

Intimate Care for Children with Disabilities

Disability is defined as a substantial restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in economic, social, or cultural life on account of an enduring physical, sensory learning or emotional impairment. The types of disability include: physical disability, mental ill-health, autism, intellectual or learning disability and sensory impairment such as hearing or visual impairment. (Duty to Care: Department of Health & Children April 2002)

Assumptions should not be made about the effects of impairment on a person. These should be elicited as much as possible directly from the person even though communications may be difficult. Where there are communication difficulties, the care giver must become proficient in understanding the child.

To ensure equality of treatment and opportunity for disabled persons, reasonable adjustments should be made to the physical environment such as access to accommodate their needs, membership and activities. Prejudice or disabling attitudes of others need to be addressed through education and information.

Disabled people must be treated fairly avoiding direct discrimination on the basis of disability, victimisation and harassment. Children and young people with disabilities are children first and they have the same rights, hopes, fears and aspirations as other young people. They have additional needs that place additional responsibility on those who care and work for them.

Code of Practice for the Intimate Care of Children with Disabilities.

- Children /young people with a disability may be more vulnerable and depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety.
- Appropriate care is to be given by carers / workers / staff / volunteers always respecting the child's / young person's dignity, privacy and choice of the child.
- Planning and agreements with the parents / children / young person in relation to how to support their inclusion in activities should be discussed when they are joining an activity, particularly around areas such as personal care and establishing communication.
- Where it is necessary to carry out tasks of a personal nature for a child/young person, this should be done with the full understanding and consent of parents or guardians. In carrying out such personal care tasks, sensitivity must be shown to the child and the tasks should be undertaken with the utmost discretion.
- Any care task of a personal nature, which a child or young person can do for themselves, should not be undertaken by the carer / worker / volunteer.
- In an emergency situation where this type of help is required, parents/guardians should be fully informed as soon as reasonably possible.
- Carers / workers /staff should be aware that vulnerable children may be more likely than other children to be bullied or subjected to other forms of abuse, and may also be less clear about physical and emotional boundaries.