



The Speleological Union of Ireland
The Official Representative Body for cavers in Ireland.

House of Sport, LongMile Road, Walkinstown, Dublin 12
Web: www.cavingireland.org

Caving with Participants with Disabilities

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It is SU1's policy that people with disabilities should wherever possible be included in the same activities undertaken by their non-disabled peers.

They should be offered this experience in as close as possible to the norms and patterns of participation experienced by other students.

Planning for Caving trips

In the initial planning stage it is important to have a thorough knowledge of the disability of the person involved and how it affects them, the activities they are able to perform and the ones they enjoy. This knowledge will allow preparations to be made to include them wherever possible.

When planning caving events with people with disabilities in the class, some additional thought and planning may be required; but it should never be automatically assumed that people cannot be involved in an activity just because of their disability.

Some people with disabilities, like their non-disabled peers, may not yet have the skills to undertake some outdoor activities. A plan to foster skills, however, can be developed.

Teacher Qualification and Experience

Caving with people with disabilities can set specific requirements for the qualifications and/or experiences of leaders. In all cases the leader and supporting staff should be experienced in the activity and be skilled in any particular aspect as required: e.g. use of wheelchairs, lifting techniques etc.

Leader/Staff : Student Ratios

Leader : participant ratios are in most cases higher than for non-disabled participants. Leadership ratios may include teacher aides, trained volunteers and ancillary staff with caving expertise.

Venue and Locations

Physical location and access issues may need to be checked:

– For persons with restricted walking capacity, limited muscle tone or in a wheelchair, venues with major facilities all on the one level, no steep downhill gradients to activity sites and built-up planking for difficult parts of walks would be

desirable. This very much limits the experience to Show caves. It is therefore recommended that you check for disabled access before you visit.

– Check that wheelchairs can be transported easily to an accessible point for activities and that there is easy vehicle **access for escape routes for activities away from your base.**

– Check the adequacy of buildings and facilities in terms of size of doorways, steps and availability of ramps, size of shower cubicles and accessibility of beds or bunks.

Program and Student Preparation

Activities for groups that include participants with a disability must be carefully planned to provide achievable yet enjoyable outcomes. Components of the activity will need to be thought through and possibly trialed so that appropriate modification to equipment and facilities can be made.

Fitness and stamina may have to be taken into consideration to ensure the activity is within the capability of the participants.

In all cases a contingency plan of emergency procedures must be developed for each activity.

Useful contacts

When planning for students with disabilities specialist support may be gained from some of the following:

Enable Ireland

Sandymount Avenue, Dublin 4
Tel: 01 269 5355 Fax: 01 260 1478
e-mail: info@enableireland.ie

Enable Ireland is the country's largest provider of services for people with physical disabilities and their families.

National Council for the Blind

The National Council for the blind promotes independence for people who are visually impaired.
Whitworth Road,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.
IRELAND
Tel: 01 - 8307033 Fax: 01 - 830 7787

The Irish Wheelchair Association

Runs national events and selects national squads for people with physical disabilities, with the exception of athletes with Cerebral Palsy.
Mr Jimmy Byrne - Sports Co-ordinator
Blackheath Drive
Clontarf
Dublin 3
Tel: (01) 8338241 Fax: (01) 8333873

Disability Sports Northern Ireland

A good linkage to many other organisations which will be specific to the disability
Kevin O'Neill Development Manager, Unit 10
Ormeau Business Park
8 Cromac Avenue
Belfast
BT7 2JA
Email: email@dsni.co.uk
Telephone: (028) 9050 8255
Fax: (028) 9050 8256
Textphone: (028) 9050 8254
Website: www.dsni.co.uk

USEFUL TIPS

- ⊕ Caving is a suitable activity for non-ambulatory students if they are able to crawl or drag themselves along.
- ⊕ People with epilepsy who recover in a short time should be in no greater danger in a cave.
- ⊕ People with significant mental health issues may need close support.
- ⊕ People with intellectual disabilities may need extra support and encouragement.
- ⊕ Consider the suitability of individual cave systems for persons with limited flexibility, larger size, limited strength and limited mobility. Be prepared to offer alternative trips with similar experiences such as show caves
- ⊕ Light will be important for those with hearing impairments who rely on lip reading. Carry spare batteries and bulbs. Give instructions before going through a narrow or difficult passage.
- ⊕ Balance may be affected in the dark. Some people will need extra support.
- ⊕ Some people will quickly experience difficulties in cold, damp and rough conditions - e.g. those with limited sensitivity in limbs, those with arthritis, those with asthma. Supply extra clothing for warmth and padding.
- ⊕ Return to surface if the experience becomes traumatic for any person.
- ⊕ Consider using a length of rope for people to hold as a link to one another.
- ⊕ Knee pads, elbow pads, leather gloves, and helmets may be useful.
- ⊕ People with hydrocephalus who have a shunt in place should not be in head down position as this causes excess fluid to drain into the brain area.
- ⊕ Consider removing torches from sighted companions if a person with visual impairment is present - for the experience of what it might be like to be without sight.
- ⊕ Thorough planning for caving is important, as rescues underground can be difficult to effect.



Published by the
Speleological Union of Ireland
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