

Reasonable adjustments are the changes that are made to a child's school life, so that they're not at a disadvantage compared to others. In reality, it's much of the support that is put in place to help your child achieve their best.

The term reasonable adjustments is often used in a quite general way to apply to all children with SEND. But in law, it's specifically about the changes made to support a disabled child. Having said that, the term disability is quite a broad one (see the section below) and many children and young people who have special educational needs have a disability too.

Reasonable adjustments come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, depending on a child's needs. They include making changes to things like uniform and behaviour policy to meet the needs of a child, as well as the kind of support offered day-to-day in school.

### What does the law say about reasonable adjustments?

Many children and young people who have special educational needs may have a disability too.

The Equality Act 2010 says that someone has a disability if they have:

'A physical or mental impairment, which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities'.

Long-term means it's lasted a year or more. Substantial means it's not minor or trivial. For example, it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a task like getting dressed.

Disabilities include:

- hearing and sight impairments
- long-term physical or mental health conditions such as asthma, epilepsy, anxiety and depression
- conditions that change, so sometimes symptoms are minor and at other times they're more severe, such as rheumatoid arthritis, ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- conditions that affect development, such as autistic spectrum condition (ASC)
- learning disabilities
- brain injuries

The Equality Act 2010 also sets out the legal duties that schools, early years providers, colleges and local authorities and others have towards disabled children and young people. These include eliminating discrimination and making sure that children with a disability have the same opportunities as those who do not.

It includes a duty about reasonable adjustments:

"They must make **reasonable adjustments**, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services, to ensure that disabled children and young people are not at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers. This duty is anticipatory – it requires thought to be given in advance to what disabled children and young people might require and what adjustments might need to be made to prevent that disadvantage."

There are three parts to the legal duty to make reasonable adjustments. That means a school, other education provider or the local authority must make adjustments in all three of these areas if needed.

- **Provision, criteria and practices.**

This is about the way a school operates on a daily basis, including their decisions and actions. The school uniform policy would fall within this part, for example. So, a school would need to make adjustments for pupils with an allergy to synthetic materials who need to wear cotton clothing.

- **Auxiliary aids and services.** This is any extra support or help for a disabled pupil, such as a piece of equipment or support from a member of staff. It would include things such as coloured overlays, pen grips, adapted PE equipment and computer software.

- **Physical features.** This is the physical make-up of the buildings. Schools must make their buildings accessible for disabled pupils as part of their overall planning duties.

### Important things to know

Reasonable adjustments aren't just for children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Children and young people with SEND who are getting SEN support should have reasonable adjustments made for them too.

A child does not need to have a diagnosis for reasonable adjustments to be made. Changes made in nursery, school and college should be based on the needs of each individual.

Making reasonable adjustments is a great way for a child, their parents and staff to work together to find solutions that really work. Talk to school staff about what works well at home – for example, what comforts your child and helps them to calm down. So, offering a soft toy to cuddle or a chance to step out of class for a hot chocolate when things aren't going well can show a child that they're understood.

The legal duty to make reasonable adjustments means a school should take positive steps to make sure that disabled pupils can:

- take part fully in education
- enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services that the school provides for pupils, including school trips

Many reasonable adjustments cost little or nothing and instead mean a change in practice rather than expensive pieces of equipment or extra staff.

Making changes to support at school is more likely to work if it's going at a pace your child can manage. Often, going slowly and being successful with one adjustment before moving to the next works best. If things go wrong, it's a smaller step to go back and start again from when it worked.

A school's duty to make reasonable adjustments is an anticipatory one. Anticipatory means that schools need to think in advance about what a disabled child might need, and what changes may need to be made for them.

In making decisions about reasonable adjustments, the best place to start is with the child or young person themselves. They are the expert in their own needs (alongside their parents, for many). By listening to what your child is saying and checking in with them to see you have understood, you may well be able to come up with creative solutions that aren't on any checklist.

Every child and young person are different and what works for one may not work for another. This might sound obvious, but sometimes when checklists and policies are drawn up and used, this can get lost.

Though it may not always be practically possible to do what a child or young person feels is right for them, it's important for them to know **why** it's not possible. This helps them feel listened to and understood, even if they are disappointed with how things turn out.

### What does reasonable mean?

'Reasonable' isn't defined in law. So, there is no clear line that says what would be considered reasonable and what wouldn't. What it comes down to is individually deciding whether something is reasonable for a school or local authority to do, or not.

For small things, that's unlikely to be an issue. Things like using a laptop to record work or having a quiet

place to go during break are straightforward. For bigger or more costly adjustments, some discussion will be needed. Schools and local authorities can say no. Where a school or local authority decides that there are no reasonable steps that it can take, it should say why.

It's not possible to say what would be reasonable in any specific situation, but there are some factors that will be thought about when any major decision is made. These include:

- the resources of the school
- if the adjustment was made, how much difference would it make to the child
- how practical it is to make the adjustment
- health and safety requirements
- how the adjustment might affect other pupils
- the financial and other costs of making the adjustment



Sometimes a parent or child's idea of what seems like a reasonable adjustment can be very different from what school staff think is reasonable. This kind of misunderstanding is common, so it's a good idea to keep review things and try and keep the discussions positive and constructive. If you find you are coming from two very different points of view, try and work to find a middle ground, or ask if something can be tried for a while to see if it works.

## Starting with your child's views

For reasonable adjustments to work well, they should be child-led. That means, whenever possible, your child or young person should be involved in helping to decide what support and changes are needed.

We know from what children and young people have told us, that putting into action what has been discussed and agreed is vitally important. Where things aren't followed through it's easy for trust to breakdown.

This is what children and young people have told us:

- Understand and hear what I am saying, and what I am not saying. Don't dismiss my views, instead make them the focus.

- Be flexible to meet my needs. Before you say no to something, really think about why something isn't possible. Just because it hasn't been done before, doesn't mean it's not possible!
- Be aware of my sensory needs. Nurseries, schools and colleges are often full of sensory stimuli, such as bright lights, noisy busy corridors, raised voices, lots of colourful work pinned to walls and the smell of the dining hall. Understanding these can often help explain behaviour and triggers.
- Agree adjustments with me and my parent or carer – have a good discussion and really listen to what we're saying.

## Examples of reasonable adjustments



Many of these are real-life examples of reasonable adjustments that nurseries, schools and colleges have made, and which parents have shared with us. Others are ideas that have come directly from children and young people themselves.

They can give you a starting point for a discussion with your child and with school staff. They won't be suitable for every child.

Please remember, it's not an exhaustive list. There is lots of room for creativity and of course the changes that need to be made for any child are led by their individual needs. If you have examples of reasonable adjustments that worked well for your child – please tell us so that we can share!

## General Adjustments

- Have a "safe space" I can go to in school. It may not be where you think, so ask me what I think. I may not feel safe or able to calm down in the "learning support centre."
- Have a "safe person" who understands me. Who this is needs to be my choice - it may not be who you suggest. I might need time and help to build this relationship, and you may need to help me work out when and where I can get support.
- Make sure that all of the staff who need to know are aware of the adjustments I need, even if they

don't teach me. One unknown teacher not giving the right support could really throw me.

- Let me get to know my teachers and spend positive time with them. Relationships are really important to me.
- Make my plan with me, not for me. I know myself best, along with my parents or carers.
- I want you to know me and know what my strengths are. This is different to the things you do to help me learn. This is about me as a person.

### Am I learning?

We all have 'bad' days when we find it more difficult to stay emotionally in control and calm. Sometimes I may not always get things right or know what I should be doing.

But if I am learning and not stopping others from learning, do some of the smaller things matter?

For example:

- Using the "wrong" coloured pen but doing the work. Does it really matter...?
- I am sat "funny" on my chair but contributing to the lesson. Does it affect anyone else...?
- Can you remind me to tuck in my shirt, rather than make me skip my breaktime, which I need to help me feel good?
- Sometimes I need to move or use a fidget toy. If I'm not disturbing others, does that matter?

### Moving on (Transition)

Starting a new school or returning after an absence can be a real challenge. I may need time to adjust to new routines. Go at my pace.

Some suggestions:

- Let me use the staff entrance or a quieter entrance.
- Can I chill out in a quiet space to mentally prepare for my lessons, rather than go to registration?
- Don't make me go to assemblies.
- I may not want to do sports days/PSHE days/enrichment activities or find it hard to take part. Ask me about what's difficult.
- Use visual timetables and something that shows me what is happening now and what is coming next.
- Give me step by step instructions.

- Reduce my timetable so that I can cope.
- Allow things to be changed and adapted when I have not been in school for a while. I may need to build back up to the successes I was achieving before, and that could take some time. Go at my pace to help me succeed.

### Uniform

Let me be comfortable if it means I can learn.

Clothes can affect my sensory needs and how I'm feeling. Some materials and items of clothing can give me comfort and reassurance. The weight, how they feel and how they let me move can be really important to how I feel. Some materials and clothing can cause me such discomfort they distract from everything else. Have you ever turned down your radio to help you concentrate on driving?

Some suggestions:

- no tie/different tie/loosely tied (so I don't feel strangled)
- top button undone (so I'm not being restricted)
- permanent knot in a tie (so I don't have to undo it)
- no scratchy jumpers (so it doesn't feel like sandpaper)
- no rigid blazers (so I feel like I can move)
- scarf (so I feel a sense of comfort)
- hood (so I can hide)
- comfortable shoes (so I feel I can move)
- no shoes or let me take off my shoes in class (so I feel grounded)
- trousers for girls
- shorts for boys (so I can control my temperature)
- polo shirt and tracksuit bottoms rather than shirt and trousers (so I feel comfortable)
- nothing fiddly like laces or buttons (so I can get dressed by myself after PE)
- nothing tight on me (so I don't feel trapped)

### Learning Environment

Help me feel safe and emotionally in control so I can learn. Classrooms are busy places full of sensory stimulation. Some sensory things can be overwhelming so talk to me about what I think helps me learn best.

Some suggestions:

- Access to natural light and fresh air.
- Think about my sensory needs – smells, sounds, lighting - don't make the environment really overwhelming for me.
- Think about the temperature - I might be sensitive to being too hot or too cold.
- Talk to me about the best place to sit so I can learn best. It might be by a window, near the door, at the back so I can see what is going on. If you know what works best for me, you're more likely to understand my request.
- It might be helpful for me to sit square on to the whiteboard.
- It might be helpful for me to have a different chair or sit "differently."
- Let me wear headphones to listen to calming music and reduce background noise. Sometimes music is more calming than ear defenders.

### Learning Strategies

Help me be confident in my abilities. If I'm constantly feeling anxious or am always on the alert for threats because I'm not sure what to expect, I won't be able to learn.

Some suggestions:

- Let me use a fidget toy or a comfort object.
- Don't ask me to speak in front of people.
- Keep the PowerPoint layout predictable and give me a printout.
- Don't make me show an exit card, just let me leave without questions and attention.
- Don't ask me to read out my mark or test results.
- Don't rank me against other children in my class or compare me to others.
- Let me use my phone at specific times to call my parent as it can help me stay calm and emotionally in control.
- Allow me to have flexible deadlines or deadline extensions when it's possible.
- Change assignments to suit my strengths – I may produce my best work on my own, rather than as part of a team.
- Give me brain or movement breaks.

### Exam Support

Set me up for success so I can do the best I can. Please talk to me about what I think could help me. Before

GCSE's and other national exams let me practise the arrangements in mocks or end of year school exams. That way I'll get to know what works best for me, and I'll be prepared. This might help me perform better.

Some suggestions:

- let me choose the type of clock – digital or analogue
- in quiet areas I can hear more, so let me wear earplugs
- give me a separate room by myself or with very few people
- let me see the room set up so I can know what to expect.
- let me meet the invigilator, so that they are a familiar person
- schedule my exams with lots of rest between them (where possible)
- let me chew on something or have a fiddle toy to help me concentrate
- let me leave when I am done or take a break in longer exams

### Need more information?

#### SEND Code of Practice

Legal guidance around special educational needs  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25)

#### Devon SEND Local Offer

SEND services and support available in Devon  
[www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send-local-offer](http://www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send-local-offer)

#### Contact

Information and support for families with disabled children  
[contact.org.uk](http://contact.org.uk)

#### IPSEA (Independent Providers of Special Educational Advice)

Information about the law and SEND  
[www.ipsea.org.uk](http://www.ipsea.org.uk)

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