevant posts and liking their updates - so they're more likely to support and share your content in return.

- **Making social media work for you:** A little planning goes a long way when it comes to social media. Scheduling posts ahead of time takes the pressure off and makes sure people see your updates at the right moments. It's also worth testing different types of posts - videos, photos, and simple text updates - to see what gets the best response. Checking your social media insights can help you understand what's working. Be sure to follow your organisation's or NGB's online and social media policy, or refer to the CPSU's best practice guidelines.

- **Send reminders and give plenty of notice for cancellations:** A quick reminder a few days before - whether by text, email, or social media - can help reduce no-shows. If a session has to be cancelled, let families know as soon as possible so they can make other plans. If you don't hear back, follow up to make sure they got the message.

- **Check in about additional needs:** Some children may need small adjustments to feel comfortable - whether it's a quieter space, extra time to settle in, or knowing what's happening in advance. A quick chat with parents/carers, schools, or the children themselves can help you understand how to make the session work for them. Let parents/carers also know how to reach out to you to talk about any accommodations their child may need.

During activities

- **A friendly face at the door:** Walking into a new session can feel overwhelming, especially for children who are nervous or don't know what to expect. Having someone at the entrance to say hello, answer any questions, and point them in the right direction can help them feel more comfortable. Let families know ahead of time if there'll be someone to welcome to help ease any worries before they even arrive.

- **Get to know each child:** Coaching isn't just about running drills - it's about building real connections. Take the time to chat with the children and young people attending beyond the session. Ask what they love doing, what makes them excited to play, and how they're feeling. The more you get to know them, the better you'll understand what motivates them and how to support them.

- **Mix up how you communicate:** Not every child will respond well to verbal instructions, so try different ways to get your message across. Show rather than tell with short demonstrations, use simple hand signals, or have visual aids on hand. Checking in regularly - whether through a quick thumbs-up or a chat - can also help young people feel heard.

- **Use an emotion tool:** A simple check-in at the start and end of a session can be helpful. Get young people to share how they're feeling - this could be through a quick chat, picking an emoji, or using a traffic light system (green = feeling good, yellow = okay, red = struggling). This can help you understand what kind of day each child has had and if they need extra support. Checking in again at the end is also a great way to see how the session has gone for them and if anything needs changing for next time.

- **Make feedback a conversation:** Ask children what they're enjoying and what they'd like to change. Keeping things flexible, especially for those with additional needs, makes it easier for everyone to feel included and get the most out of the session.

- **Get permission for photos:** If you're taking photos at your sessions, make sure both parents/carers and children are happy for them to be used. Parents/carers need to give permission for safeguarding reasons, but it's just as important to ask the child if they're comfortable with it too. Be clear about where the photos might appear - like social media, flyers, or your website - and how long they'll be used for. Four

years is a good rule of thumb, as young people grow fast and might not want old pictures being shared later on.

- **Talk to each other:** A little chat between coaches at the end of a session can be a great way to spot what worked well and what could be better next time. If there's something important - like a child who had a tough day or a big achievement worth celebrating - sharing it with parents/carers or schools helps keep everyone on the same page.

After activities

- **Check-in with young people and parents/carers:** A quick chat on the way out or a simple online poll can help you see what's working and what could be better. It doesn't need to be formal - just asking if they had fun or if there's anything they'd change can give you some great ideas for next time.
- **Make small changes that count:** If the same feedback keeps coming up - like the session running too late or children wanting more free play - see if there's a way to switch things up. Even slight changes can help improve your sessions for everyone.
- **Keep in touch:** Make it easy for families to stay in the loop. A WhatsApp group, mailing list, or social media updates can be a simple way to let them know about upcoming sessions and events. If you're setting up a WhatsApp group, be sure to follow best practice (such as guidance from the CPSU) - only include parents/carers, not young people, and set clear ground rules from the start.

Supporting different needs

- **Make it easy for families to understand:** If some parents/carers speak little English, simple things like translated flyers or a bilingual volunteer can be useful. Be aware of religious festivals, dietary needs, or modesty concerns, as this can help make sure everyone feels comfortable and included.
- **Check how parents/carers prefer to stay in touch:** Not everyone is always online. Some families might not have regular internet access or smartphones, so ask what works best for them. A quick phone call, a printed handout, or a text might be easier. It's also good to have a backup contact in case of emergencies.
- **Help children feel prepared:** Some young people feel more relaxed when they know what to expect. If anything changes - like a different coach or a session moving rooms - give them a heads-up to help avoid any stress.
- **Celebrate progress, big or small:** A quick 'well done' at the end of a session, a message to a parent/carer, or a simple shout-out can mean the world to a child trying something new or building confidence.

> **"Celebrating small wins really matters, both for the children and their parents. Encouragement – especially for children with additional needs who might not hear it often – can help with confidence and motivation. We always take the time to notice their progress and help them feel proud of what they've achieved."**
>
> *– Jess Barnes, The Russell Martin Foundation*

Useful tips straight to your inbox

How you communicate with parents/carers, schools, and young people can make all the difference for your sessions. Sign up for our emails to get easy-to-use tips and resources that help you share information clearly and effectively. Sign up: **activesussex.org/email-newsletter**

Bringing Play Their Way into your sessions

The Play Their Way campaign is all about child-first coaching - making sure young people feel heard, valued, and in control of their own activity. It's about listening to what they enjoy, giving them choices, and making sessions fun and inclusive

Simple ways to put it into practice:

- **Let them take the lead:** Ask children what they'd like to focus on, whether it's learning new skills, playing games, or just having fun.
- **Offer choices:** Try simple questions like, 'Do you want to start with a warm-up game or go straight into skill practice?'
- **Check in with them:** Quick questions like, 'What was the best part of today's session?' can help you make sure they're enjoying it.
- **Be flexible:** Not every child enjoys structured drills. Make space for creativity, free play, or adjusting the challenge level so they can get the most out of it.

When young people have a say in their sessions, they're more engaged, more confident, and more likely to keep coming back. Learn more at www.playtheirway.org.

Case study: A real-life example

DanceHub CIC

For DanceHub CIC, young people are at the heart of everything they do. They make sure children feel listened to before, during, and after each session - working closely with schools and community partners to set clear expectations, keeping families updated on social media, and regularly checking in to shape sessions together. Young people are involved in decisions from the start, so they always know what's happening and feel part of the process. One of the simplest but most powerful ways they do this is through 'word of the week' - a quick check-in where children share how they felt about a session. These little moments of feedback help DanceHub fine-tune sessions to make sure they work for everyone.

"We've found that talking with children and young people and listening to what they have to say from day one - especially those who aren't used to having their voices heard in other areas of their lives - makes them more enthusiastic and keeps our sessions firmly rooted in their needs."

– Daran Bennett, DanceHub CIC

Recommendations: Quick ways to improve

Communication checklist:

Use this simple checklist to stay on top of communication before, during, and after your sessions. A little planning can go a long way in making sure everyone feels included and ready to take part.

1. Plan the session details	
☐	Confirm date, time, and location (plus any accessibility details).
☐	Decide on key aims (for example, building confidence, learning new skills, having fun).
☐	Assign who's in charge of communication (for example, coach, volunteer, admin).
☐	Review your current communication tools (for example, website, social media, email list, flyers)
☐	Build relationships with key contacts - schools, parents/carers, local press, community groups, to help spread the word.
2. Before the session	
☐	Let parents/carers and young people know • Choose how you'll contact them (email, text, WhatsApp, social media, flyers). • Keep messages short, friendly, and clear. • If possible, send a quick reminder a day or two before.
☐	Share session details • A checklist of what to bring (for example, water bottle, appropriate clothing, small change for lockers if needed). • A short video or photos of the venue so families know what to expect. • A 'meet the coach' post or poster to introduce the session leader. • Let families know someone will be at the door to greet them and show them where to go.
☐	Check-in with partners or schools • A quick call or email to confirm any roles, equipment, or plans. • If they're helping promote the session, send over any information they need (for example, 'Please share this flyer by Friday').
☐	Plan your marketing • Test different flyers or social media designs with your target audience. • Schedule social media posts in advance. • Engage with other local pages - like, comment, and share to build relationships. • If using photos, make sure you have consent from both the parent/carers and child.
3. During the session	
☐	Welcoming young people • Say hi, introduce the session plan, and check if anyone has questions. • Check-in with how children are feeling using an emotion tool • Keep instructions simple - visuals like a whiteboard or icons can help. • Encourage questions and make sure everyone knows what to do.

☐	Keeping parents/carers in the loop • If parents/carers are dropping off/picking up, give a quick update on timings or activities. • If parents/carers aren't there, consider a short text update for younger children. • Celebrate progress: 'They gave it their all today!'
4. After the session	
☐	Ask for feedback • Have a quick chat at the end, or send a short online poll. • Ask what they liked and what could be better.
☐	Follow-up • Send a friendly update (session highlights, next session details). • Thank the children for coming! • If relevant, share any photos or links (for example, a Facebook group update).
5. Reflect and improve	
☐	Team check-in • What worked well? What didn't? • If something went wrong (low turnout, missed messages), what can be improved?
☐	Tweak as needed • Fix any issues before the next session. • If people prefer different communication methods, try adjusting (for example, switching from emails to WhatsApp for reminders).

Print this out or keep it saved somewhere handy. Use it as a guide and adapt it to suit your sessions!

Learn more about connecting with people

Clear communication helps make sessions smoother for everyone. Discover more helpful information and tips around communication and marketing to make sure young people, parents/carers, and schools always know what's going on. https://buddle.co/learning-and-support-resources/develop-and-grow/marketing-and-communications

Top three quick wins:

1. **Keep messages short and clear:** Too much information at once can be overwhelming.
2. **Check in often:** At least once a term with young people, parents/carers, and schools.
3. **Celebrate the small wins:** A simple 'well done' can mean the world.

Try this:

Pick one new way to improve communication - maybe a quick weekly Instagram post or a friendly check-in with parents/carers if plans change. Try it and see how it helps keep everyone in the loop and feeling connected.

Looking to work on how you communicate?

Good communication helps keep sessions running smoothly, but it's not always easy to get it right. Whether it's reaching parents/carers, keeping young people engaged, or making sure schools are in the loop, the Active Sussex team is here to help. Get in touch and let's chat: **activesussex.org/contact**