



# Activities for Children, Young People or Adults with Severe Learning Disabilities to do at Home

## This information sheet may be useful for families who are:

- Spending time at home unexpectedly with a relative who has a severe learning disability.
- Finding accessing the community difficult and will be spending a lot of time at home.
- Looking for different activities to do with a relative who has a severe learning disability.



All our information sheets are available to download free of charge because we believe that money should not be a barrier to getting the information you need when you need it.

Please see the end of this information sheet for details of how to support us.

We want to make sure our resources are helpful. Please spend a few minutes giving us some feedback: [Feedback form](#)

For some families, spending time at home unexpectedly with your relative who has a severe learning disability can be difficult. For others, accessing the community may be difficult and so they may spend a lot of time at home.



This information sheet contains activities to do at home to fill the time, keep your loved ones occupied and help to maintain calm, happy relationships.

The activities listed below can be done after school or college, at the weekend and during holidays. This resource was developed during the Covid-19 pandemic, when we all had to spend some time isolating at home. So, these are also activities to do when we might need to stay at home unexpectedly, for example in extreme weather such as snow.

Remember:

- Some days will be better than others.
- Your relative may have a very short attention span (but it may be longer if the activity is enjoyable and meaningful).

- Activities don't have to be fully completed, it's about having some 'fun' and for some that could mean engaging in an activity for as little as a few minutes.
- Everyone is different and not all activity suggestions will be appropriate for every family. You are the expert in your relative so use ideas that you think will suit your family.

**Important note: some activities will be unsuitable for people who display Pica behaviour (eating inedible objects) and will need to be amended.**

For more information see the CBF information Pica behaviour sheet [here](#) or contact the Family Support Service (details at end of sheet).

## Skills

### Setting a routine

Creating some kind of daily routine, that provides predictability and structure can help to reduce feelings of anxiety that your relative may be experiencing.

If your relative relies upon a structured week/activity plan or predictable routine, it could be really helpful for you and your relative to plan your day and build a new routine together.

Build in a variety of activities each day, rather than just focussing on one type.

You could try to 'replicate' (as far as possible) the activities that your relative does normally. For example: If they go trampolining or do activities such as: bouncing, running, swimming etc – think creatively about how you could replicate this e.g., water play if you have a garden; energetic or bouncy dance routines.

### Developing Skills

Being together more indoors is a good opportunity to look at teaching new skills. You can start with more engagement in *everyday home activities* such as:

- Helping with preparing meals, snacks or drinks
- Getting saucepans out of cupboards
- Putting washing in the machine and helping take it out
- Putting the recycling out
- Hanging out the washing
- Dusting and polishing
- Tidying and sorting



Getting your relative involved in the things that happen at home on a daily basis is a way of using 'naturally presented opportunities' to create some structure, meaningful activity, as well as teach new skills. Use those things in daily life that are naturally motivating for your relative e.g., making drinks, food, or sorting.

If your relative loves a cup of tea, it may be considered unsafe for them to use a kettle or hot water tap but they can still get involved. For example: Getting a cup out; putting a tea bag in the cup; adding milk; stirring (with hand over hand support if needed).

**Task analysis** is all about analysing a particular task (e.g. washing hands, making a drink or food or getting dressed), by breaking it down into smaller chunks and thinking about which steps someone might need support with. There may be only one or two key steps which are stopping the person completing the task, so by teaching these steps or providing support for these steps a person can maximise their achievement and independence. The steps can be made larger or smaller depending on who the task is being analysed for.

**Chaining** is a successful approach for many people with severe learning disabilities, who may otherwise find it difficult to learn new skills. Chaining breaks tasks down into manageable steps.

This is an example of 'forward chaining' which starts at the beginning of the task for 'Putting on a t-shirt' and works through each step:

1. Open drawer
2. Choose a t-shirt
3. Take t-shirt out of drawer
4. Shut drawer
5. Un-fold top
6. Hold t-shirt by the bottom
7. Place t-shirt over your head
8. Put your head through the hole
9. Find the sleeves
10. Put left arm through sleeve
11. Put right arm through sleeve
12. Pull bottom of t-shirt down over stomach



**Backward chaining** is useful for a person who finds learning more difficult. Rather than teaching them to go through each step at a time, it can be more useful to support the person through all of the steps until the last one which they do for themselves.

For example, if putting on a jumper: physically support all of the steps but ensure that the person pulls down the jumper to waist level (the last step in the chain) and therefore complete the last step independently. When they can do this, teach the person to do the last 2 steps of the sequence, i.e., pull jumper over face and then pull down. Thank or praise them for putting on their jumper. This is a good method as the person is completing the task for themselves each time and is gradually gaining independence.

To find out more about teaching new skills please click here to see the CBF Information Sheet [Teaching New Skills](#).

For more details, have a look at this handbook about *Person Centred Active Support*, which looks at how to actively support individuals with learning disabilities and autism to learn and develop skills:

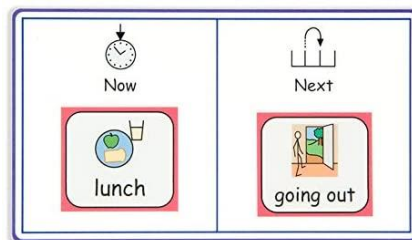
<https://arcuk.org.uk/activesupport/files/2012/03/Active-Support-Handbook-updated-2019-1.pdf>

## Communication

### Using visual aids

Visual aids can be helpful in providing further clear structure and predictable routine for your relative, so they can see what is going to happen. They may help to reduce feelings of anxiety for your relative. They are also a great way of encouraging choice making and teaching about different categories of things e.g., food, activities, objects. Print or draw images and put them on the daily plan or timetable. If you don't have a printer but do have a tablet or iPad, you can create a digital visual timetable.

You can also create a simple visual to look at what is happening like a Now & Next board:



Choose the kind of visuals that your relative already uses or images that they will understand. Some people use:



Widgit Symbols



Photos



Objects of Reference

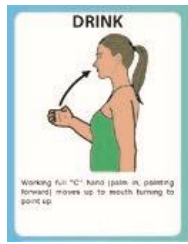
For those without a printer, cutting relevant images out of catalogues or magazines could also be very helpful. Also using things you have photos of, or using images from e.g. cereal boxes.

If creating your own images, it is helpful to use simple picture/photo/symbol e.g. for a bowl – just a bowl - not a bowl surrounded by other things on a table, as this can be really confusing and distracting from what the picture is meant to represent.

## Work on communication skills

Time together at home provides an opportunity to work on teaching communication skills. This is particularly important if your relative is non-verbal or has very limited communication. They may resort to using behaviours described as challenging, as they are unable to communicate in a more effective way.

Communication skills can be factored into those things that happen in everyday life, teaching one (or more) of the following in the context of what is happening:



A sign



A word



Use of an object



Photo



Symbol

Teaching one of the above communication methods in the context of when 'an activity' is happening, will help to reinforce what the sign means. Using those things that help get basic needs met e.g., food, drink, activity, to express pain or distress, get an object, meeting sensory needs, for example:

- Going to the toilet
- Getting a drink
- Getting food
- Asking for an activity, game or tv programme
- Sensory needs
- To gain attention
- To leave or be removed from a place/activity, situation, or person

Here are some different methods of communication that you might like to try:

### Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is an approach designed to help people at early levels of development, people who have severe, profound, or complex learning disabilities and people who have autism.

Intensive Interaction teaches and develops interaction and communication by doing and taking part in interaction and communication (joining in or "mirroring" what your relative does). This method also supports choice making and two-way communication opportunities.

Many family carers have found that this is a great way to encourage interaction and engagement with a relative who has previously been 'difficult to reach' or engage. This is a link to information on our website about family carer, Jackie, using Intensive Interaction with her son Rhys:

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/cbf-articles/your-stories/interaction-with-rhys.html>

Below are video clips showing Intensive Interaction in action:

- Phoebe Caldwell and Olly:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhnaPJw\\_Wh8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhnaPJw_Wh8)
- Jennifer and Lana:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgnDwRG0hXM>
- Phoebe Caldwell and Gabriel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8wEkgOJnMU>

## Signing

For some people signing is helpful and although a person's signs may not be "textbook" signs, if they are meaningful and communicate something they should be encouraged. Signing is a fun activity that everyone can get involved in.

### British Sign Language (BSL)

Dictionary - <http://www.british-sign.co.uk/british-sign-language/dictionary/1/>



### Makaton

Makaton is a unique language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate.

Makaton Car Park Karaoke videos from Singing Hands UK are interactive, fun and help perfect signing skills at the same time. Here are two links suitable for different ages and different music tastes from

- pop music [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCfjV\\_G\\_x5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCfjV_G_x5s)
- to nursery rhymes and songs:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0peZ5AN5vs8&list=PLjT4XhijakZiqAV\\_QjFd-8nV5CuO5Rpnz](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0peZ5AN5vs8&list=PLjT4XhijakZiqAV_QjFd-8nV5CuO5Rpnz)



For those who enjoy stories, click here for a signed story 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwmkzeTAJ8I&list=PLGRmi0Ff2irbrrq7M0MBX4LZvpaX9pobs>

**Signalong** (Sign Supported Communication, focussing on 'key word' signing)

Signalong offers some free resources you can access here: <http://www.signalong.org.uk/free-resources>



Read more about communicating using PECS, symbols and photos, objects of reference and communication choice boards in the Communication and



Challenging Behaviour information sheet, here:

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-behaviour/communication-sheet.html>

## Connecting with others

Sometimes it can be difficult to visit particular family members and friends due to distance, transport issues or illness.

If you are unable to see certain family members and friends why not try one of the following:

- **Make a card and walk to the post box to post it**, rolling several activities into one by incorporating your daily exercise too!
- **Ring them** on the phone
- **Video call using Face Time, Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp** (using technology to connect will not work for everyone. Some people with severe learning disabilities may find this confusing, upsetting and too difficult to understand. It could make some people display challenging behaviours as they can't physically see their relative and feel confused or sad because they don't understand the restrictions and social distancing)



zoom



- **Use Touch Note App to create and send personalised photo postcards, birthday cards and messages** to your loved ones. This is an app you can use on a phone or tablet to upload your own photos. This could be displayed on the wall to give you something to talk about. For more information click here: <https://touchnote.com/>

## Special interests

If your relative has a special interest, you could use this to get them engaged in new activities. For example: if they love the tube map you can talk about tube stations as you do the washing or labelling each room as a tube station and asking the person to deliver the clothes to a specific station.



Think creatively of activities that focus on your relative's specific interest and look at different ways of engaging with this e.g. finding a particular piece of music or song such as 'Every Tube Station Song' by Jay Foreman - A song to help you memorise all 270 stations on the London Underground:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jPyg2pK11M>

Here is a link to a video by a tube enthusiast about abandoned tube stations:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOLQ3GqfNrQ>

You may be surprised by the number of different songs and clips you find about a special interest!

*Be careful not to over focus on 'special interests' as this could become a fixation on the interest for your relative. Perhaps it could be helpful to limit activities involving the 'special interest' to once or twice a day and mixing it in with other varied activities.*

## Sensory activities

Some sensory activities can be made without you having to spend any extra money or at very little cost, here are some ideas:

- **Make an 'ocean bottle'** <https://happyhooligans.ca/ocean-in-bottle/>
- **Watch a sensory story**, here is one about a rainforest (you need to make an account on Youtube to watch this story).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj7YSv0v4kA>
- **Bag books** – make your own sensory story using things that you've got at home, for inspiration and DIY bag books, see Bag Books website here  
<http://www.bagbooks.org/bookshop/diy>
- **A scented bath** - with bubbles
- **Finger painting** - prepare for a lot of mess but also some great fun!
- **Use a foot spa** - try a bowl of warm water with oils or bubble bath if you don't have an electronic spa.
- **Touching and sorting** - Put some pasta, dried beans, lentils or rice into a big plastic bowl. Place this bowl and three empty smaller bowls in the floor. Let your relative dig into the big bowl and separate the mix into the smaller bowls.

## Make your own playdough

### You will need:

- 8 tbsp plain flour
- 2 tbsp table salt
- 60ml warm water
- food colouring
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil

### Method:

1. Mix the flour and salt in a large bowl. In a separate bowl mix together the water, a few drops of food colouring and the oil.
2. Pour the coloured water into the flour mix and bring together with a spoon.
3. Dust a work surface with a little flour and turn out the dough. Knead together for a few minutes to form a smooth, pliable dough. If you want a more intense colour you can work in a few extra drops of food colouring.
4. Store in a plastic sandwich bag (squeeze out the air) in the fridge to keep it fresh.

## Messy play - sludge!

**You will need:** Cornflour, water, a wooden spoon, a bowl.

### Method:

1. Pour half a box of cornflour into a bowl
2. Gradually pour water over and mix until it looks and feels like custard
3. Run your fingers through the liquid.

## Fun activities

- **Make homemade musical instruments** from household objects – use these whilst playing your relative's favourite music
- **Create a memory book of activities you are doing at the moment.** Print out photos, group them together and put them in scrap book. Talk about the groups of photos you are creating with your relative. Alternatively create albums on your tablet/ computer. Let your relative choose which ones to look at.

- **Make a simple sorting game (or buy one).** Find pictures (e.g. from magazines) or print some out, in themes. For example, farm is the theme and you print pictures of farm animals, tractors etc. You spread them out and use simple instructions like “Where are the pigs?”, “Find the tractors” etc. Different themes can be used depending on the interests of your relative.
- **Pamper time** – facial/face masks, painting nails, make up
- **Take a trip down memory lane in the comfort of your home.** Get out your family photos and re-live some happy times. Look at family photos – use family photos to – show me, who is, where is, give me etc.
- **Karaoke** – you don’t need a real microphone – a hairbrush will do (if safe to use!) and music
- **Do some jigsaw puzzles together**, you can also get free puzzles online
- **Gardening** – if you have access to a garden and it is safe for your relative to do



## Virtual zoo trips

For the animal lovers, why not take a virtual trip to the Zoo! Some zoos have live webcams for some of their animals. The links below are for you and your loved ones to watch live footage of: tigers; penguins; pandas; koalas.

- [www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/](http://www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/)
- [www.paigntonzoo.org.uk/explore/webcams](http://www.paigntonzoo.org.uk/explore/webcams)

There are many live webcams from all around the world online. You can watch animals, birds and fish on [www.explore.org](http://www.explore.org), or go on a ‘Virtual Field Trip to The Amazon Rainforest’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEsV5rqbVNQ>

## Baking together

### Basic cookie recipe

You will need:

100g butter (softened)

50g caster sugar

150g self-raising flour

Method:

- Pre-heat your oven to 180C / 160C fan
- Line a few baking trays with baking paper

Mix the butter and sugar together

- Measure the butter and put it in a large mixing bowl.
- Weigh the sugar and add it to the bowl.
- Beat together with a wooden spoon until well combined.

Add the flour

- Weigh the flour, then add to your mixing bowl.
- Carry on mixing then use your hands to bring it all together into a soft dough.

Form the biscuits

- Roll small pieces of dough (the size of a walnut or teaspoon) into round balls. Place on your baking tray, leaving space between them for spreading.
- Dip a fork in cold water and press down on each ball in turn to flatten each biscuit and make an imprint.
- Bake in the oven for 12-15 minutes until they are golden brown.
- Cool on a wire rack.

## **Chocolate nest cakes**

For those of you whose relative doesn't have a long concentration span, this is an easy recipe to try which also doesn't involve too much waiting until they are ready to eat.

**You will need:**

12 cupcake cases

200g milk chocolate, broken into pieces

85g cereal (shredded wheat, cornflakes or crisped rice)

Chocolate mini eggs

**Method:**

- Put the cereal into a large bowl (if shredded wheat, crumble with hands or use a rolling pin to crush it)

- Put the chocolate into a microwave proof bowl
- Microwave on high for 20 seconds, remove and stir
- Microwave again for 30 seconds, stir again- repeat until melted
- Pour the chocolate into the cereal
- Stir well until combined
- Spoon into the cake cases
- Make a small dip in the centre of each
- Place 2/3 eggs in each nest
- Chill in the fridge for 2 hours until set.

## Art and craft ideas

- Make collages out of magazines
- Make a rainbow and put it in your window to show support for your local community
- Cut pictures out of paper or magazine/catalogue to make a free matching/snap game – this can also help with labelling and communicating
- Make some cards or postcards that can be sent to relatives you are unable to see at the moment



## Create your own wall of handmade posters

- Make a wall in the house clear
- have large white paper
- collect different materials you can use for the poster
- use water colours, pasta to stick on, other papers in different size, buttons, paper plates, old bottle caps, toilet paper rolls
- be creative and use these materials to create beautiful posters
- your goal will be to fill the wall with these crafts
- put up to 3 different materials in front of the person and let them choose and place whatever he/she likes on the paper
- be close so you can help the person to stick the different materials in the paper
- do this activity at the same time every day, creating a new routine and encourage the person to be creative!



## Physical

### Keeping Active

When at home, it is important to try and remain active and to help your relative channel their energy into activity they enjoy. Here are some ideas for exercises you might want to try:

- **Bouncing or jumping** - using a trampoline, a pogo stick or big exercise ball if you have one
- **Online exercise** classes
- **Make up your own exercises** in line with your relative's abilities
- **Create an indoor obstacle course** out of pillows, toys and furniture.
- **Or an outdoor obstacle course** if you have a garden. Use whatever you have: chalk marks on the ground to run around, objects to weave around or jump over, a ball to kick around, a bucket to throw a ball into (or laid on its side, to kick a ball into).
- **Have your own disco at home!** Music is a great way to de-stress - singing, dancing or both. Dancing is a functional activity that is a great way to exercise and burn off excessive energy but can also help a person to 'self-regulate' and meet some sensory needs. It will increase the feel-good hormones and help promote feelings of happiness (for you and your relative!).

Try any dance style or form of exercise from around the world by choosing free video classes on You Tube. The following links are not recommendations by the CBF, just some ideas of the kind of dances or exercise you might like to try:

- This is a link to an exercise video with music for people with learning disabilities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXtBMJz0BvI>
- Five minute (ish) 'African Dance' Lesson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ewqq-3xJFdI>
- Bollywood Dance Class [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5M6AF\\_3lcl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5M6AF_3lcl)



- Muve dance workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juSiKMo8Ocw>

## Down time

It is essential for you and your relative to have some down time during the day, maybe during the evening to help with preparing for going to bed. Activities that can help with relaxation can include listening to favourite music, watching TV or videos, having a hand or foot massage or a treat!

- Make the ordinary extra special by having a treat e.g. a luxury hot chocolate with cream and marshmallows. Get your relative to help if they would like to.
- If you have created a sensory space, use this as one of your calming, relaxing activities.
- Settle down to watch a film together if your relative has a good concentration span and would enjoy this. Make it a special event by having popcorn. For those with a short concentration span, watch short clips of things they enjoy.
- Hand/foot/back massage
- Listening to relaxing music or sounds

## Online stories

**Story Line Online** have lots of stories for children, read by famous actors:

<https://www.storylineonline.net/>

**Cbeebies** also have lots of stories being read by famous musicians e.g., Robbie Williams and Olly Murs, and actors e.g. Tom Hardy and Dr Ranj:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b00jdlm2/cbeebies-bedtime-stories>

Having calmer activities during the evening can also become part of your daily routine and may act as a cue for your relative that it will soon be time for bed.

It could be helpful to limit screen time, where possible, at night to ensure that your relative (and you) can get a good night's sleep.



## Support for you from the Challenging Behaviour Foundation

If you need support or require information in relation to your relative, you can talk to one of our Family Case Workers by calling 0300 666 0126 or emailing [support@thecbf.org.uk](mailto:support@thecbf.org.uk)

### The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are the charity for people with severe learning disabilities who display challenging behaviour. We make a difference to the lives of children and adults across the UK by:

- Providing information about challenging behaviour
- Organising peer support for family carers and professionals
- Giving information and support by phone or email
- Running workshops which reduce challenging behaviour

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email [info@thecbf.org.uk](mailto:info@thecbf.org.uk), or visit our website: [www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk)

If you have found this information useful, please consider making a donation. You can show your support at [www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/support-us](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/support-us). Make a £5 donation by texting CBF DN05 to 70085 Or email us to get involved at [support\\_us@thecbf.org.uk](mailto:support_us@thecbf.org.uk)

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