What are short breaks and fun activities?

Short breaks is a national term to describe a break from parenting and caring for families with disabled children and young people. Short breaks and fun activities is the term we use in Leeds to describe opportunities for disabled children and young people to take part in fun play and educational activities that can appropriately meet their needs. Short breaks and fun activities allow disabled children and young people to interact with their peers without needing their parents, other family members or care givers to help them to participate.

What does the law say?

Paragraph 6(1) (c) of the Children’s Act 1989 requires local authorities to provide services which assist carers of children with disabilities and additional needs by providing breaks from caring. Each local authority is required to offer a range of short breaks as a preventative, early intervention strategy, and to publish a statement of those services. In Leeds, our short breaks and fun activities guide, developed with families, is our statement.

What kind of short breaks and fun activities are available?

Different types of short breaks and activities are available, depending on the needs of each child, and they are accessed through universal, targeted and specialist services.

Universal services: There are lots of activities in the community which all children and young people can access, such as Brownies or Scouts, arts and craft groups and sports clubs. The organisations and individuals running these activities have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to make sure that children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs can access them, for example providing a British Sign Language translator for a deaf child.

Leeds City Council has a contract with the charity Scope to provide advice and support on short breaks and fun activities, including helping families to get children and young people involved in universal services. They can provide training and advice to organisations and individuals running these clubs and activities to help them include children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Targeted services: Targeted short breaks and activities are designed specifically to meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs, for example youth groups for young people with autism spectrum conditions, or a playgroup for children with Down’s Syndrome.

Specialist services: Specialist short breaks are for children and young people who have very complex needs which cannot be met in other types of short breaks; for example, they may need specialist medical equipment, personal care, or support from specially trained workers. Specialist short breaks give families a break from caring while their child enjoys fun activities in a safe, supported environment. These short breaks can include daytime and overnight breaks in a specialist health unit, or in the home of an approved foster carer.
How can families access short breaks and fun activities?

The Leeds Local Offer is available online, ensuring families can access clear information about all services for those aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities.

For universal services, families can find details of short breaks and fun activities, including those with disabilities, by contacting the Family Information Service on 0113 247 4386 or visiting their website.

All of the targeted short breaks and fun activities are detailed in the Leeds Local Offer, and in the short breaks directory. If parents already know which service they would like to access, they can complete the single referral form, available in the documents section of the short breaks webpage, and send this directly to the provider. Leeds Placement Service can offer advice about targeted and specialist short breaks and fun activities, and they can be contacted on 0113 378 3775.

Access to specialist short breaks can only be secured following an assessment of the child or young person’s needs, involving the child or young person, their family, and the practitioners who work with them. If families already have a social worker or other practitioner working with them, they can ask this practitioner to carry out an assessment. If they are not working with anyone currently, they can contact the Integrated Processes team on 0113 247 6830 to ask for advice about assessments.

What are direct payments and personalised budgets?

Direct payments and personalised budgets are ways to give families of children and young people with complex needs, who have already had an assessment of those needs, more control over the services they access.

Direct payments: Families can ask for a direct payment as an alternative to accessing the specialist short breaks described above. They can use these payments to buy the services that meet their child’s individual needs, for example to pay for a carer they know well or from an agency they have used before.

Personalised budgets: children’s services have the option to allocate a sum of money - a budget - to meet the needs of disabled children and their families, and this budget will become ‘personalised’ to them. They can choose to receive this budget as a direct payment and choose how to spend it, or if they prefer they can keep their budget with the local authority and continue to access local services with it. Personalised budgets are a new approach to providing services, and are still being developed in Leeds.

There is more information about direct payments and personalised budgets here.

Where can I find further information?

There is a range of information available about short breaks and fun activities in Leeds: Leeds Local Offer
Short breaks and fun activities guide
Short breaks and fun activities directory
Scope in Leeds

One minute guides homepage