

Tips & Information

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Here you will find various information that could be helpful to you, your family or individuals you support.

These articles were written and provided by **The Nova Scotia Partnership on Respite, Family Health, and Well-Being.**

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Communication Tips for Managing Transitions within Routines

In this article, we talk about ways to help people who have difficulty completing tasks with many steps (i.e. following a sequence).

What are transitions within routines?

Routines have a regular series of steps to complete. Transitions within routines means moving from one step to the next. An example of this type of routine is getting ready in the morning (e.g. get dressed, use the toilet, wash hands, brush teeth, wash face). Sometimes children or adults with high needs get stuck or have trouble moving from one step to the next. How can you help your family member move to the next step? Consider the needs of your child, such as:

- Your child's motivation (or level of interest) to learn how to do the steps and complete the routine
- How well your child can focus on tasks with many steps
- How sensitive your child is to things like noise, temperature, textures or pressure (e.g. rough fabrics; zippers; water on his/her face)
- How difficult is the routine? Maybe breaking a larger routine into several smaller routines would help (e.g. instead of one routine for getting ready in the morning, create a separate routine for getting dressed, another for brushing teeth, etc.)

By thinking about these issues, you will make a better support plan for your child to help you work through transitions within activities. You may notice triggers for challenging behaviour, or find things that your child really enjoys (e.g. sticker charts), which will help encourage his/her participation in these types of routines.

How Can I Create Smooth Transitions within Routines?

We know that some people will respond strongly to daily life routines, such as brushing teeth in the morning. For example, parents can find the transition from the kitchen table to the bathroom very challenging. Here are some suggestions to help prevent tantrums or outbursts and help you create a smooth transition. These ideas are suggested around the tooth brushing routine but you can apply them to other routines as well:

- Find a reward that your child really enjoys (e.g. chewing gum). Give the gum to your child immediately after he/she completes brushing their teeth. It is very important that this reward is immediate, especially when you begin teaching your child the routine. Try to keep a supply of the reward in the bathroom, but out of your child's reach. If your child finishes teeth brushing and you have to go to the kitchen (or another room) to get the reward, it is no longer "immediate".
- Find an interesting and motivating name for the routine. Instead of saying "It's time to brush your teeth", try saying "It's time to get ready for chewing gum!" (This will be much more motivating to your child).
- Use social stories or picture schedules to help you explain the chewing gum routine. There are many great resources available for social stories and visual schedules – contact your speech-language pathologist, your early interventionist, or your local parent resource centre for more information on them.

- Use simple language with repetitive messages that clearly describe how the child will get the gum
- Choose the goal you are working on with your child. You want your child's teeth brushed, but he/she resists tooth brushing. The first goal should be having your child's tooth brushing routine completed with the least amount of stress. This may not be the time to teach your child to brush their own teeth. You may need to do the brushing for them. The goal for independent teeth brushing can wait. Once they are completing the tooth brushing routine successfully, you can move to the next step of more independent tooth brushing.

Final Thoughts

As you think about the communication tips shared in the last 3 articles, please remember that these are general strategies. These tips are not speech-language pathology programs developed for your individual child or family member, and they should not be used in place of professional consultation. For more information on communication with children and adults who have speech and/or language difficulties, please visit the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (www.caslpa.ca), or, the American Speech & Hearing Association (www.asha.org).

This article was prepared by Julie St-Pierre, a speech-language pathologist with Atlantic Clinic for Communication Disorders, in Halifax. Julie was a respite care provider for seven years and continues to provide support to families.

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Communication Tips for Managing Unpredicted Changes in Routine

May is Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, the perfect time to talk about the power of communication and your child. In this article, we talk about ways to help people with high needs cope with surprise changes in routines.

What are unplanned transitions?

Unplanned transitions are unexpected or sudden changes in routines, like a snowstorm that cancels school or work, or a sick day at home. Feeling disappointed, sad or angry when plans change suddenly is natural, but sometimes these reactions are strong and extra support may help prevent or reduce a tantrum.

How do I prepare for unplanned transitions?

We know that ‘unplanned transitions’ are hard to plan for. Get to know what kind of change upsets your child. Think about the following:

- Is your child upset when you suddenly stop at the store to pick up milk on the way home?
- Is your child upset with school cancellations?
- Is your child upset when different people pick him/her up from preschool, recreational activities, or after school?

Now think about the things your child enjoys doing. How can you include these in talking to your child about routine? For example, think about the following activities:

- Looking through photo albums
- Looking at and talking about the calendar on the fridge or the wall
- Helping with grocery lists or holding “important” pieces of paper for you

Using things your child likes may help him or her manage a sudden change in the expected routine. Pair an enjoyable activity (e.g. making up the calendar on the fridge with pictures of people/places) with the more difficult one of having your child accept a change in routine (e.g. staying home vs. going swimming). Shifting the focus away from your child’s expectation (e.g. “swimming first, and then home”) to the routine of making up the calendar may help your child be more flexible about the change.

Now the calendar is being used to talk about changes in routines, you need to think about replacement activities, something your family member really likes to do. For some people with high needs, it is not enough to explain that a change is happening. There needs to be an

activity available that they really enjoy to help cope with the change. This creates a feeling of comfort for your child, who is learning that the calendar can be about good and fun information.

What about transitions on the go?

While the calendar (or picture schedule) can serve as a visual reminder for your child at home, what might help when you are in the car, or out in the community? Some children have a hard time keeping track of how many errands need to be done before going home. Try keeping a photo album in the car with pictures of places you visit a lot in your community (the grocery store or the library). Try using a Velcro strip with numbers or pictures of items your child likes (e.g. numbers; cats; cars). As each task is completed, your child can take off the pictures. This will help your child understand what needs to happen before going home or to another place.

These strategies can be helpful when you need to explain unplanned transitions to your child. These transitions can be challenging when your child does not enjoy a particular activity or step in the sequence of a more complex routine that has many steps (e.g. Getting Ready for School – and your child refuses to get dressed or brush their teeth).

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Sibling Support

Families are both 'strengthened and stressed' by having a family member with a disability (Marci Wheeler, M.S.W.). Strengths can be found in the excitement and joy of shared experiences, in building self-esteem in all family members and through improving life situations. Stresses can be financial or emotional as families work on finding supports and building awareness in community. Parents and siblings both struggle with understanding the disability and the effects it has on their lives and on the family.

Strengths and Stresses

Siblings tend to be more compassionate and understanding than their peers. When they are more mature and they are better prepared to think about and help others around them. Siblings can be a positive influence on their brother or sister with a disability, and can be first playmates and natural teachers for their siblings. Their positive attitude and acceptance increases the self-esteem of the child living with disability and on their own lives. However, siblings can have challenging feelings such as worry about the family member, jealousy, resentment (being left out or not receiving much attention), guilt, embarrassment about the family member and concerns for the future. These can be quite overpowering and they may need some help to deal with these feelings.

What do Siblings need?

Siblings need support and information as much as parents do, but this need is usually not considered. Siblings will have a longer term relationship with their brother/sister, and could have long-term care considerations to manage for their sibling.

Families can support siblings by:

- **Talking.** Provide information that is open, honest, ongoing, and understandable to the sibling at his/her age and stage of life. Give good information to the sibling, but give them what they are able to manage. Simple language is important for younger children. Give them small bites of information – just what they need for that time. Children may develop worries about the disability, for example that they may catch the disability or that they are the cause of it. Being honest about the disability and its characteristics will help the sibling understand and prevent anxiety.
- **Spending time with the sibling.** Be sure to give consistent attention to the sibling – try to set aside a short time each day when you do something special with the sibling. This may be 10 minutes each night before bedtime where you read a book or play a special game.
- **Celebrating successes.** Everyone likes to be noticed and appreciated. Don't forget to celebrate achievements and successes. Recognizing even a small event can mean a great deal to your child.
- **Teaching.** Help siblings to learn about their family member's disability, and the best ways to interact and support their sibling. Search for resources through:
 - professionals working with your child
 - Community Support Groups

Some organizations have lending libraries for information:

- IWK Family Resource Library <http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/childrens-health/services/#/childrens-health/services/family-resource-library> Telephone: 902-470-8351
- Autism Nova Scotia www.autismnovascotia.ca Telephone: 902-446-4995
- Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of Nova Scotia www.sbhans.ca Telephone: Toll Free (within Nova Scotia): 1-800-304-0450
- **Providing Private time.** Give siblings some choice about spending time with their brother/sister. Siblings need time for their own activities, and should not always be expected to support their brother/sister. Respect their need for private time.

Other ways to find Support

Siblings may find connecting with other siblings can be helpful. Some ways for siblings to connect and support each other are:

- **Sib group** - Although Sibling groups are helpful, and parents ask and look for them, there are essentially no sibling programs in Nova Scotia. Programs have started, but for different reasons have not continued. The Sibling Support Project www.siblingsupport.org/about/copy_of_index_html is based in Seattle, Washington. It offers curriculum in beginning a sibling workshop program in your community. For information click on www.siblingsupport.org/sibshops/want-to-start-a-sibshop . If you are an adult sibling interested in starting an adult group, click on www.siblingsupport.org/connect/connect-with-other-adult-sibs-in-your-community
- **Sibnet and SibKids** – The internet is another way to connect with siblings for support. The Sibling Support Project has two listserv groups: SibNet for adults and SibKids for youth. Click on the link to connect! www.siblingsupport.org/connect/the-sibnet-listserv . Or go to Facebook and search for Sibling support groups.

Finally, there is community support in Atlantic Canada which is special and unique. Camp Triumph is a summer camp experience children 8 – 17 who have a family member with a chronic illness or disability, but do not have a disability themselves. Campers go for a week and there is no fee for the camp. Parents are responsible for transportation to and from camp. The camp is located in Prince Edward Island. For more information, visit:

<http://www.camptriumph.ca/>.

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Self Managed Care

The Self Managed Care program is for persons with physical disabilities who want to take charge of and manage their own personal care and support needs.

The program lets people with physical disabilities be a part of making decisions about their personal care plan by becoming the manager of the care plan. The manager finds and hires staff to be care providers, and is responsible for the coordination and management of the staff and services.

This program is for someone who needs assistance with daily activities like dressing or bathing. The person must be able to take part in making decisions and arrangements about his/her care needs. They will become the manager of their care supports and work with Continuing Care (Department of Health) to make sure they get the care they need.

To be eligible for this program a person must:

- Be a resident of Nova Scotia
- Have a Nova Scotia Health Insurance Card (MSI Card)
- Be 19 years of age or older
- Need help with routine activities of daily living because of a physical disability
- Be able to fully take part in making decisions and arrangements about their own care needs
- Be able to enter into a contract with Continuing Care (Dept. of Health). Continuing Care looks after the terms and conditions of Self Managed Care
- Have Continuing Care agree that he or she is able to organize and manage the delivery of support services
- Be considered a long- term user of Self Managed care, ie., needing service for longer than 90 days
- Have assessed needs which can be met by the Self Managed Care option. If the client's needs are greater than the monthly service cost limit established by Continuing Care, they will not be covered. The client can agree to personally cover any costs which exceed the established limit.
- Have stable care requirements.

What does a Self Manager do?

- Signs an agreement with the Department of Health, Continuing Care program
- Develops a care plan, in consultation with the care coordinator
- Looks for, interviews and hires care providers
- Is prepared with a back-up plan in case a care provider is not available
- Keeps the Care Coordinator updated on care needs, such as a hospital stay which would mean an interruption of service
- Keeps a separate bank account and keeps all financial records
- Gives a complete accounting of all program funding to Continuing Care
- Notifies Care Coordinator about significant health changes within 24 hours
- Cooperates with Continuing Care on audits

Being an Employer

The self manager is expected to learn about being an employer. This would include:

- Hiring, training, supervising and terminating (firing) care providers.
- Managing work schedules and payroll
- Ensuring quality of care from care providers
- Registering with the Canadian Revenue Agency <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/menu-eng.html> and Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia http://www.wcb.ns.ca/wcbns/index_e.aspx?ArticleID=715
- Calculating payroll deductions
- Following Nova Scotia Labour Standards

Who can be hired?

There are no required qualifications for care providers. However, the policy is clear that family members cannot be hired. This would include parents, grandparents, spouses, children, siblings, in-laws, nieces or nephews.

For more information:

The Self-Managed Care policy, a Fact Sheet, and a Guide for Clients can be found at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/ccs/selfmanage.asp>. The Department of Health also offers orientation sessions for those interested in learning more about this program.

While self-managed care may not be for everyone, taking charge of one's own personal care and support service needs can increase a person's self-confidence and sense of having control over their life.

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Recreation Therapy – Putting everyone into the game!

So let's talk about recreation and how it can make respite meaningful.

We all need a break from our work. We all need a chance to rest, to relax, and to renew our body and mind. This, simply put, is *respite*.

As caregivers, what we choose to do with this free time is an important part of respite. Most of the time, respite allows us to get something else done (i.e. housework). But shouldn't this free time be something more?

Recreation is a meaningful activity that we choose to do during our free time for FUN. Don't you think that *respite* and *recreation* should go together? Together they can both help to relieve stress, restore energy, and promote balance in our lives.

Doesn't that sound nice? So why do we find it so hard to create meaningful respite? What would need to happen to change how you feel about taking that well deserved break? What if your child/youth was enjoying meaningful respite too?

Recreation can be the solution. It can turn respite into a fun opportunity that benefits everyone.

Recreation therapy can make respite better. Recreation Therapists know how to adapt recreation so that everyone can join in and have a good time. Recreation can: improve our bodies and our minds, improve friendships and prevent other health conditions. The benefits of recreation will improve the quality of your life.

A recreation therapist would ask you the following questions of your respite experiences:

- Are you or your child relaxed?
- Are you or your child learning something or trying something new?
- Are you or your child enjoying this activity?
- Are you or your child gaining new energy?

Did you answer "No" to any of the above? If so, a recreation therapist might say you may not be benefiting from your respite activity choices.

A recreation therapist would encourage you to choose *recreation* during times of respite for yourself and your child that will allow you to:

- Develop life skills.
- Gain skills that give you more choice in activities and to have more fun.
- Have a different sense of purpose.
- Feel independent and grow.
- Discover who you truly are and what you can become.
- See yourself more positively.

- Feel empowered.

If we began to view respite differently, and connect it with recreation to make it meaningful, then wouldn't you feel more in the game? Your answer might be "YES!" You might be more willing to take that bubble bath, yoga class, sport team, book club, concert event, spa day, trip for two, or summer camp, day program, art class, drama lesson, music group, etc. The recreation opportunities are endless and so too will be the respite!

To learn more about recreation therapy check out the following websites:

Therapeutic Recreation Association of Atlantic Canada

<http://www.traac.ca>

The Canadian Therapeutic Recreation Association

<http://www.canadian-tr.org>

This article was prepared by Dana Mills, a Recreation Therapist with the Pediatric Rehabilitation Service at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax. A recreation therapist works with persons with disabilities and illnesses in various clinical and community based settings.

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Preparing for the Immunization Day

Even at an early age, your child can sense your emotions, so the calmer you are, the calmer your child is likely to be. If you are anxious about the idea of an immunization, your child may also feel anxious. If you do feel nervous, try using anxiety-relieving techniques. Taking a deep breath or using muscle relaxation may help you to relax. Do you have a family member or a friend who is calm, cool and collected in any situation? Ask them to go with you. Having a calming presence with you will help everyone to feel more comfortable.

When should you tell your child about the immunization appointment? If your child is developmentally under the age of seven, it is recommended you tell them one hour before the appointment. Don't give them too much time to think about it. Children may start to worry about going for an immunization. Here are some ideas for relieving your child's anxieties, but you are the best judge for which ones might be most appropriate for your child.

- Tell your child that you or another adult will be there during the immunization.
- Talk to your child about the immunization. Explain how the immunization works. You can tell your child that the doctor or nurse is putting medicine into their body to keep him/her from getting sick and using a needle is the only way to get the medicine in there.
- Teach your children that doctors and nurses are nice, friendly people. They are working hard doing their jobs to keep children healthy.
- Honesty is the best policy. Immunizations do hurt, so you need to prepare your child for that. Let him/her know that it might hurt a little bit but it will not last too long.
- Prepare yourself with information about immunizations so you can answer any questions. Make sure to give all explanations in a way that your child can easily understand. Too much information can cause as much worry as not enough information, so think about your child's ability to understand. Use simple language to explain what will happen to your child at his/her level. Below, we provide three examples of ways to explain the immunization procedure to your child, using language at different levels. Choose the language level that will help your child to understand what is happening.
- But remember, when we are distressed, simple words are best. And when paired with photos, they create a picture/visual story to explain the procedure.
- Finally, most of us would agree that "A picture is worth a thousand words". Your child may understand better using pictures. Use photos, premade pictures or make use of your artistic soul. Even stick figures can get the point across. Use whatever works for you and your child. We have included some examples of photos/visuals below.

Pictures/Visuals

You can cut these pictures out and staple them together into a flipbook. We used Smarties[®] but it is important to use your child's favourite reward!



Nurse



Sit in Chair



Wipe Arm



Medicine



Band-aid



Treat

Here are a few ways to explain the immunization procedure to your children. Pair the words of your choice with the pictures above to make the story.

Getting my Immunization

Doctor's office/clinic (use a picture that makes sense for your child)

Toy/book (hand-drawn or web/catalogue)

Nurse

Sit down.

Wipe arm.

Medicine in arm, Count 1 2 3.

Band-aid on arm.

All done! Treat

Getting my Immunization

We are going to the Doctor.

Waiting. I will play with my toy.

Then, I will see a nice nurse.

Sit down.

Wipe arm. It's little wet but that's OK.

Medicine in arm. Count. 1, 2, 3.

Band-aid on arm.

ALL DONE!

Now treat! I did a good job!

Getting my Immunization

We are going to the Doctor.

Today, I am going to meet a nice nurse.

I might have to wait but that's OK. I will play ... or I will read

First the nurse will ask me to sit down.

Next, the nurse will ask me to lift up my sleeve.

Then she will put a little wipe on my arm.

It might be a little wet but that's OK.

The nurse will put medicine in my arm.

I might feel a little hurt but maybe not. Count 1, 2, 3, and it will be all done!

Next the nurse will put a band-aid on my arm.

ALL DONE! Now I will get my treat!

I did a good job!

Immunization Day

Consider developing a flexible plan to help make the day easier. We would like to suggest some strategies that other parents and their children have found helpful.

Waiting Strategies

- Waiting can be hard and if we can avoid it, the immunization may go more smoothly.
- Sometimes it helps the clinic to know they have a patient coming to their office with special needs so they can make your visit more comfortable. If you have an appointment, call an hour or two before the appointment to find out if the clinic is running on time. Adjust your arrival time accordingly.
- If you do have to wait, the clinic may have a quiet room where you can wait. Or you may suggest waiting in a quiet spot outside of the office and coming back when it's your turn.
- Just in case you find yourself in a busy waiting room, try to pick a spot in the room where there is less noise and movement. While some of our kids enjoy busy places and watching busy people, others will want their back to the crowd and will take comfort in the distractions you brought from home.
- Ask your child to choose a favourite toy to bring from home to play with while they are waiting (e.g., toy, iPod, book, or stuffed animal). A well-loved toy or activity can help to pass the time and reduce anxiety.
- Waiting is hard for most of us. If your child becomes impatient, it may help to have some back-up activities. Other ways that you can fill time with your child is by talking about things other than the immunization, quietly singing, listening to music, watching TV, reading a book, or blowing bubbles.

Strategies for *Before – During – After* the Immunization

- Many of us have used the *Tell-Show-Do-Reward* approach with our kids at home and school. You might want to try this approach for the immunization procedure. We are going to suggest a general strategy that you may want to adapt for your child.
- For some children, using pictures/visuals helps when going to the doctors' and during the procedure (see below for the pictures).
- Just before the injection, it might be helpful to "read" the picture/visual story about what to expect.
- During the procedure, the picture/visual story may help children to do the immunization steps. Pictures/visuals help to explain what is happening and what to expect next. These can be a series of single pictures on a strip, stapled together into a flipbook, or put on a ring to explain each step. During the procedure, the pictures will show what the present step is and flipping the picture over can be a signal that the step is done, until all the steps are completed. This helps your child understand that there is a clear beginning and ending. It is a good idea to have a special treat to give to your child when the last step is done!
- For some children, shifting their attention might work better. Tell him/her to 'blow away the hurt' – blow really hard just before the injection. Concentrating on blowing may keep him/her from thinking about the pain.
- Offer some comfort by speaking to your child in a calm, low voice, or by sitting next to or holding him/her in your lap during the injection.

- Sit beside your child on the side opposite to the injection site and have your child squeeze your hand as hard as the pain of the needle is. This can give your child another choice to crying.
- Let your child watch the needle if they want to. If they prefer not to watch, you can be the eyes to let the child know what is happening and when it will be over.
- Your child may cry following the needle prick as a way of coping with the experience. Comfort and calm your child before you leave the office or clinic. If possible, try not to leave while your child is crying, as he/she may learn that the doctor's office is a bad place and that crying will help to make a quick escape.
- Give your child a positive end to the experience. Praise him or her for doing well, and plan to do something special and fun with him/her after the appointment.
- Don't forget to reward yourself!
- On the other hand, we know what it is like to go through this procedure with our kids with special needs. Sometimes just rustling up the courage to take our children for an immunization, and getting it done, is all we can do. That's why we have written this article for you, to hopefully make it a little easier!

Information on the Web about Immunization

<http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/article.php?id=194>

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Planes, Trains, and Ferries... Traveling and Disabilities

Traveling with a child or adult with special needs can sometimes be a challenging experience. Did you know that different companies such as Air Canada, Bay Ferries, and VIA Rail have tried to make travelling easier, safer, and more accessible for your family and you?

Air Canada, Via Rail and Bay Ferries, along with other agencies recognize that not all their customers have the same needs. In order to provide their customers with comfortable, easygoing and economical travel they offer different supports and services for clients who need accommodations such as an escort, a service animal, or an extra seat. They also provide storage for mobility aids while travelling.

Did you know...?

Air Canada

Air Canada provides an on-board wheelchair to help their clients move around the airplane and allows certified, professionally trained service animals to be carried free of charge. Air Canada also allows personal attendants for individuals who can't travel independently, to fly free (except for related taxes) within Canada.

For more information on Air Canada's services and eligibility, please see: www.aircanada.com

VIA Rail

VIA Rail Canada provides services to help you board and get off the train and allows escorts to travel free in the same class. All VIA trains are accessible to travelers in wheelchairs and are equipped with wheelchair tie-downs, narrow wheelchairs, tools to reduce the width of certain manual wheelchairs, and grab bars in washrooms.

VIA Rail also provides free travel in the summer for children under the age of 11, when accompanied by an individual over the age of 18.

For more information on VIA Rail's services and eligibility, please see: www.viarail.ca

Bay Ferries

Bay Ferries provides attendants to travel at no charge if a disabled person is unable to travel alone. Please note this is for the Princess of Acadia service between Saint John NB and Digby, Nova Scotia.

Nova Star Cruises

Nova Star Cruises offers wheelchair accessible cabins. These cabins provide extra space including a large bathroom with a roll-in shower and a shower seat. The adaptations made to the cabin allow for space and comfort. The cabin sleeps 4 adults.

For more information and pricing, visit: <http://novastarcruises.com/>

Disability Travel Card Program

The Disability Travel Card™ is available for someone with a permanent disability who needs to travel with a support person. The Disability Travel card lets the support person who is accompanying the person with a disability to travel at no cost or for a greatly discounted fee. This is a national program sponsored by Easter Seals Canada and is managed by the Abilities Foundation of Nova Scotia for the Province of Nova Scotia. For more information please see: <http://easterseals.ca/english/disability-travel-card>.

Websites that may be of interest

The following websites are about accessible travel for persons with disabilities.

www.accesstotravel.gc.ca. Access to Travel is a special needs information resource developed by the Government of Canada. It provides information on accessible transportation and travel across Canada with the aim of making traveling an easier and more enjoyable experience for Canadians with disabilities.

www.disabledtravelers.com a resource on disabled travel information.

<http://www.keroul.qc.ca/en/travel-links/> a site from Quebec dedicated to tourism and culture for people with restricted physical ability

<http://www.guidedtours.com/?gclid=> A professionally supervised travel and vacation program in the United States for persons with developmental and physical challenges. Travel options for all over the world

www.iser.com/disabled-travel.html a listing of US Government and International sites on Travel for Disabled persons

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Disabled Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) for Persons with Disabilities

What is RRAP?

The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) is a program to help homeowners make changes to a home in order to accommodate a person with a disability. The changes usually make it easier for the person to move throughout their home because the home has been made more accessible.

This program is funded by both the Government of Canada (75%) and the Province of Nova Scotia (25%).

How can I use RRAP?

RRAP can be used to change parts of the home so it can meet the needs of the person with a disability. The changes or modifications must be made to the house and must be related to the person's disability. Some examples of modifications are:

- changing the height of countertops
- building ramps
- adding handrails
- installing special cues for doorbells
- installing chair or bath lifts.

Modifications that would **not** be covered include:

- purchasing walkers or wheelchairs.
- therapeutic care

How much is the funding?

In Nova Scotia, the maximum loan forgiveness amount is \$16,000. If the modifications cost more, the homeowner is responsible to pay the difference. ***Any work started before the RRAP loan is approved in writing will not be covered by this funding.*** *This program is income tested and is based on the total family income. They do allow the Disability Tax Credit to be deducted from the total family income when deciding if the family qualifies.*

How do I apply?

Contact your nearest Housing Services office of the Department of Community Services <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/department/contact/HousingServicesOffices.html> or call 1-877-424-1177. If you are a possible candidate for the program, you will be sent an application to complete.

The Department will use the application and their conversations with you to determine if your family qualifies for the program.

Once you qualify, an inspector will come to your home to look at the changes you would like to make. Sometimes a professional may be asked to consult, for example an Occupational Therapist might be asked to suggest or comment on changes to make the home more

accessible for the individual with disabilities. Once the plan for changes is developed, two contractors are asked to bid. The lowest bidder is awarded the contract. The homeowner is given the name of the successful contractor and arranges for the work to be done.

When the work is completed, Community Services issues a cheque made out to both the homeowner and the contractor. The cheque is sent to the homeowner, to be given to the contractor. This prevents the homeowner having to pay the bill from personal funds and then having to wait for a claim to be processed.

The work must be completed and the minimum standards for health and safety must be met in order to receive the RRAP-D funding. The funding is a fully forgivable loan which does not have to be repaid if the terms and conditions of the program are met. Homeowners must agree to continue to own the home during the loan forgiveness period, which could be up to five years.

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Disability Tax Credit

The disability amount, also known as the Disability Tax Credit, is used to reduce the amount of income tax you pay.

The Disability Tax Credit is useful for families who have a dependent with a disability or for a person who has a disability.

By reading this article you will know if you or a family member should consider claiming this credit and how to claim it.

In order to claim this credit you must show that:

- the condition has existed for at least 12 months;
- there must be an impact on the Activities of Daily Living such as eating, bathing, dressing, getting around, etc.

This federal government website <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/cdb/index.html> has a series of questions to help you decide if you should consider claiming the credit for yourself or your family member.

You must apply for the credit by filling out a form called the T2201 (Disability Tax Credit Certificate). Then you take the completed form to a health care professional who can verify the disability, such as a doctor, occupational therapist, etc. This website <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/ndvdl/tpcs/ncm-tx/rtrn/cmpltng/ddctns/lns300-350/316/pply-eng.html> explains which health care professional's signature is required for each type of disability.

You must send the completed T2201 Form to your local tax centre.

This can be done at any time of the year. In fact, you can make a claim for past years by asking for an adjustment to your tax return.

If the claim is approved, a credit of up to \$ 7,196 (2009 taxation year) can be used to reduce taxable income. For example, if you apply for the 2009 tax year your credit can be up to \$7,196 if your claim is approved.

For more information go to <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/ndvdl/tpcs/ncm-tx/rtrn/cmpltng/ddctns/lns300-350/316/menu-eng.html>. This is a discussion of Line 316 (Disability Amount).

The Canada Revenue Agency is also issuing weekly tax tips to specific groups. Click here: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/nwsrm/txtps/2010/tt100223-eng.html> to read tips important to families. There are some tips there which will be helpful to families who have children with disabilities.

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Choosing a Summer Camp Program

You have decided that a summer camp program is best for your child this summer. There may be several options open to you i.e. a local community/recreation day camp, a disorder specific special needs camp, or a sleep away camp outside of your community. What are the pros and cons of each?

Community Camp

Pros:

- Chance for your child to meet 'typical' peers in a relaxed setting
- Usually close to home
- Your child with special needs and his/her siblings could attend the same camp
- Your child becomes better known in your community

Cons:

- Concerns about accessibility and appropriateness of equipment, location and activities
- Camp staff may not have the right skills or training to support your child as well as needed
- Potential for teasing is there if the staff are not trained in inclusion and your child's disability
- Your child may be ignored, neglected or under stimulated

Special Needs Camp (sleep away or day camp)

Pros:

- Program, materials and environment are geared to your child's special needs.
- Child can meet and play with peers living with similar challenges
- Parents have a chance to meet and network with other parents of special needs children
- Staff will be trained to work with your child and his/her special needs

Cons

- Camp may not be in your community so you may have to travel
- Camp fees are usually more expensive
- Lack of experience in counselors can be challenging to the program

Explore your options early as many camps fill up quickly. Once you have looked for and found a promising program, you will need to ask some questions to be certain this is a good fit for your family member.

Questions to ask before making a final decision:

1. What is the camp philosophy? Is it a recreation program or is there learning/therapy for your child involved?
2. What is the inclusion policy?
3. What is the educational background of the director and staff? Do they have special needs training and experience?

4. What is the daily schedule?
5. What is the adult-child ratio? If my child needs one on one support, can that be provided? If the camp cannot provide it, could I provide a worker? Would the camp pay for a worker I provide or am I expected to pay the worker directly?
6. Is lunch provided or does my child bring his/her own? Is there a refrigerator and stove available for campers' meals? How is mealtime supervision handled?
7. Do staff members have lifeguard skills? What rules are there around swimming?
8. My child needs to have medication during the day. How are medications stored? What is the plan for giving my child his medications?
9. How long are the camp sessions?
10. What is the cost? Are there any financial aid programs to help with fees? Can my child try camp for a week or do you have to sign up for entire session?
11. What is the camper age range?
12. What age are the counselors? What training do they receive?
13. What is the turnover rate of staff and campers? A 50% return rate is ok – higher return rates are considered to be better.
14. Is the camp location accessible?
15. Who has first aid training?
16. How are behavioural problems handled? What training is given to staff?
17. Is the camp equipped to handle your child's special needs?
18. What are the camp hours? Are there extended hours?

There may be more questions you can think of to ask. Be sure to write down all your questions and don't be afraid to ask them. You know your child and you are his or her's best advocate. In order to have a positive camp experience it is important to be honest with the camp staff about your child and his/her needs. If the staff fully understands the needs, they can tell you if they are able and equipped to include your child in the program.

Finally, you have your child registered in a program and beginning day is here. Pack up the backpack; send any treats and equipment needed for the day. Although you and your child may feel anxious about starting at camp, it is best to say good bye with a smile and a wave. If you seem calm and happy, your child will feel more reassured about the experience.

Happy Camping!

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Child Disability Benefit

The Child Disability Benefit is of interest for families who have a dependent under age 18 who is disabled.

The Child Disability Benefit (CDB) is a tax-free benefit for families who care for a child with a disability under the age of 18. For example, for the 2009 taxation year the benefit is up to \$2,455 per year (up to \$204.58 per month). This website http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/cdb_pymnt08-eng.html gives more information on benefit amounts.

By reading this article you will know if you should consider this benefit for a family member and how to apply for it.

In order to claim this credit you must show that:

- the condition has existed for at least 12 months;
- there must be an impact on the Activities of Daily Living such as eating, bathing, dressing, getting around, etc.

This federal government website <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/dsblty-eng.html> has a series of questions to help you decide if you should consider claiming the credit for your family member.

You must apply for the credit by filling out a form called the T2201 (Disability Tax Credit Certificate) <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/t2201/README.html> . Then you take the completed form to a health care professional who can verify the disability, such as a doctor, occupational therapist, etc.

This website <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/ndvdl/tpcs/ncm-tx/rtrn/cmpltng/ddctns/lns300-350/316/pply-eng.html> explains which health care professional's signature is required for each type of disability. You must send the completed T2201 Form to your local tax centre. This can be done at any time of the year. In fact, you can make a claim for past years by asking for an adjustment to your tax return.

The exact amount of the Child Disability Benefit will be different for each family. It is calculated based on the family income. The monthly amount is added to the amount you receive for the Canada Child Tax Benefit.

For more information go to this link on the Canada Revenue Agency website.

The Canada Revenue Agency tax tip for Feb. 9 2010 focused on persons with a disability. To read these tips, click on <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/nwsrm/txtps/2010/tt100209-eng.html> .

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