



INFORMATION SHEET

Making it happen: Positively managing risk for children and adults with severe learning disabilities

Introduction

When the Covid-19 outbreak occurred in March 2020 and during the subsequent “lockdowns” the focus has been on reducing the risk of infection from the virus. This period of isolation and reduced activities has inevitably led to nervousness about resuming activities or trying new things but should not be used a reason to deny people with severe learning disabilities access to meaningful activities.

All our information sheets are available to download free of charge.

To enable us to continue our work [please support us](#) or donate £3 by texting CBF to 70450.

Is this resource helpful? Please spend a few minutes giving us some feedback: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/cbfresources

As we start to resume activities, we need to balance taking measures to keep people safe from the virus and the risks to health, wellbeing and quality of life when normal activities and face to face visits with family are suspended.

This information sheet is aimed at family carers, schools, colleges and adult support services. It sets out what should be taken into account and who should be involved when making decisions about suspending or resuming activities or face to face contact for people with severe learning disabilities.

Key Principles

- People should not be prevented from taking part in activities, attending school or services simply because they have complex support needs or display challenging behaviour
- Risk management is a process to identify potential risks
- Positive risk taking involves identifying how risks can be eliminated, minimised, mitigated and managed to ENABLE the person to take part safely wherever possible
- The focus should always be to choose the least restrictive option that successfully mitigates risks and keeps the person and others safe

What is risk?



There are risks in everything we all do and we all negotiate these risks all day every day without thinking about it very much. Risks can be high, low, or negligible, both in terms of likelihood and in terms of impact. Risks are mostly managed routinely (for example holding onto the handrail while walking up the stairs) but even high risks can be managed safely (for example- skydiving is high risk in terms of potential impact if something goes wrong, but the safety measures are stringent, so the likelihood of something going wrong is very low).

The challenge during the pandemic is that some of the activities which were on the “safe list” (e.g. holding onto the handrail up the stairs) now hold a potential risk of infection. But these must be weighed against other risks (for example, for someone with poor balance, the risk of a fall may be greater in terms of impact and likelihood and they could easily manage the risk of the handrail through sanitising their hands.)

How to positively manage risk

We have summarised below the steps to follow to help enable activities to happen safely. The positive management of risk involves a number of steps:

- Clearly specify the activity that needs to be assessed and the risks that need to be managed
- Clarify the risks of engaging in the activity as currently planned. It is useful to estimate both the likelihood and the potential impact of these risks
- Similarly, clarify the risks of not engaging in the activity. It is easy to forget this as the risks may be less concrete and more long-term
- Completing a matrix that rates likelihood (e.g., unlikely, possible, likely) and the severity of impact (e.g. minimal, some, severe) is one useful way of assessing risk. Please see **Appendix 1** for a blank grid you can fill in when assessing and managing risk.
- Identify how each specific risk (especially those that are likely and/or severe) can be mitigated or managed. Often there is more than one way of mitigating risk and the different options might be weighed in terms of restrictiveness and/or preference.
- Throughout the process and especially in its latter stages (when activities have been specified, risks have been identified and mapped, strategies for managing risks have been laid out) key stakeholders should be involved. This should include, as much as possible, the person with a severe learning disability and should also include family members and others involved in their support. The aim should be to reach an agreement about the way forward.
- At the conclusion of the process a decision needs to be made. In most cases this will mean that an activity continues or begins and follows an identified procedure to mitigate risk. However due to Covid 19 restrictions some activities will be cancelled as the buildings are closed or the risk assessment may identify that there is no sufficiently safe way to proceed with the activity at present. If this is the case,



alternative activities that meet as many as possible of the original activity's goals should be considered.

- Risk assessment is not a one-off process. The decision should be regularly reviewed as the risk of Covid-19 changes to see if an activity can be restarted when spread of the disease decreases.

Legal Framework

Information sheets summarising the legal framework relevant to positively managing risk are available on the CBF website [here](#). These have been kindly developed by Doughty Street Chambers.

The following Acts are covered:

- Children and Families Act 2014
- Care Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Mental Capacity Act 2005



The key legal duties to bear in mind are that:

- Children should be supported to facilitate their development and supported to achieve the best educational and other outcomes.
- There is a duty to promote the wellbeing of adults
- There is a duty to make Reasonable Adjustments to ensure disabled people are not disadvantaged; and,
- People should be supported to make and communicate decisions for themselves where they are able; where they lack the capacity to do so, there is a duty to work out what is in their best interests.

What to do if you disagree with how risk is managed

If you think that the decision is risk adverse or the risks of the person not taking part in an activity or not seeing their family have not been properly considered, you can:

- Speak to the decision maker about your concerns. Ask if an individualised risk assessment has taken place. If not, request this.
- Ask for a copy of the risk assessment and check it contains information about:
 - The specific risks
 - The impact of the risk
 - The likelihood of the risk
- It may be that after you read the risk assessment you agree with the decision maker. If you do not agree with the risk assessment try to identify information that you think is missing or incorrect and speak to the decision maker about your concerns
- If they do not take your concerns on board you may wish to put your concerns in writing, make a formal complaint or seek independent advice.

Please see **Appendix 1 - 3** for a risk matrix template and examples of how to assess and manage risk.



Appendix 1 - Risk Matrix Template

Appendix 2 – Assessing and managing risk when visiting a playground

Appendix 3 – Assessing and managing the risk of resuming visits to the gym when they re-open.

For information about contact with family and visiting your relative during Covid 19, please see CBF information resources here: [COVID-19 - Information and resources \(challengingbehaviour.org.uk\)](https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/covid-19-information-and-resources)

Or call: 0300 666 0126 to request a printed copy.

Further information and support:

Challenging Behaviour Foundation – information about Positive Behaviour Support and a range of topics associated with challenging behaviour. Aimed at anyone who provides unpaid support to a child, young person or adult with a severe learning disability.

Call: 0300 666 0126

Email: support@theCBF.org.uk

Mencap – The learning disability helpline offers advice and support for people with a learning disability, their families and carers.

Call: 0808 808 1111

Email: helpline@mencap.org.uk

British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) - Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) helpline to support families and carers of people with learning disabilities, mental health issues or autistic people with the challenges of living with Covid-19 restrictions.

Book an appointment online [here](#)

Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) - advice regarding any educational issue that is the result of a child's special educational needs or disability. Includes advice on Covid-19 school re-openings and exclusions.

Book an appointment online [here](#)

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) – offer information, advice and support for parents and carers of



children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This service is also available to young people themselves.

To find your local service click [here](#)



Appendix 1 Risk Matrix Template

Complete the table below to help assess risk of engaging in a particular activity.

Activity:.....

	Likelihood	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Very likely
Severity of impact						
Minimal impact						



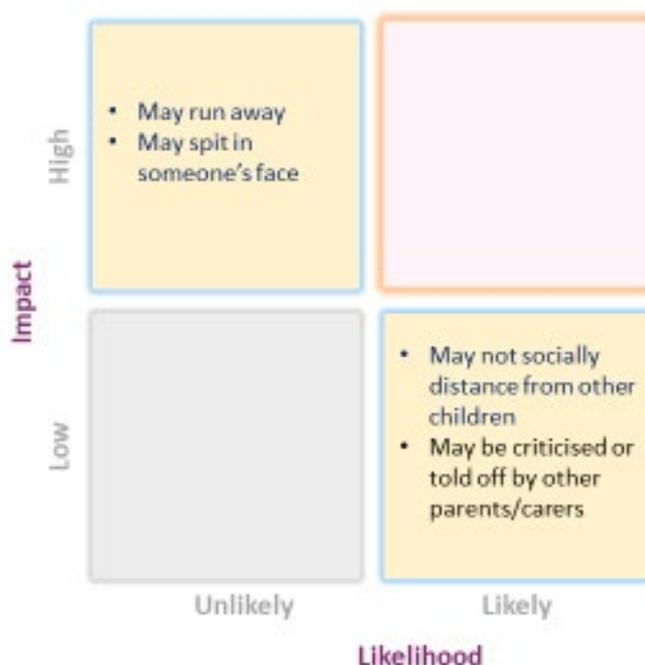
Some impact						
Significant						
Very severe						

Appendix 2 - assessing and managing risks when visiting a playground

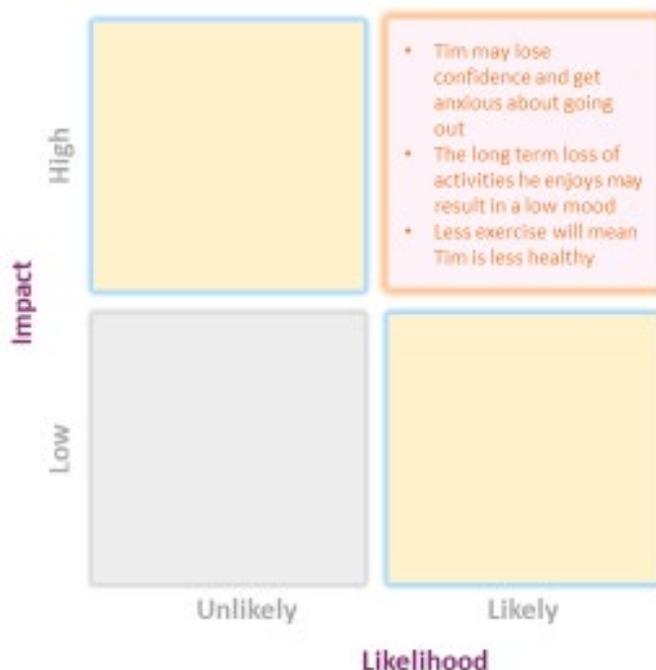
Step 1: Clearly specify the activity whose risks are to be assessed and managed

Activity: Tim resuming weekly visits to the play park (a park within walking distance of Tim's home with play equipment he enjoys)

Step 2: Clarify the risks of engaging in the activity as currently planned. It is useful to estimate both the likelihood and the potential impact of these risks. A matrix setting out these risks can be found below:



Step 3: Clarify the risks of not engaging in the activity. It's easy to forget this as the risks may be less concrete and more long-term



The box in the top right of the grid is outcomes which are both highly likely and have a high impact.

Step 4: Identify how each identified risk (especially those that are likely and/or severe) can be mitigated or managed. Often there is more than one way of mitigating specific risks and the different options might be weighed in terms of restrictiveness and/or preference

Managing risks associated with taking Tim to the play park:

Risk	Likelihood	Severity of impact	Options for how to manage or mitigate this risk
May be criticised or told off by other parents	High	High (Likely to result in anxiety or behaviours that challenge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a "Be Kind" CBF badge explaining that Tim has a severe learning disability • One support worker to explain what it says on Tim's badge if needed to other parents/carers in the playground • Only use the playground in bad weather when it is emptier
May not be socially distant from	High	Low (children are at low risk from Covid 19,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a "Be Kind" CBF badge explaining that Tim has a severe learning disability



other children		especially when outdoors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do some work with Tim to teach a sign for “apart” to help him learn to avoid going too near to or touching strangers Support workers to use distraction/ encouragement to play on less busy play equipment Only use the playground in bad weather when it is emptier
May spit in someone’s face	Low (has only ever happened when Tim is extremely stressed)	High (Could have a negative impact on someone else and a long term impact on how Tim is perceived)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support workers to allow Tim freedom to do his favourite activities (even if he will get sandy etc) Support workers to actively facilitate the experience so it will be enjoyable for Tim Support workers to monitor Tim’s mood to ensure he is enjoying the playpark Support workers to discreetly monitor Tim’s interactions with others to ensure he is enjoying the playpark & intervene to distract if required Support workers to avoid any known triggers of stress eg large dogs Support workers to check other children are not bullying/insulting Tim
May run away	Low (has only ever run away from activities where he feels restricted eg school)	High (Tim has no road sense so could put himself in danger if he absconded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support workers to allow Tim freedom to do his favourite activities (even if he will get sandy etc) Support workers to actively facilitate the experience so it will be enjoyable for Tim Support workers to monitor Tim’s mood to ensure he is enjoying the playpark Support workers to avoid any known triggers of stress eg large dogs Support workers to check other children are not bullying/insulting Tim



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support workers to remain arm in arm with Tim alongside the road on the way to the playpark Support workers to remain arm in arm with Tim at all times whilst in the playpark
--	--	--	--

Step 5: Involve key people. Throughout the process and especially in its latter stages (when activities have been specified, risks have been identified and mapped, strategies for managing risks have been laid out) key stakeholders should be involved. This should include, as much as possible, the person with a severe learning disability and should also include family members and others involved in their support. The aim should be to reach a consensus about the way forward

Who has been involved in discussions about Tim going to the play park?

- Tim
- Tim's mum, dad, sister and grandma.
- Tim's support workers.
- Tim's social worker.

Step 6. Weighing up risks and making a decision.

Everyone agreed that Tim should resume his weekly visits to the play park as the risks of not going are likely to have a much more severe impact on Tim's wellbeing in both the short and long term.

Visits will usually be on a Wednesday afternoon when two support workers are present to take Tim. There may be an additional visit at the weekend with two or more family members.

All the mitigations in the table will be used except for those in red which were agreed to be too restrictive.

Remaining arm in arm with Tim at all times while at the park would restrict his freedom to do his favourite activities and to choose what to play on. Although the impact of spitting or running away would be high, Tim has never exhibited these behaviours in the playpark before as both are associated with stress and it is a place where he feels happy and at ease. There would be warning signs if Tim was getting stressed and so support workers could distract Tim onto another activity, away from the source of stress, or calm him down with a favourite snack to avoid these behaviours.

It was agreed that it would be disproportionately unfair on Tim for him to only enjoy the playpark in bad weather. He is not the only child unlikely to socially distance at the playpark and as far as we know the risks of transmission to children when playing in the open air are very low. Of course if Tim were to display any covid 19 symptoms he would remain home and his family would order a test, consistent with everyone else.

2.



In this case the risks of not going to the park are much greater for Tim than the risks involved in going to the park.

Outcome

Tim has been hugely enjoying his weekly visits to the playpark. All problems encountered have been due to other people using the park, rather than any issues with Tim's behaviour.

Tim has been making great progress with learning "apart" which the family have been practicing daily. Tim doesn't usually manage to stay very much apart from other children (his is not the only one) but there have been two occasions when parents at the playpark have expressed concerns to his support workers. They showed the CBF card, but also communicated "apart" to remind Tim.

Reviews: It will be reviewed by all stakeholders weekly to begin with, particularly as support workers have found the experience stressful, with extra covid restrictions and other people's judgements, even though they fully agree and can see the benefits for Tim. It helps to reflect on how things went and what could be done differently or better. Once everyone is used to the arrangement it will be reviewed monthly, unless rules change again.



Appendix 3 –Assessing and managing the risk of resuming visits to the gym when they re-open

RETURNING TO AN ACTIVITY AFTER LOCKDOWN

GOING BACK TO THE GYM

When returning to a familiar activity use the existing support plan as a starting point.

The support plan will need to be updated to take into account new guidelines relating to Covid-19.

One way to do this, is to arrange a visit to the gym, without your relative, with the opportunity of a walk through with a member of staff.

Take the support plan with you so you can go through it step by step identifying any changes, which may include, for example:

- Having to book a session
- Arriving and leaving promptly
- Social distancing
- Support staff wearing masks
- Gelling hands before, during and after a gym session
- Wiping down equipment before and after use
- Following a one way system
- Music in the gym being played at a lower volume
- Taking photos/ short film clips that can be used to familiarise your relative with any changes

Solutions to managing the above changes, could include:

- Booking a quiet time for the first couple of sessions back
- Using visual supports such as photographs/ short video clips of one way markers, social stories to explain why equipment has to be wiped down before and after use and a schedule showing what time to arrive and leave.

Familiarising your relative with these changes will be beneficial for other activities which are likely to have the same guidelines in place.

You can help your relative get used to the changes by:

- Wearing face masks at home
(If your relative cannot tolerate wearing a face mask mention this to the member of staff who walks you through on your visit
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear->



[one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own](#)

- Practising hand washing and gelling
- Using resources available on the internet to reinforce messages in a fun way, e.g. hand washing <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/radio/get-well-soon-wash-your-hands-song> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wtL2oqCLj8>
- Practising spraying and wiping down surfaces at home
- Playing a game where you have to follow arrows or wait on a circle. If the gym is using particular arrows/circles to wait on, ask if you can have a couple or make your own

It has been difficult for all of us to get used to a different way of accessing our usual activities.

For people with a severe learning disability and communication difficulties, this is a confusing time.

Be prepared for it to take a couple of sessions before your relative gets used to a new way of doing this activity.

Session plans should always be continuously updated. It may take a couple of goes before you get the plan exactly right.

Don't be afraid to ask for help from gym staff or professionals involved in your relative's support, e.g. speech and language therapist to write a social story, provide visual supports.



Reviewed March 2021

© The Challenging Behaviour Foundation, 2021

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are a registered UK charity specifically focussed on the needs of children, young people and adults with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges, and their families.

We will make a difference to the lives of people with severe learning disabilities, whose behaviour challenges, and their families by:

- Championing their rights
- Ensuring timely information and support
- Raising awareness and understanding
- Promoting and sharing best practice

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email

info@theCBF.org.uk or visit our website: <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk>