

ENGAGING DISABLED PEOPLE WITH GROUP EXERCISE

POWERED BY:



the national governing body for group exercise

CONTENTS

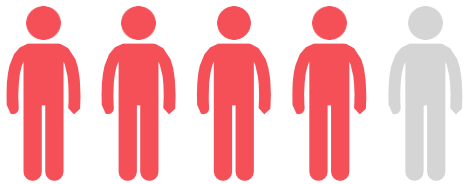
Disability and physical activity: The statistics	page 2
Practical tips	page 5
Tip 1. Targeted marketing.....	page 6
Tip 2. Booking system.....	page 7
Tip 3. Open and Advanced Communication.....	page 7
Tip 4. Brief front of house.....	page 9
Tip 5. Familiarise new participants with the space and equipment.....	page 9
Tip 6. Don't be afraid to say the wrong thing.....	page 10
Tip 7. Welcome carers.....	page 10
Tip 8. Voice.....	page 11
Tip 9. Visual and non-verbal language.....	page 12
Tip 10. Options.....	page 13
Tip 11. Feedback.....	page 13
Tip 12. Practice.....	page 14
References	page 15



DISABILITY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: THE STATISTICS

**THERE
ARE OVER
14 MILLION
DISABLED
PEOPLE IN
THE UK –
THAT'S 1 IN
5 PEOPLE.**

Recent research from the Activity alliance found that:

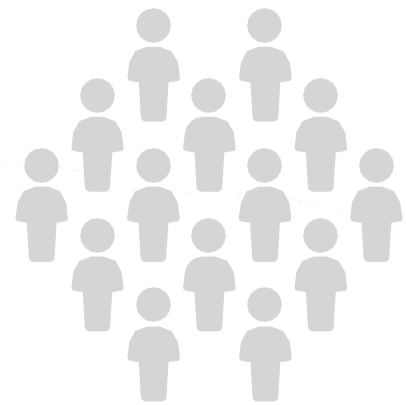


4 in 5 (77%) of disabled adults wanted to be more active, yet

just 42% felt they were given the opportunity to be as active as they would like. [1]

The pandemic exacerbated inequalities and Sport England Active Lives research found that between November 2020-2021:

42.4% (4 million) disabled people were inactive (doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week), compared to 22.6% of non-disabled people.[2]



References

[1] <http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/news/5564-new-report-shows-more-to-do-to-reduce-disabled-peoples-inactivity>

[2] <https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/news/7148-our-response-to-sport-englands-active-lives-202021-report>

EMD UK is committed to improving the participation of disabled people in group exercise. Our members have a vital role to play in providing activities that are inclusive. As exercise professionals, we are client-focused, and should always be reviewing, and adapting our approach to reflect the abilities and ambitions of the people we support. The principles of basic training, and continuous professional development provide a solid foundation for meeting the needs of a wider client-base.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT.

Ensuring your sessions are welcoming and inclusive of disabled people does not require you to be a disability expert.

Specific disabilities such as a visual impairment impact individuals in very different ways. It would be extremely challenging for a fitness professional to have expertise in every type of disability, combination of disabilities, and every person's experience of disability.

83% OF DISABLED PEOPLE HAVE MORE THAN ONE IMPAIRMENT. [3]

The abilities it is reasonable to expect you to have as an exercise professional is being able to attract a diverse client group and ensuring that people who take part have a positive experience.

If there are specific impairment groups that you would like to specialise in supporting and wish to learn more about, there are resources available through a range of disability organisations, some of which are listed in the useful links section at the end of this resource.

References

[3] <https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/fact-and-statistics/page:2>



PRACTICAL TIPS

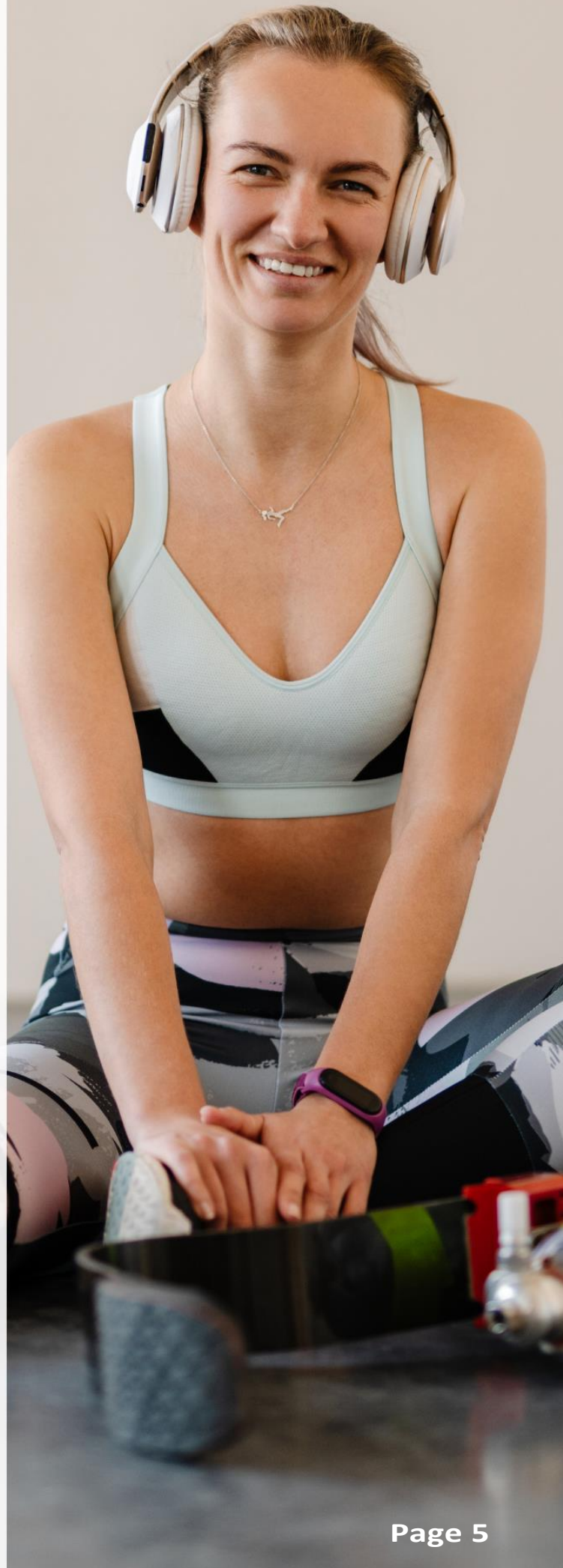
The aim of this resource is to provide practical tips for delivering accessible, inclusive sessions for disabled people. They are far from exhaustive but provide a good baseline for developing your own approach within a flexible framework.

You are not expected to be able to implement every one of these tips yourself, but the advice below aims to prompt you to think about a range of areas and reflect on what you can do and what those around you can do. Remember that over time and with practice, things that may require more time and effort initially will become more instinctive as you develop your experience and approach.

In creating these tips, we have considered broadly physical disabilities that impact mobility; neurodiversity such as Autism and ADHD; and sensory impairments that can impact sight and hearing, for example.



Taking part in group exercise involves more than just time spent in a session. The following tips consider the accessibility of an activity from the first and last point of contact a person may have.





TIP 1. TARGETED MARKETING

How do people find out about sessions?



Think about both the placement and content of your marketing communications.

Are you actively targeting specialist media and organisations? There are many specialist places you can promote your classes such as RNIB Radio and talking newspapers for people with sight loss; disability-specific media, websites, e-news, and social media; and disability sports organisations.



Include accessibility information.

Have you mentioned helpful accessibility information such as accessible toilets, parking and other facilities? Make sure you provide different contact methods for questions. Activity Alliance produce a helpful guide to inclusive communication which you can read [here](#).



Think about the different formats.

For example: using large font, avoiding clashing colours, and providing audio for people with visual impairments; 'easy read' or picture formats for people with learning disabilities; printed media for people who cannot get online. When advertising in physical locations, think about the position of your material – is it visible to a wheelchair user for example?

TIP 2. BOOKING SYSTEM

Think about different ways disabled people can join your sessions.

How essential is it to require advance booking?

Barriers to participation for some people can include complicated online booking systems; not having access to a credit card to pre-pay; and not being able to pre-book due to uncertainties around transport, care support, or health on a given day.

Can you offer more flexible ways to book – such as in person on the day, and accepting different methods of payment?

Enforcing cancellation charges/loss of payment can also impact disabled people disproportionately.

Can you refund or credit people for sessions they needed to miss?

Talk to disabled people who want to join to find out what booking method is the most accessible.



TIP 3. OPEN AND ADVANCED COMMUNICATION

Have a conversation before class: If you know that a disabled person will be attending your session, if possible, contact them in advance to find out their motivation for taking part and how they like to learn. If their main motivation for joining is social, that will require a different type of engagement than if they have specific physical goals.

Find out what works: Asking how people like to learn and what works and what doesn't will help you understand what is helpful to that person. For example, someone with a sight impairment may prefer to stand as close to the instructor as possible. This is also a valuable opportunity to ask if there are things that are helpful to know about their disability when taking part – for example people may share details about how they communicate, cognition, mobility, use of mobility aids etc - which will allow you to consider how you plan and adapt your sessions.

Physical touch: Always check if people are comfortable with physical contact. People with certain disabilities, such as Autism may not like physical contact and personal space is important to respect. Other people may find physical guidance helpful.

Equipment: Run through any equipment you use in your sessions so that you can identify anything that might be a barrier and plan adjustments. There are lots of sensory equipment that can be helpful to disabled people because of how they feel, sound, and look. Ask people if there are particular sensory items they find helpful and think about what can be incorporated into your sessions. For example, items could include balls with bells inside, tactile items such as ribbons/material, and items that light up such as glow sticks. Explore ideas and approaches with participants.

Advise people on what to expect: You should also use this conversation to inform the participant about the location they will be coming to and to answer questions about the space and facilities. Describe the setting, such as the arrival point (reception), lift access, changing rooms, how the lockers work, what to wear. The aim is to ensure there are no surprises for the participant when they arrive such as not being able to get into or find their way around a venue.

This advanced conversation before class will help you to prepare and to build trust moving forward.



TIP 4. BRIEF FRONT OF HOUSE

Make sure the first point of contact, such as reception staff are aware if a disabled participant will be attending your session and that they are ready to support as required. Check that the arrival process, such as security and signing in, is not prohibitive and that equipment or items such as towels are within reach or given to people. This first impression can make a big difference to whether people feel welcome and will return.

Thomas Pocklington Trust has created free front of house online training in partnership with UK Coaching.

TIP 5. FAMILIARISE NEW PARTICIPANTS WITH THE SPACE AND EQUIPMENT

Are you able to provide a short induction to your class for new participants before the class starts? Take a few moments to introduce the exercise space and equipment. Describe the layout of the room and equipment and how the space and equipment will be used. This can be helpful in enabling people to anticipate how to navigate the space, and what the equipment is for. It will also allow you to identify changes to the environment that would be helpful, such as lighting, positioning of equipment and people, distracting noise. If you have regular class participants, introduce them by name and voice. Over time, this can enable people who may require initial support to build confidence and to get to know other people in class.

TIP 6. DON'T BE AFRAID TO SAY THE 'WRONG' THING

When it comes to disability, people often worry about inadvertently causing offence. It is totally fine to use everyday language such as 'see you next week', or 'let's go for a walk' for people with sight loss or wheelchair users. If you are unsure of people's preferences when it comes to language, ask them. Equally, you should reassure participants not to worry about following every move, that they will become more familiar over time, encourage them to ask questions, and remind them that the priority is that they have a positive experience.

If you would like to know more about terminology and language, Activity Alliance produce a helpful factsheet which you can view [here](#).



TIP 7. WELCOME CARERS

To take part disabled participants may require or find it helpful to have support from a carer or someone they know. This can make a difference in whether or not they participate. Carers should be welcomed and exempt from any class fee. For some disabled people, over time they may grow in confidence and ability and require less support or choose to participate independently. While your focus of attention should be on the disabled participant, it is important to engage the carer so that they feel included and can facilitate the person they are supporting to enjoy the session.



A hand is shown from the right side, holding a large, rounded pink speech bubble. The background is a light blue wall with a white torn-paper edge at the bottom. The speech bubble is empty and has a small tail pointing towards the bottom right.

TIP 8. VOICE

As exercise professionals we can use our voice in different ways to support learning. There are additional things that are helpful to know when supporting people with different disabilities:

For people with sight loss, a simple 'this is Gita speaking' each time you speak helps people know who is talking, and make sure you let them know if you are leaving a specific interaction or conversation with them so they don't carry on talking after you have left.

Always let someone know if you are going to make physical contact each time to ensure they are aware and comfortable with this. If someone is taking part with a carer, ensure you engage directly with the participant, rather only through the carer.

Avoid covering your mouth when you speak, or speaking over loud music, and try to avoid facing away from people when you speak: this is important to people with hearing impairments who lip read, visual impairments who need to hear your words clearly, as well as people with cognitive and communication difficulties that find it helpful to read facial expressions.

Lastly, avoid jargon or colloquialisms. Use language that can be clearly understood.



TIP 9. VISUAL AND NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE

This tip is especially helpful for visually impaired people but also for people with cognitive difficulties. Think about how to turn dance and fitness moves into imagery that people can visualise, and be specific in the words you use.

For example, avoid words like 'step out' (out where?) and 'raise your arms' (how)? Be specific, such as 'step out to the side on your right foot and bring your left foot to join the right'. Once people know the steps you can shorten descriptions with names such as 'side step'.

Visual language such as 'circle each arm backward like you're swimming backstroke', and 'wave your hands from side-to-side like window wipers' can help convey movement. Don't worry about repetition, as reinforcement is helpful. You can ask people to follow your voice to support directional movement. Consider contrasting language, such as high and low, small and big, fast and slow.

Think about other ways you can support someone to follow without relying completely on words, such as gestures, clapping, clicking your fingers, body percussion, musical cues (such as a change in move linking to a change in the music).

You can also combine verbal and non-verbal prompts such as moves being linked to words in a song, and animating your voice to capture the mood of music such as energetic or relaxed.

TIP 10. GIVE OPTIONS

As with all group classes, give people different options to choose from. These options should cover different ranges of movement, and progressions and regressions. For example, a step or a jump; bending halfway or all the way down; slow and faster version; feet/arms only; with and without equipment; number of repetitions; static and travelling; standing and seated. If your sessions allow – elements of 'freestyle' or providing participants a choice of moves/activities can also provide positive opportunities to engage and develop.

TIP 11. PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Give feedback: Disabled people can experience additional concerns about how they look in class and whether they are following correctly. Ensure you provide regular feedback during class; this includes encouragement, praise, and prompts to support people to follow.

Ask for feedback: It is also important to ask for regular feedback from participants. Simple checks during class such as whether the music, talking, exercises, etc are clear will help you to make small, quick adjustments. If something doesn't work, speak to people about different options and be open and flexible in your approach. Two-way communication will help you to modify your approach and delivery.

As you get to know participants over time, you will learn what works and how to support their enjoyment and development.





I N C L U S I O N

TIP 12. PRACTICE

A key part of preparing sessions and testing different ideas and approaches is to practice. You should practice by yourself and with other people to see how they respond. You can also audio record yourself and watch and listen for improvements you can make. As an exercise professional you also have access to other professionals and resources so use your network to share ideas, approaches and to help you with any challenges.

Whatever your approach, remember to keep things enjoyable. If you're enjoying delivering the session, it will make a big difference to people enjoying taking part.

USEFUL LINKS

This section provides links to a range of resources on supporting disabled people to be active. If you have questions about specific impairments you can contact the relevant national or local disability organisation.

Activity Alliance have a wide range of helpful, practical resources for supporting disabled people's participation in sport and physical activity:

<https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/resources>

Activity Alliance provide a free e-learning module on delivering inclusive activity via the UK coaching website: <https://www.ukcoaching.org/iapelearning>

Activity Alliance have created a toolkit which outlines the broad profiles of disability that are used in competitive sport. This toolkit introduces the 'Activity Inclusion Model' which sets out different approaches to delivering activity and the STEP model which guides you through how to make an activity more inclusive:

<https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/resources/1921-profiling-toolkit-functional-categories-for-sport-and-disabled-people>

National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSO): This guide provides a summary of organisations supporting people with specific impairments to be active:

https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/000/539/6345_NDSO_Inserts_COMBINED_updated_28.9.17_original.PDF?1506610834

British Blind Sport:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/VIFriendlySport-1-1-1.pdf>

British Blind Sport also provide an e-learning course on coaching people with a visual impairment:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/coaching-people-with-a-visual-impairment/>

Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association:

CPISRA provide free e-learning on sport and sports coaching:

<http://cpisra.org/online-courses/>

Dwarf Sports Association UK: <https://www.dsauk.org/resources/coaching/>

Limb Power: <https://limbpower.com/resources>

Sense provide helpful resources and training for professionals wanting to support people who are deafblind or disabled to be active:

<https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/for-professionals/sense-active-for-professionals/>

For an overview of different forms of verbal and non-verbal communication see: <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/communication/>

Sense have also produced a specific guide on dance provision in partnership with Studio Wayne McGregor:

<https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/for-professionals/sense-arts-and-wellbeing-for-professionals/dance-activities-for-people-with-complex-disabilities/>

UK Deaf Sport: <https://ukdeafsport.org.uk/how-to-be-accessible/>

WheelPower provides free online training on engaging wheelchair participants in sport and physical activity:

<https://www.wheelpower.org.uk/resources/online-training>

EMD UK offer more useful resources like this to their members. To log into your member dashboard click [here](#).

Not a member? Find out more here: <https://emduk.org/fitness-instructor-insurance-2/>