

10 Simple Steps to Making your Service Accessible

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There are simple steps you can take to ensure your home is more accessible for children with disabilities. There are the obvious changes such as putting in a ramp or an accessible toilet, these can be expensive, and there are other creative but effective changes you can make.

When looking at accessibility for all children, you should consider children with physical impairments (e.g. weak grip, cerebral palsy), children with hearing impairments, children with visual impairments and children with cognitive impairments (e.g. learning impairment, dyslexia etc.). An environment, which takes into account the needs of all users, is an environment that is accessible for everyone.

Universal accessibility is a concept that states that all environments should be accessible by everyone, regardless of ability (*University of Ulster, 2003*). Everybody is different and there is no 'average' person. As a result universal accessibility will benefit everybody, because people with disabilities, people of small or tall stature, parents with buggies, delivery persons will have greater access to the built and external environments.

Here are some easy-to-do, low cost methods of improving the

accessibility of your home, which will help your home childcare service become more accessible for all children.

1. Begin by creating a room plan on graph paper showing the layout of furniture and areas of storage. When designing the room plan, consider the placement of furniture so that children with disabilities can have unrestricted access to the whole room and set aside enough storage space so that clutter and obstructions are avoided. When furniture, toys or equipment is moved for different activities and cleaning, ensure the room is returned to its original, accessible condition. The layout can be marked on the floor with coloured/tactile strips of tape.
2. Many people, particularly those with visual impairments, have difficulty in recognising a glazed door or partition. Where a door or fixed panel is mostly glazed or comprises of a single pane of glass, it should be marked permanently within the 1200-1500mm range above floor level so as to indicate its presence visually.

3. Floor mats are a tripping hazard for many people. Remove all mats or ensure that they are well secured firmly to the floor to reduce the risk of injury.
4. Ensure buildings and gardens are regularly maintained. Leaves should be kept off paths, blown light bulbs should be replaced and there should always be sanitary provisions (i.e. toilet paper, soap)
5. Colour contrast can be a valuable tool for identifying objects and is necessary for people to see information on signs, posters, and overhead projections. When choosing colour contrasts keep in mind that many people have difficulty perceiving certain colour contrasts, especially red and green. Use colours that contrast in tone (black and white/yellow). To check this, photocopy the colours in black and white and see if they still contrast.
6. When making signs or printing policies, stationery etc. ensure the information and the background clearly contrast. Use Sans Serif fonts such as Arial and avoid having words composed entirely of capitals. Check that the sign is at a level that can be read by all. If possible, raise the characters and symbols or use Braille so that the information is available to touch as well as sight.
7. When replacing fixtures and fittings that are to be used by children ensure that they are designed with ease of use.
8. Glare is uncomfortable for everyone and can be especially problematic for people with visual impairments. Reduce glare with adjustable lighting, blinds, and non-glare laminates.
9. Practice emergency exit procedures with all children. Can they hear/see the alarm? Do they require assistance to evacuate from different areas?
10. The provision of colour contrasting grab rails in toilet cubicles will give support and stability to children.

While this article highlights 10 easy ways to improve accessibility there are a wide range of other issues that have not been discussed. For further details on this topic and a wide range of other disability issues, why not check out the NDA library catalogue, which is available on www.nda.ie.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) has also recently published a new best practice guideline entitled *Building for Everyone*, which aims to promote universal access to buildings and the environment. *Building for Everyone* shows how to design, make and manage buildings and external environments for the inclusion, access and use by everybody.