

Pathways to Play: *Choosing Community Recreation Programs*



Introduction

Taking part in community recreation activities is great for kids! These activities and experiences boost confidence, increase physical activity, and enhance play and social interactions. Research has shown that for children with developmental disabilities, recreation also improves physical health, motor skills, and self-esteem, while fostering social connections and supporting long-term well-being (Johnson, 2009).

There are many community programs and activities to choose from. Deciding on the best activities for your child and family can take time and access to the right information. People from different communities have said that having more and easier access to information about local activities and programs would make it easier to get involved.

This guide is designed to help you make informed choices about leisure and recreation activities for your child and family. It will help you:

1. Learn about different programs, activities, and accessibility options to support your child's participation and success.
2. Get familiar with terminology and features that can help you identify programs that are a good fit.
3. Find resources in your community that can help your child and family get involved.

This guide is best for families with children and youth from preschool age through 18 years old. It does not cover finding professional therapeutic services, childcare, or respite care (like occupational therapy, AAC programs, or afterschool care). We will use identity-first language (e.g., "autistic children" rather than "children with autism"), as this is preferred by many autistic advocates. However, we recognize that preferences vary, and we encourage everyone to respect individual choices when addressing others.

Types of Programs

Specialized or Adaptive Programs

Some programs are designed and structured for children with disabilities or individuals who are neurodivergent. The program and services are tailored to support a wide range of individual needs and disabilities. Accessibility options and supports, such as access to adaptive equipment (e.g., adaptive bicycles, art equipment) and trained staff and volunteers (e.g., sighted guides) are standard features.

Words and examples that describe these programs may include: