

DISABLED HOLIDAYS

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



For most families, organising a holiday is a case of choosing where to go, booking it and making sure you've packed the suncream. If you have a disabled child, the thought of going on holiday can seem daunting, but with some careful planning it is possible to book a break that is suitable for everyone.

Types of holiday

Everyone has their own idea of what makes a great holiday, whether it is staying in a caravan in the UK, going to a villa, or booking an all-inclusive resort abroad. For families with a disabled child, the most important thing is finding a holiday that meets their needs. Families who have a child with autism may need to consider things such as booking outside peak season, so that resorts are quieter. For families with a child who is a wheelchair user, one of the key considerations will be accessibility.

Finding the right holiday

Thankfully there are a number of organisations such as Contact and AccessAble that can help you to plan a break for you and your family. Tourism for All has travel advice and information about all kinds of holidays to help you plan something that is suitable for everyone in your family.

The majority of resorts and owners are very accommodating if you have any special requests. Even so, if you've made special arrangements for your child, it's a good idea to get these confirmed in writing before you go. Make sure you take a copy with you as well, so you can show exactly what's been agreed.

It is also important to ensure that you have adequate travel insurance. Many companies will not cover existing conditions, but several organisations are able to help you find a policy that is suitable for your child – see page two for details.

Grants

One of the biggest strains on families who care for a disabled child is the cost of a holiday, and this is especially true if you have had to give up work to care for your child. There are several organisations and charities that provide grants to help families with the cost of a holiday. For some grants, parents must receive certain benefits. For others, you may need to be referred by a professional such as a health worker or social worker. Information about some grant making organisations can be found overleaf. You can find more about this on our fact sheet, 'Fundraising' and also in the Grant Making Directory in our book, *Making Sense of it All*.

Getting there

Make sure you tell the airline or company you are travelling with about your child's needs before you travel. Check to see if the airline you are flying with offers discounted seats for carers, as some do and this will help with the cost of your trip.

Some airports will offer to escort families through check-in and security if they find queuing or busy areas challenging – if they do offer this you will need to contact the airport's guest services before you fly and arrange to be met at the airport on the day you travel. If your child has mobility issues you may also be able to ask for assistance to help you get to and from the aircraft. Many airlines will also allow disabled passengers priority boarding, which can help ease the stress of the journey.



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When you board, it's a good idea to make yourself known to the cabin crew – if they are aware of your child's needs they can help to ensure that your journey goes as smoothly as possible.

Ask About

- **Airlines** – look at www.gov.uk/transport-disabled/planes for advice on flying if you are disabled or caring for someone else with a disability. You can also book special assistance, which must be done at least 48 hours before you travel.
- **Contact** – has a free guide to holidays and leisure. For more information go to their website <https://contact.org.uk> or call their helpline: **0808 808 3555**.
- **Gatwick airport** – offers a special assistance service for passengers, www.gatwickairport.com/at-the-airport/passenger-services/special-assistance/facilities-and-services which includes an eagle hoist for wheelchair to seat transfer; changing places in both arrivals, a smaller changing place in South Terminal departure lounge and a hidden disabilities service HiddenDisability@gatwickairport.com. The eagle hoist must be booked in advance via lgweaglehoist@wilsonjames.co.uk.
- **Grants** – the following is a selection of those that award grants to disabled people, their families and carers on low incomes to take UK holidays:
 - **3H Fund**: organises subsidised group holidays for groups of people with physical disabilities and their carers. For more information go to: www.3hfund.org.uk, call: **01892 860207**, or email: info@3hfund.org.uk.
 - **Family Fund**: grants to families with a disabled child who receive certain benefits. Tel: **01904 550055**, or go to: www.familyfund.org.uk.
 - **Family Holiday Association**: funding for families on low incomes, a referral must be made by a GP, health worker, charity or school. For more information go to: www.familyholidayassociation.org.uk, tel: **020 3117 0650**, or email: info@fhaonline.org.uk.
 - **Starlight Children's Foundation**: grants wishes to children with life-threatening or life-limiting illnesses. Tel: **020 7262 2881**, or go to www.starlight.org.uk.
- **Hidden Disabilities Lanyards** – Gatwick, Heathrow and other regional airports offer free sunflower lanyards to people with conditions such as autism, ADHD, learning disabilities and dementia, which alert staff that the wearer has a hidden disability and may need extra help. At Gatwick the lanyards are available from Assistance Reception areas at the airport, or you can email the team at: HiddenDisability@gatwickairport.com before you travel.
- **Travel and holiday homes** – check the following for accommodation, advice and information on accessibility:
 - www.autism.org.uk
 - www.disabledtraveladvice.co.uk
 - www.holidayhomestrust.info
 - www.tourismforall.org.uk (tel: **0845 124 9971**, or email: info@tourismforall.org.uk)
 - <https://ski2freedom.com>

Further reading and useful links

- **Making Sense of it All** – our handy parent/carer guide contains information and advice on benefits, support for your child at school, getting help from social services and accessing social & leisure activities. For more go to: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- **AccessAble** – website with a detailed access guide to places such as shops, restaurants, toilets and hotels across Britain. Please visit: www.accessable.co.uk.

