



Living Your Life: Recreation for People with Disabilities

When people with disabilities are creating their everyday to-do list, we prioritize a lot of things over fun. Leisure isn't something that we get to put at the top of our list most of the time. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that recreation is important, and we must make it a part of our lives!

What Is Recreation?

Recreation activities are the ones that you do for fun in your free time. There are two types of recreation: passive recreation and active recreation.

Passive recreation is something that is fun and does not require a lot of energy. Here are some examples:

- Reading a book
- Watching a movie
- Cooking a recipe
- Playing a video game



IMAGE: A boy reading a book in Braille.

Active recreation is something that is fun and takes more physical energy. Here are some examples:

- Swimming
- Hiking
- Skating
- Playing ping-pong



IMAGE: A girl and a guy playing basketball. The girl is a wheelchair user.

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There are also kinds of recreation that you can do on your own. Some examples may be listening to music, watching movies, playing an instrument, or surfing the Internet. Recreation can also be done with a group. Some examples may be going shopping, playing board games, doing art projects, or talking on the phone. Recreation is just a good thing to do both with other people and on your own.

Why Is Recreation Important?

Recreation has many benefits! Here are some examples of why recreation can be great for youth with disabilities:

- It provides an opportunity to develop new friendships.
- It helps someone feel a part of the community.
- It allows people to have an active role in the community, to make friends, and to feel empowered.
- It allows people to learn about themselves. They can discover what kinds of activities they like and what they are good at.
- It is a great stress reducer and can even help to relieve symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- It allows people an opportunity to laugh and feel joyful.



IMAGE: A man is reading a book to two young kids.



IMAGE: An animated image of a soccer ball.

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Disability and Recreation

People with disabilities usually have additional challenges finding recreational activities that work for them. Some reasons for this are:

- Many recreational places aren't accessible to people with disabilities. A lot of people need sign language interpreters, wheelchair ramps, scent-free environments, sighted guides, Braille, etc.
- A lot of accessible recreation is expensive. The cost of equipment, membership fees, and other things all add up.
- People with disabilities often have limited transportation to get to the site.
- People with disabilities are often considered "unhealthy" or "weak" because of the "medical model" of disability. (The "medical model" implies that people with disabilities are somehow inadequate and need to be "fixed.") Some people even think that recreation for disabled people is wrong if it isn't based on rehabilitation [activities focused on making the disabled person as non-disabled as possible]. So what happened to the idea of everybody having a chance for fun?
- People with disabilities don't often think about recreation for themselves because society has "included them" by letting them watch, rather than finding a way for them to participate.



IMAGE: Two people are in a hot air balloon, looking at other hot air balloons in the sky around them.

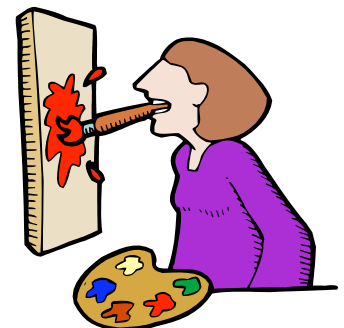


IMAGE: A woman is painting by holding the paint brush in her mouth.

People with disabilities need to use creative ways to find inclusive recreation options. It is important to think about recreation in a very broad way. People think of recreation as exercise, but it is more about enjoying life.

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This enjoyment can be something you find in your local community, you discover in cities you visit, and may even be an option you explore in a foreign country.

Here are some ways to find accessible recreational activities:

- Ask around for discounted movie theaters so that the cost of going to a movie is not prohibitive. Call ahead to see if they provide captioning, audio description, wheelchair access, etc.
- Ask friends for recommendations of accessible leisure activities or locations that are easy to get to.
- Call local disability groups, such as local independent living centers, and ask for suggestions.
- Check out local university programs (festivals, movie nights, etc.). Some schools have recreational therapy departments where students can connect people with disabilities with community activities.
- Watch the community channel or look on the announcement boards at grocery stores or disability service offices at colleges.

Resources for Accessible Recreation

Here are some other resources for accessible recreation opportunities:

- **Mobility International USA.** MIUSA has an online clearinghouse with tons of information about activities that may even take you to visit other countries:
www.miusa.org.
- **National Center on Accessibility.** The National Center on Accessibility works with the National Park Service to promote access and inclusion. They have online articles, publications, and videos on their website:
www.ncaonline.org.



IMAGE: Two people playing basketball outside. One is a wheelchair user.

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- **United Spinal Association's USA TechGuide.** This is a website that covers wheelchair- accessible travel, adaptive sports, and camps for wheelchair users: www.usatechguide.org.
- **Suite101.** This is an online clearinghouse of different articles. They have a page on accessible travel: www.accessibletravel.suite101.com.
- **Kellogg Foundation's Access to Recreation Initiative.** This Initiative started in 2006 and is in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. It includes 36 accessible recreation programs. They have a website that has videos, articles, and links to their programs: www.accesstorecreation.org.
- **Magazines.** The following magazines about disability have a lot of information on things people with disabilities can do. Some examples of these are Ability Magazine (www.abilitymagazine.com), Audacity Magazine (www.audacitymagazine.com), and New Mobility (www.newmobility.com).
- **Centers for Independent Living.** CILs (also known as ILCs, or Independent Living Centers) are local resource centers for people with disabilities. They often have information about recreation. You can find a directory of CILs at <http://www.ilru.org>.



IMAGE: A group of friends is outside at a picnic. Some people have balloons.

Departments of Tourism of most states also have information about recreation possibilities. Most travel guides now include sections on accessibility for people with disabilities. You can also find accessibility information on the Internet. So...consider recreation to be an important part of your everyday, explore the many options that are available to you, and have fun!

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**This document was written by the
National Youth Leadership Network.**

This information was created for youth, by youth. The information is based primarily on first-hand life experiences. We value direct youth-to-youth communications. We wrote this document to be as inclusive as possible. However, we also know that there may be additional information or different perspectives to what is shared here so do send comments/suggestions to us.

The National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) works to build power among young leaders with disabilities. We are a national non-profit organization led by and for youth with disabilities ages 16-28 years old. We live across the United States and its territories.

We believe that youth with disabilities can be great leaders. We work to promote youth leadership and education. Our goal is to make sure youth with disabilities have the chance to set and reach their own goals. Anyone can become a member of our organization for free. Please visit our website and register today!

**For more information:
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