

# Supports in the Community

Created for mothers by Helen Bourke-Taylor PhD©



Research with mothers of children with a disability shows that supports around the mother, child and family in the community, and positive experiences outside the home, reduces family stress and increases a sense of belonging. Support and positive experiences in the community are an important part of daily and weekly life.



Some parents say that it can be difficult to go out into the community. Mothers describe discomfort when faced with poor community attitudes. Sometimes, well-meaning people may make awkward suggestions or comments. Consequently, some families avoid leaving the home or going to community events unless they feel confident about the people around them.



## *What does a supportive community or environment look like?*

- acts of kindness from others to assist you and your family (for example, holding open doors for wheelchair access, or people who understand boundaries about what to say and do around different people)
- others in the community actively supporting you and your family's inclusion in activities
- environments where you can go out with your family and feel comfortable and welcome
- physical buildings or places that are accessible to anyone.

## *So what can I do?*

There are many things you can do to increase you and your family's community participation:

- Get to know your community.
- Consider what supports may help your child to be involved.
- Make plans as a family to determine what activities you would like to do.
- Schedule a time and day of the week to explore the activity, plan what will be necessary to attend and prepare your family.
- Invite others to meet you if you wish. Over time, you may build a positive network of like-minded families or friends who you trust to enjoy community events.
- Consider paid and unpaid supports to help you and your family in the community.



Destinations such as shops or libraries may become more accessible. Being involved in the community has the added benefit of creating the same expectation for your child: that the community is a place for everyone to belong. Preparing your child to become as independent as possible in the community is an important endeavour from a young age.

It is important to remember that the overwhelming majority of people value diversity and difference in the community. Most people want to know how to help and include your child. They are just unsure how to. If negative incidents occur, talk to your supports and find ways to manage these incidents. Humour can be a useful shield from what might otherwise be harmful comments and attitudes. Your family is an important part of the community. Be involved in your community.

**Being involved and present in the community may benefit every member of the family and contribute to family well-being.**

Visit our website at <http://www.healthymothers-healthyfamilies.com/> for references and more information.

If this fact sheet has raised any concerns, please seek medical advice from your local GP. Alternatively, please call LifeLine on 13 11 14 or Carers Australia, who can provide short-term counselling and emotional support for carers and families, on 1800 242 636.