

Principle 5: Make flexibility and access part of your programme design





OFFER REALISTIC
OPTIONS OVER
WHERE, WHEN & HOW
YOUNG PEOPLE
PARTICIPATE

MAKE FLEXIBILITY & ACCESS PART OF YOUR PROGRAMME DESIGN

LEADERSHIP
IS BUILT
OVER TIME



CHOICES ABOUT

LEVEL OF
VISIBILITY



SENSORY
DEMANDS



COMMUNICATION



PACE OF
LEARNING



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Why this matters

Young people are more likely to take part and stay involved when they know what to expect and have realistic choices about how they join in.

Flexibility and accessibility should be built into the programme from the start.

Young people should not have to ask for “special” changes, disclose personal information, or wait until something goes wrong before support is offered.

This means making information clear, offering different ways to participate, and creating predictable routines that still allow young people to move at their own pace.

“I need to know what’s coming so I can prepare myself, but I also might need adaptations to make it work for me”



What this can look like in practice



If you notice:

Try:

Young people suggest they have anxiety before coming to sessions

Send clear “what to expect information” in advance. Include who will be there, where to go, what to bring, what it will cost, and what the session will involve

Young people felt unsure how they can take part

Offer a small number of clear participation options, such as observing to learn, joining in slowly and gradually, working with a partner, taking breaks when needed, or helping out with smaller tasks.

Young people seem overwhelmed by instructions and information

Keep communication short, clear and jargon-free. Use simple steps, examples, reminders and visual prompts where helpful.

Adjustments are only made once a problem happens

Plan common adjustments in advance and make them available to everyone as part of the programme design.

Principle 5: Offer flexibility and accessibility by default

What you can do to build flexibility and accessibility in from the start

- Send clear “what to expect” information before sessions, especially before the first session or after a break.
- Include practical details such as time, place, cost, travel, access routes, kit, food, and who to contact.
- Offer a small number of meaningful choices, rather than too many options.
- Build in different ways to take part, such as observing first, working in pairs, taking breaks, helping behind the scenes, or choosing a lower-pressure role.
- Keep routines consistent so young people know what to expect.
- Use clear communication, short instructions, examples, reminders, and visual prompts where helpful.
- Make accessibility available to everyone, not something that feels exceptional.
- Record useful adjustments so staff can be consistent.
- Use communication routes that work for the young people you are supporting.



Signs it's working

Young people know what to expect and are able to plan for each session

Young people use different ways to take part without feeling shame

Different routes to participation feel normal

Fewer young people drop out because of avoidable uncertainty, sensory overload, or practical barriers

Communication is short and easy to understand

Staff use planned options and recorded adjustments, rather than improvising under pressure

