

**activity
alliance**

**disability
inclusion
sport**

Play, move, belong:

Active futures
for young
disabled people
research report

November 2025

Survey research by
Activity Alliance and
supporting partners:
Sport England, Access Sport,
Loughborough University,
Paralympics GB,
Youth Sport Trust.



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Key findings

Activity levels

During a normal week when young people are in school:

- Young disabled people are more likely to be 'less active' than their non-disabled peers (43% vs 32%).
- Only 3% meet the Chief Medical Officers' recommended 60 minutes of daily activity.

As young disabled people get older, inactivity levels get bigger:

- However, the gap in activity levels between young disabled and non-disabled people aged five to eight (39% vs 26%) remain similar when aged 14-16 (52% vs 36%).

Attitudes and experience of playing sport and being active

Intersectional differences highlight inequalities across how young disabled people experience sport and activity.

- Disabled girls, young people with multiple impairments, those aged 14-16 and young disabled people in lower social grades are least likely to feel that sport is 'for them'.
- Only half of young disabled people agree that they find sport and activity easy compared to three quarters of young non-disabled people (50% vs 76%).
 - Young people with a physical impairment or multiple impairments report it is not easy to be active.
- Disabled girls are three times more likely to say they do not feel confident when being active compared to their non-disabled peers (24% vs 8%).

At school, young disabled people are less likely to take part:

- Only a quarter (26%) of young disabled people say they can take part in sport and activity at school all of the time, compared to 38% of young non-disabled people.
 - Disabled girls (24%), young disabled people aged 14 -16 (22%) and young people with mental health problems (19%) are least likely to say they can be active all the time at school.

Over half of young disabled people with visual (56%) or multiple (54%) impairments want to be more active:

- Half of parents with a disabled child want them to be more active (55% vs 37%).
- Parents of Black young disabled people want their child to be more active.

The majority of young disabled and non-disabled people say they like or love being active (85% vs 95%):

- Staying healthy (45% vs 55%), having fun (44% vs 57%) and building confidence (37% vs 39%) are the key motivations for young disabled people to be active.

Barriers to participation

Young disabled people are more likely to experience barriers to being active than young non-disabled people. These include:

- Lack of confidence (43% vs 18%)
- Not feeling comfortable (31% vs 10%)
- Not wanting to go on their own (27% vs 15%)
- Feeling like they won't belong (24% vs 5%)
- And their impairment (22%)
 - Young people with physical (44%) or multiple impairments (42%) are most likely to highlight this barrier to being active.

Whilst most young people state they are happy, young disabled people are most likely to say they are 'less happy' (12% vs 5%).

- Young people with mental health problems (26%) or multiple impairments (22%) are most likely to say they are 'less happy'.
 - Young disabled people are also more likely to say they felt lonely some of the time (57% vs 36%) or often (9% vs 2%) than their non-disabled peers.

Preferences and inclusion

Young disabled people prefer quiet, fun, and outdoor activities with others.

- 49% of young disabled people prefer inclusive activities with both disabled and non-disabled peers compared to 58% of young non-disabled people.
- But 17% prefer activities with similar impairments – highlighting the need for tailored inclusion.

Young disabled and non-disabled people say school is the place they prefer to be active (64% vs 63%).

- Away from school, young people prefer to be active outdoors in spaces such as the park, seaside or street (43% vs 46%).
- Or at home (40% vs 39%).

Both young disabled and young non-disabled people highlight they would like to do more activity at the park, leisure centre, friend's house or at home in their street.

- Young non-disabled people are more likely to want to do more PE at school than young disabled people (73% vs 59%).
 - Only half of disabled girls want to do more PE at school compared to two thirds of disabled boys (50% vs 65%).

Support to help young people be more active

Parents and caregivers of young disabled people are most likely to report needing support to improve their child's physical and mental health (46% vs 26%). In addition, parents of young disabled people highlight the need for:

- Support for their child to get to facilities (38% vs 29%).
- Greater awareness of suitable activities (38% vs 33%).
- Sport and activity staff to have greater disability awareness (29% vs 8%).
- And teachers at school having better disability awareness (24% vs 5%).

Introduction and background

A vision for inclusion

Activity Alliance's vision is a future where all disabled people feel they belong in sports and activities¹. Central to this vision is ensuring that every young disabled person grows up with a positive experience of being active, where they can move, connect, think and feel in unique ways that work for them.

Collaborative action

This report explores the lived experiences of young disabled and non-disabled people, and their parents and caregivers, in relation to sport and physical activity. The research on which it is based is supported by a consortium of partners: Activity Alliance, Sport England, Youth Sport Trust, Access Sport, Paralympics GB and Loughborough University. The insights from the research form the foundation for a three-year programme, beginning in October 2025, exploring experiences of physical activity and sports participation of young disabled people, and how to tackle inequalities.

Rising prevalence of disability

The prevalence of disability among young people is increasing. Latest national insight shows that 12% of children in the UK are considered disabled under the Equality Act (2010)^{2,3} – a rise from 7% ten years ago. More than half of these children (59%) report social or behavioural impairments, while almost a third (29%) live with mental health-related conditions (Table 1). Part of the rise in disability prevalence is strongly linked to the increase in 'probable mental health disorders', now affecting one in five young people aged 8-25^{4,5}. For young people, this increase in prevalence particularly linked to mental health and social/behavioural difficulties may further deepen inequalities across education, social development and health outcomes.

¹ Activity Alliance, [Our Strategy](#). 2024

² see Disability definition [Appendix 2](#)

³ [Family Resources Survey](#), Department for Work and Pensions. 2025

⁴ [Family Resources Survey](#), Department for Work and Pensions. 2025

⁵ [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England](#), NHS England. 2023

Table 1: Proportion of impairment types reported by disabled children.

Impairment type	Percentage of disabled children reporting each type of impairment
Social/behavioural	59%
Learning	32%
Mental health	29%
Mobility	18%
Stamina/breathing/fatigue	17%
Other	13%
Memory	10%
Dexterity	9%
Vision	8%
Hearing	7%

Disabled children and young people's wellbeing

Young disabled people are more than three times as likely to experience loneliness as their non-disabled peers (28% vs 6%)⁶, and report lower levels of happiness, worthwhileness and life satisfaction⁷. Intersectionality also plays an important part in mental health and wellbeing⁸. Young disabled people who also hold another characteristic linked to inequality (e.g. they are female, Black, or from a less affluent background) experience poorer wellbeing and less positive attitudes to life. Young people with multiple characteristics of inequality also experience fewer positive attitudes than young people with none or one characteristic⁹.

⁶ [Disability and loneliness](#), Office for National Statistics. 2022

⁷ [Disability and well-being](#), Office for National Statistics. 2022

⁸ Intersectionality recognises that people belong to more than one identity category (e.g. gender, age, disability) and considers how the combination of a person's identity characteristics interact, leading to different levels of privilege or discrimination for different people

⁹ [Sport England Active Lives Online](#) Tool, Sport England.

The role of physical activity on health and wellbeing

Being active is one of the most effective ways to improve health and wellbeing¹⁰. National physical activity guidelines highlight how regular activity benefits physical, social and mental health outcomes for young people, including those who are disabled. Sport England's Active Lives data shows that higher levels of engagement in sport and activity are associated with improved mental wellbeing, individual development, and stronger community connections¹¹. In particular, building positive early experiences of activity supports the development of motivation, confidence and competence – key foundations of physical literacy¹². Young disabled people engaging in sport and physical activity across a range of school and community settings are likely to have better physical and mental health, social wellbeing and school outcomes¹³. Supporting young people, especially young disabled people, to be more physically active is one way of supporting them to improve their physical, social and mental wellbeing.

According to the Chief Medical Officer, to access these health benefits, young people aged 5 to 18 should aim for an average of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day¹⁴. Doing so would class them as 'active' whereas those who do less than 30 minutes per day of activity would class them as 'less active'. Those completing an average of 30 to 59 minutes per day would be 'fairly active'.

For young disabled people specifically, guidelines recommend 120 to 180 minutes per week¹⁵. While 'small amounts of physical activity are good for you as well'¹⁶, current activity levels for all children and young people fall short of these benchmarks¹⁷.

The participation gap

According to Sport England's Active Lives data, only half (50.7%) of young disabled people currently meet recommended activity levels of 60 minutes of activity per day across the week and are classed as 'active', while nearly one third (28.8%) are classified as 'less active', engaging in fewer than 30 minutes of activity per day (Figure 1).^{18,19}

¹⁰ [Physical activity for general health benefits in disabled children and disabled young people: rapid evidence review](#), Department of Health and Social Care. 2022

¹¹ [Active Lives Adult Survey November 2023-24](#), Sport England. 2025

¹² [Positive experiences for all](#), Sport England. 2023

¹³ [PE and School Report](#), Youth Sport Trust. 2025

¹⁴ [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines](#), Department of Health and Social Care. 2019

¹⁵ [Physical activity for general health benefits in disabled children and disabled young people: rapid evidence review](#), Department of Health and Social Care. 2022

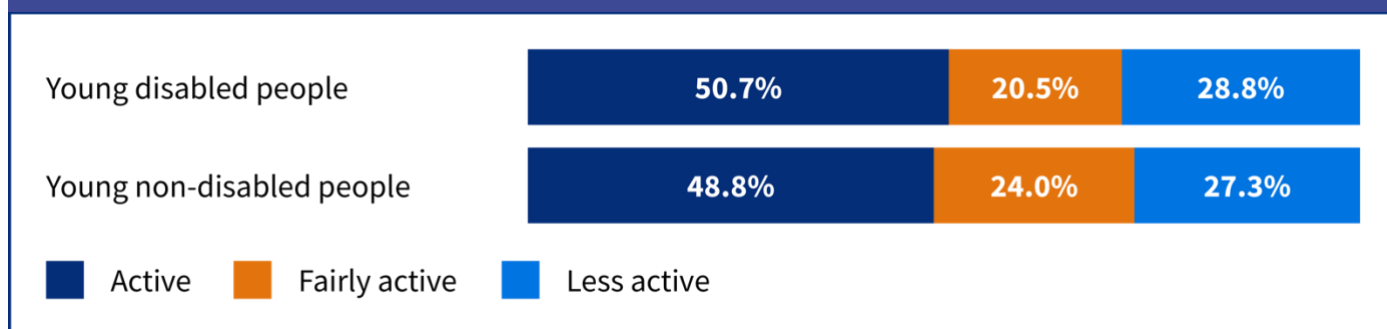
¹⁶ [UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines for disabled children and young people](#), Department of Health and Social Care. 2022

¹⁷ For this research report, we refer specifically to the initial guidance of 60 minutes of activity for all young people. We do so to make direct comparison in activity levels between young disabled and non-disabled people, however also seek to reference the latest guidance in relation to young disabled people's activity levels and whether they take part in enough activity to achieve likely health outcomes.

¹⁸ [Sport England Active Lives Online Tool](#), Sport England.

¹⁹ [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines](#), Department of Health and Social Care. 2019

Figure 1: Sport England Active Lives activity levels for young disabled and non-disabled people.



Headline figures suggest young disabled people have similar levels of physical activity to their non-disabled peers. However, existing evidence also shows that they encounter disproportionately greater personal barriers to participation. These include impairment-related challenges, loneliness, low confidence, fear of being judged, and not knowing what to do. Such barriers undermine the development of physical literacy and reduce the likelihood of sustained, lifelong participation in sports and activity.

In 2020, research from Activity Alliance²⁰ provided further insight into the difference between activity for young disabled and non-disabled people. The research found young disabled people are:

- Less likely to enjoy taking part in sport and activity compared with young non-disabled people, despite wanting to take part in more activity.
- Less likely than young non-disabled people to enjoy taking part in sport and activity in school as well as outside school across a range of community settings.

In addition, the research highlighted the following key barriers to young disabled people being active:

- Their impairment
- Loneliness
- Fear of getting hurt
- Feeling uncomfortable
- Worrying about how they looked
- Not knowing what to do

²⁰ [My Active Future: Including every child](#), Activity Alliance. 2020

Setting also plays a part in how young people engage in activity. Young disabled people are less likely than young non-disabled people to be able to join in with sport and activity at school all or most of the time, at afterschool clubs, and outside of school. All young people would like to be more active at a friend's house, a leisure centre or swimming pool, or park or play area, highlighting the informal activities that young people seem to enjoy more.

Gender also plays a key role in activity levels, with girls, and disabled girls in particular, experiencing greater barriers to being active than boys. Most notably:

Girls are less active than boys and less likely to take part in sport regularly than boys²¹.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of disabled teenage girls don't take part in sport on a regular basis or avoid it all together, despite two-thirds (67%) wanting to be more active²².

Over half (54%) of disabled teenage girls would take part if there were more opportunities outside of school, yet only four in ten (39%) disabled teenage girls feel comfortable to join in with sport at school or college²².

Disabled girls are the least likely to engage in, and feel like, sport is for them, with one in five disabled girls not seeing people like them in sport²³.

Why this research matters

While Sport England's Active Lives data sets the benchmark in understanding activity levels and attitudes of young people, Activity Alliance research, such as My Active Future²⁴, alongside insight from key partners, allows us to understand inequalities young disabled people experience when being active within and outside of school settings.

Increasing positive experiences for children and young people is one of Sport England's five big issues in Uniting the Movement²⁵. This research contributes directly to that ambition by highlighting young disabled people's experience of sport and activity, and by identifying the changes needed to ensure every young person can improve their experience, increase their enjoyment, and access the lifelong benefits of being active.

²¹ [Chasing the Olympic Dream: Closing the dream deficit in sport](#), Women in Sport. 2024

²² [Breaking Barriers: Supporting disabled teenage girls to be active](#), Access Sport, Women in Sport, Sweaty Betty Foundation. 2024

²³ [A game of inequality: The reality of sporting dreams for young disabled people](#), Activity Alliance, Women in Sport. 2025

²⁴ [My Active Future: Including every child](#), Activity Alliance. 2020

²⁵ [Uniting the Movement](#), Sport England.

This research

This report summarises findings from a recent survey with young disabled and non-disabled people, and their parents and caregivers about their experiences of sport and physical activity.

Purpose

This research aimed to further understand the experiences and perceptions of young disabled people and their parents and caregivers compared to their non-disabled peers. At its core, the study sought to explore how young people's physical literacy – their motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding – shapes their engagement in sport and activity, and how these foundations are influenced by social, environmental and attitudinal barriers.

Key objectives

The research focused on:

- The differences in engagement and enjoyment of sport and activity.
- The motivations and barriers to taking part in sport and activity.
- The perceptions of parents and caregivers of sport and activity for their children.
- What support parents and caregivers feel they need to support their child in being more active.
- The experiences of different demographic groups and intersections of young disabled and non-disabled people.
- Future solutions to aid participation and engagement in sport and activity.

Our approach

This report, in alignment with all of Activity Alliance's work, is informed by the social model of disability. This means that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. These barriers include people's perceptions and attitudes towards disabled people, as well as logistical and practical barriers relating to the environment.

In contrast, the medical model of disability says that people are disabled by their impairments or conditions.

Understanding the report and definitions used

We have referenced internal evidence from Activity Alliance insight and external research in the report to add context to our findings. Definitions of how we define disability and sport and activity can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

Methodology

Research design

Based on the insight offered from the Annual Disability and Activity Survey for Adults²⁶ and existing research around the experiences of young people, we reviewed questions alongside a consortium of partners in March 2025, understanding which topics are most important to provide data to support the wider research, beginning in October 2025. As a consortium of partners, it was agreed to seek the views of parents and caregivers as well as young disabled and young non-disabled people through an online survey. This combination would offer contextual insight around the perceptions of children and young people's supporter networks.

Survey development and delivery

The survey was developed and adapted from previous research conducted by Activity Alliance²⁷ and later refined through consultation with the partners of this research.

We commissioned Savanta to conduct an online survey with young disabled and young non-disabled people aged 5-16, as well as their parents and caregivers. The sample aimed to be nationally representative and aimed to include 10% of young people attending a special school or special educational needs and disability-specific provision (SEND) school. This is something that Sport England's Active Lives survey does not currently include.

Survey sample

2,054 people took part in an online survey between March and April 2025. This included:

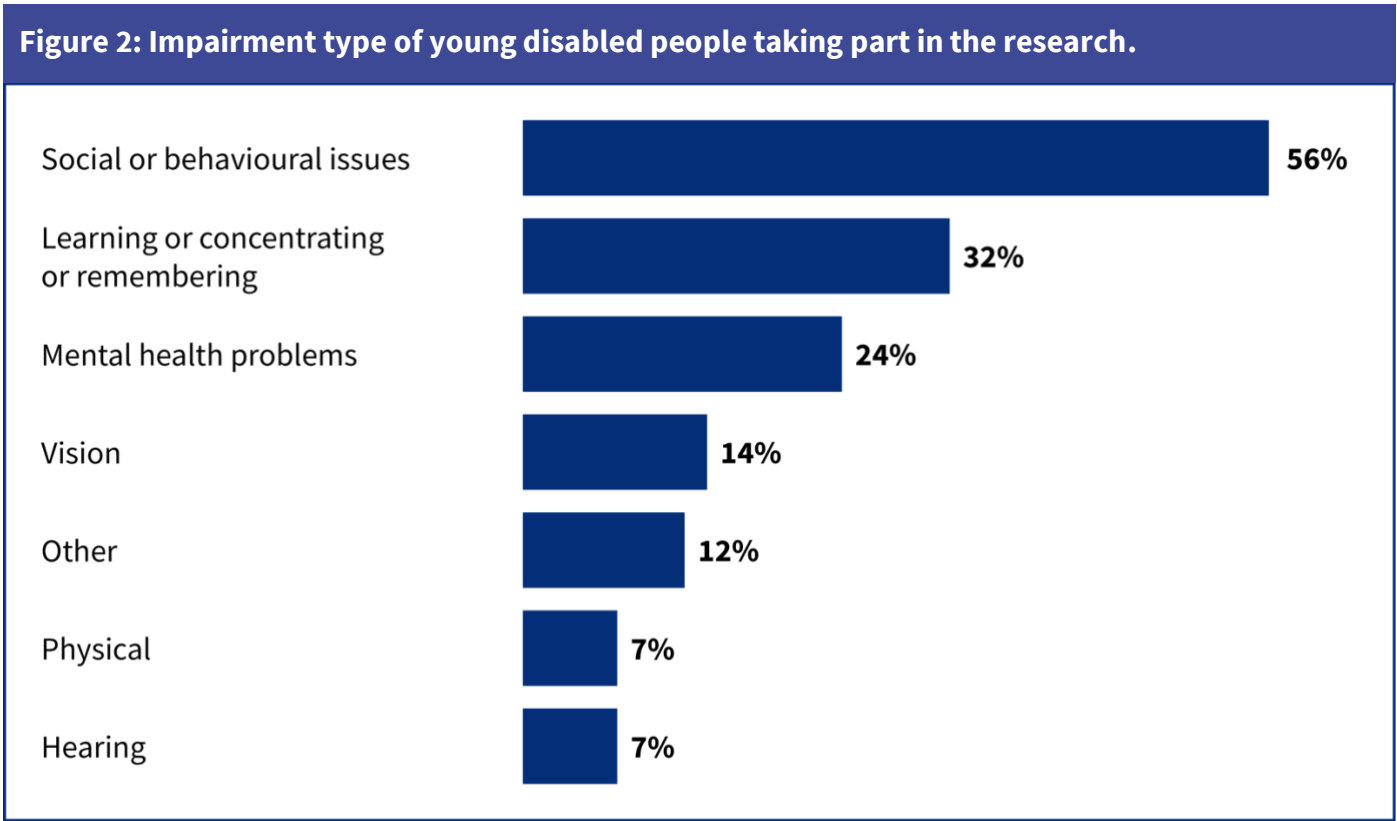
- Young disabled people (n=521)
- Young non-disabled people (n=506)
- Parents and caregivers of young disabled people (n=521)
- Parents and caregivers of young non-disabled people (n=506)

Parents and caregivers were asked to complete demographic details relating to their children aged 5-16. Of parents and caregivers with a young disabled person, seven in ten (71%) reported they had one young disabled person, with two in ten (20%) reporting more than one young disabled person.

²⁶ [Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24](#), Activity Alliance. 2024

²⁷ [My Active Future: Including every child](#), Activity Alliance. 2020. As in this research, The survey was split into three sections, with parent or caregivers invited to answer section one, young people providing responses with support of a parent or caregiver in section two and young people answering on their own in section three.

Parents and caregivers reported the most frequent type of impairment to be social or behavioural issues (56%) and the least frequent to be physical and hearing impairments (both 7% respectively), which is in line with other national statistics, as highlighted earlier. The impairment types of young people reported by parents and caregivers are shown in Figure 2^{28,29}. Of this sample, 66% of young disabled people had one impairment, 21% had two impairments and 13% had three or more (multiple) impairments.



The demographic makeup of the sample of young disabled and non-disabled people was broadly similar with a few notable exceptions. Young disabled people in our sample, while representative, were more likely to be male, White, and from a lower social grade. They were also less likely to attend a free state school, with 22% attending SEND provision. Additional details on the sample can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

²⁸ Q. Does your child aged 5-16/Do any of your children aged 5-16 have any of the following long-term health conditions, impairments, or illnesses that limit their daily activities?

²⁹ Other includes ‘including Stamina or breathing difficulty, difficulty speaking or making themselves understood, dexterity difficulties, long-term pain’

Research findings

Young people's activity levels

This chapter offers analysis on the activity levels among young disabled and young non-disabled people during school term time. This includes differences in activity levels across impairment types, demographic groups, and type of school provision. Activity levels are measured in the survey. Parents asked their child how often they are physically active in a normal week when their child is at school, for either 30 or 60 minutes per day.

For all young people, we determine activity levels using the same three activity groups used by Sport England's Active Lives:

- Active – doing an average of 60 minutes or more a day.
- Fairly active – doing an average of 30-59 minutes a day.
- Less active – doing less than an average of 30 minutes a day.

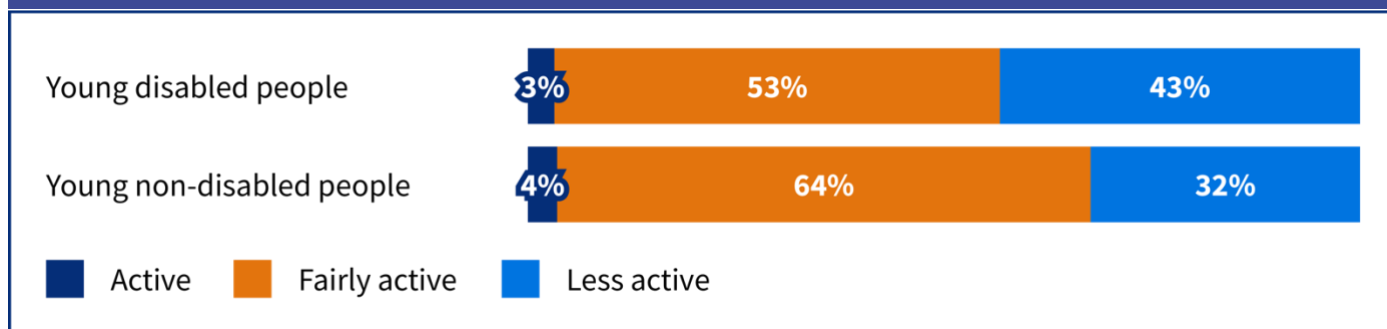
Activity levels during a normal week when in school

Young disabled people are 'less active' than young non-disabled people

In a normal week when they are in school, young disabled people in our sample are more likely to fall into the 'less active' group than young non-disabled people (43% vs 32%). This means that more than four in ten young disabled and one third of non-disabled people are taking part in 30 minutes or less of sport and activity per day (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Activity levels for young disabled and non-disabled people in a normal week when they are in school.



With national guidelines for young people to be active for an average of 60 minutes each day, this research highlights that only 3% of young disabled people and 4% of young non-disabled people in our sample are achieving these levels of sports and activity. In addition, activity levels indicate that half (53%) of young disabled people are active on average between 30 and 59 minutes per day per week, compared with more than six in ten (64%) young non-disabled people.

There is a decrease in the proportion of young people who are considered active compared with 2020³⁰. Previously, 10% of young disabled and non-disabled people were considered ‘active’ during term time. In addition, 30% of young disabled people and 21% of young non-disabled people were considered ‘less active’. These latest findings suggest that levels of activity have decreased while levels of inactivity have increased for both young disabled and young non-disabled people. We also observe that the ‘activity gap’ from My Active Future to this current research has widened from 9% to 11%.

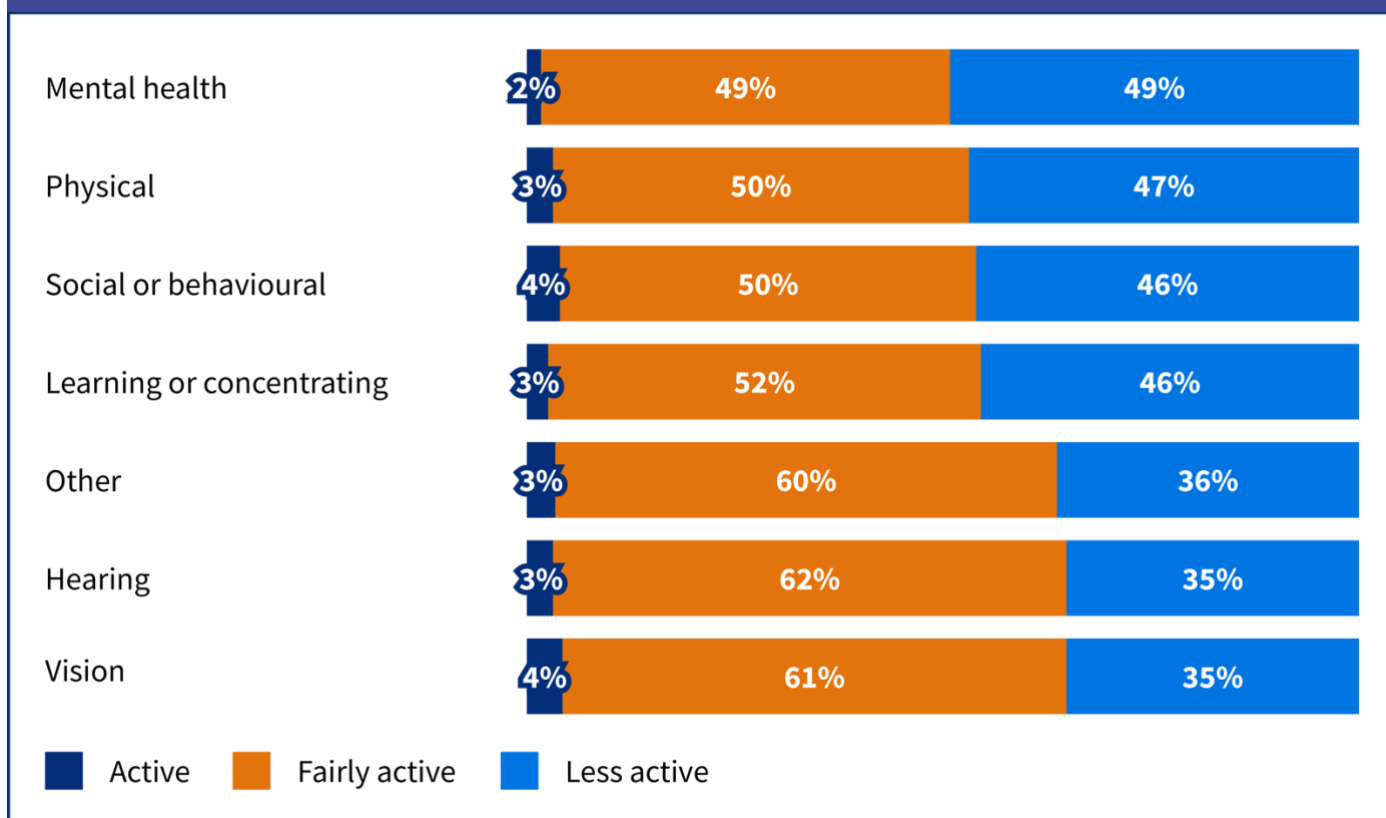
While Sport England’s Active Lives Children and Young People Survey³¹ provides the most comprehensive national data on activity levels, this research offers a different perspective. These findings indicate lower levels of activity and higher levels of inactivity, particularly among young disabled people, compared with Active Lives. This difference can be explained by the focus and methodology of our study, namely to include young people in special schools who are not captured in Active Lives, and data drawn directly from young people and their parents or caregivers, reflecting lived experiences and everyday barriers to participation. As a result, our findings may present a more realistic account of the challenges young people, especially young disabled people, face in meeting national activity guidelines.

Almost half (49%) of young people with mental health problems are considered ‘less active’

³⁰ [My Active Future: Including every child](#), Activity Alliance. 2020

³¹ [Active Lives Adult Survey November 2023-24](#), Sport England. 2025

Figure 4: Activity levels in a normal week when in school across impairment types.

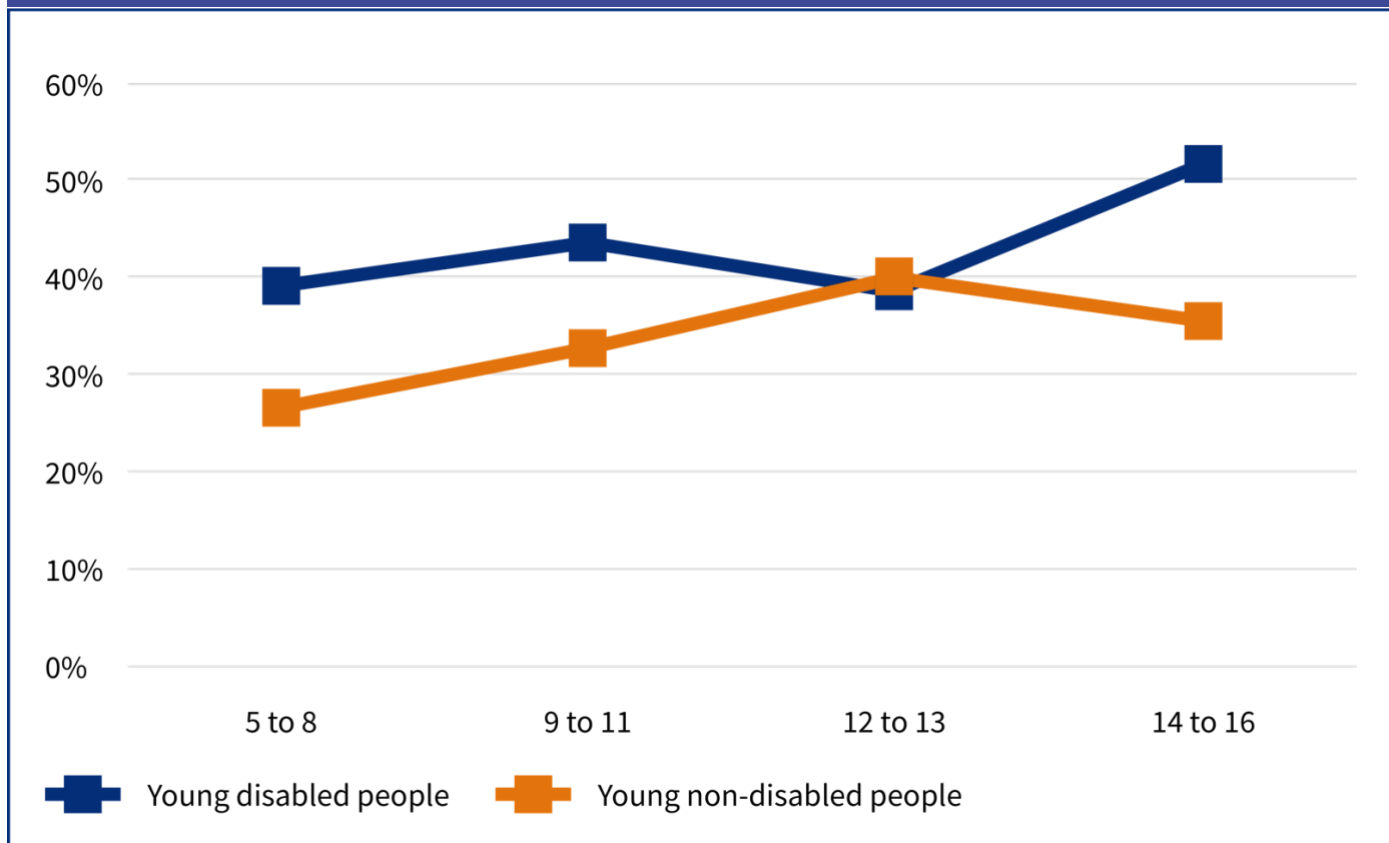


Young people with mental health conditions are the least active group, with half (49%) being active for less than 30 minutes per day. Young people with a sensory impairment (hearing or vision) are the most active, but still very few meet the threshold for 'active'. Figure 4 shows activity levels during a normal week at school for young people with different impairment types.

Inactivity increases with age, with young disabled people less active.



Figure 5: Proportion of young people who are 'less active' (doing less than an average of 30 minutes activity per day in a normal week).

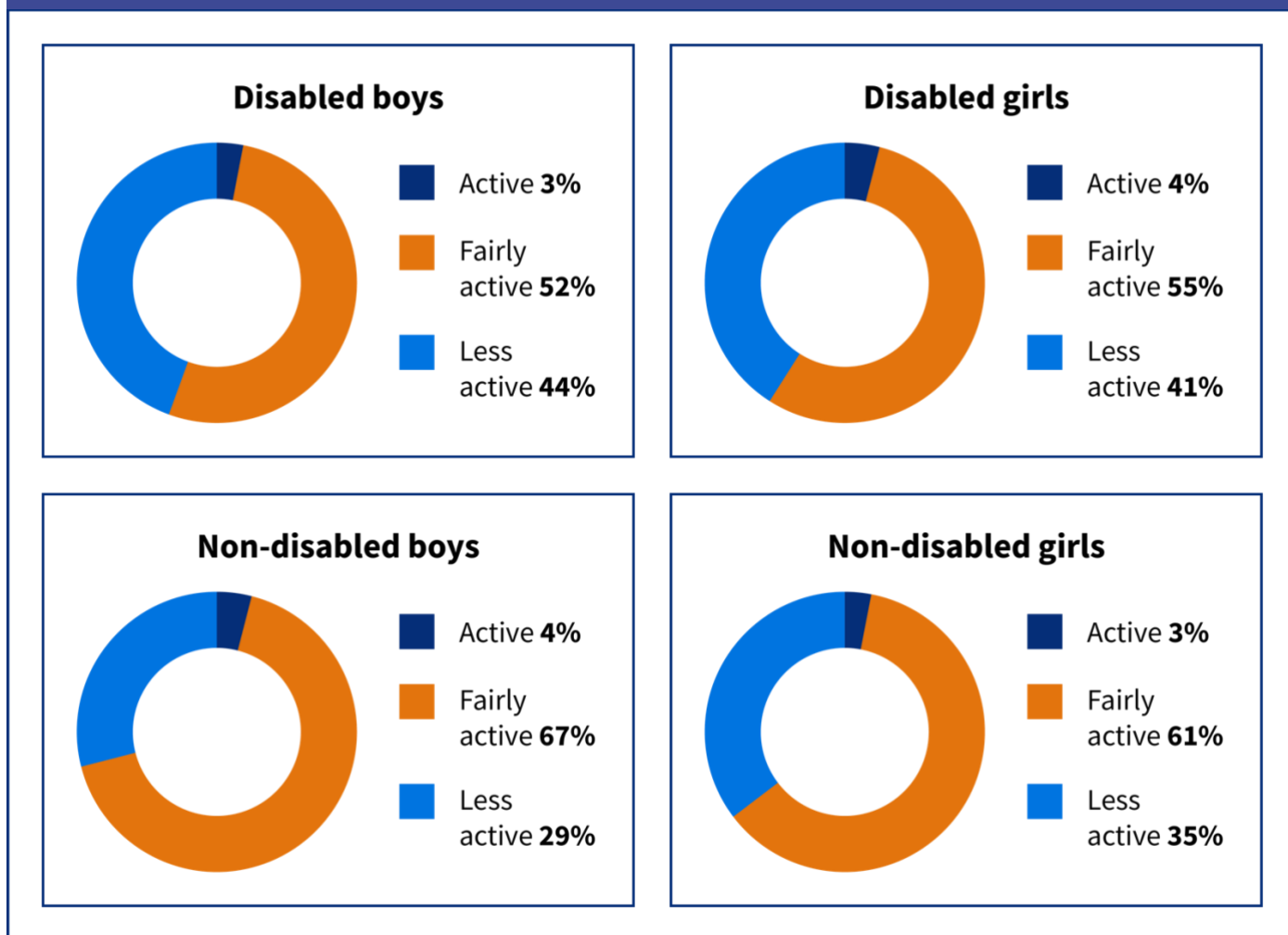


Findings in this research share a similar trend to Active Lives and My Active Future, where the proportion of young disabled people who are 'less active' increases with age (Figure 5). In addition:

Disabled boys and girls remain less active than non-disabled boys and girls.

- Both disabled boys and girls are more likely to be 'less active' than non-disabled boys and girls. Four in ten (44%) disabled boys are 'less active' compared with three in ten (29%) non-disabled boys. Similarly, four in ten (41%) disabled girls are less active compared with one third (35%) of non-disabled girls (Figure 6).
- Non-disabled boys are the most active group, with seven in ten (71%) engaging in an average of at least 30 minutes of activity per day.

Figure 6: Activity levels of disabled and non-disabled boys and girls.

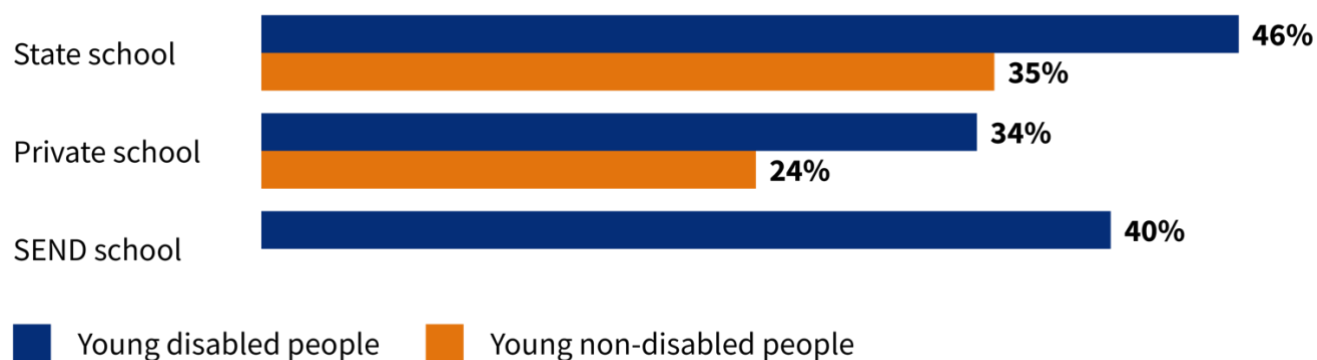


White young disabled people are ‘less active’ than Black young disabled people

- While there is no difference in inactivity levels between Black young disabled and non-disabled people (33% vs 35%), White young disabled people are more likely than White young non-disabled people to be ‘less active’ (44% vs 33%).

Four in ten (40%) young disabled people attending a special school are considered ‘less active’.

Figure 7: Proportion of ‘less active’ young people within state, private and SEND schools.



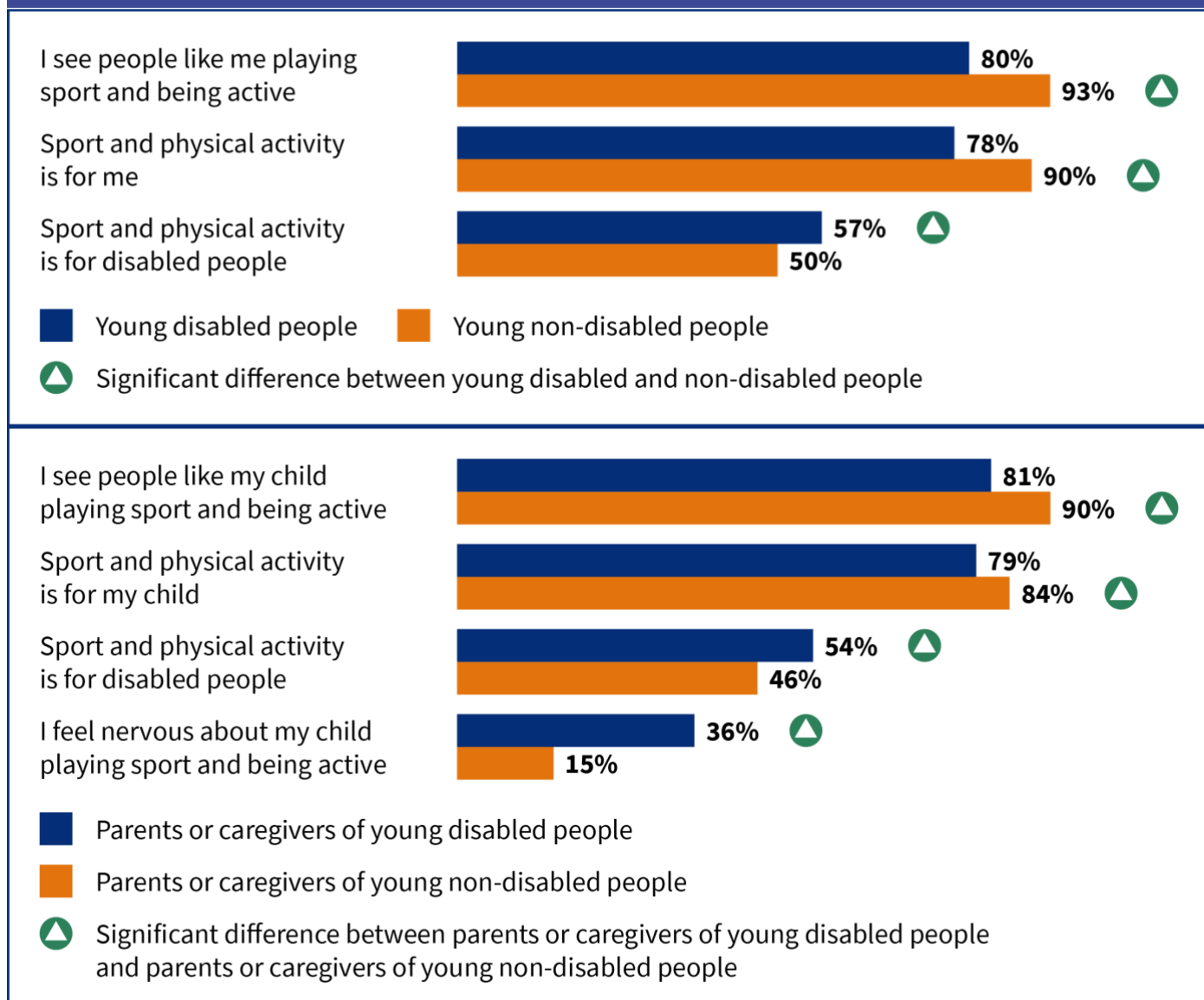
Young disabled people are more likely to be ‘less active’ than young non-disabled people in all types of school provision (Figure 7). In addition, young people attending private schools are more likely to be active than young people attending state schools.

Young people’s attitudes and experiences of playing sport and activity

This chapter discusses how young people and their parents and caregivers experience sport and activity. First, we explore the differences in perceptions in young people and their parents and caregivers of how disabled people are perceived in sport and activity. Next, we use a behaviour change framework to show how a young person’s capability, opportunity and motivation (COM-B)³² may influence their level of physical activity.

³² For an explanation around the COM-B model, please see [Appendix 2](#).

Figure 8: Young disabled and non-disabled people's perspectives on sport and activity as well as perspectives of parents and caregivers on sport, activity and disability in relation to their child.



Disabled girls are least likely to feel that sport and activity is for them

As shown in Figure 8, the majority of young people feel like sport and activity is for them; however, young disabled people are less likely to agree than young non-disabled people (78% vs 90%). Young disabled people most likely to agree that sport and activity are for them are:

- **By impairment type:** Young people with a hearing impairment (86%) or other impairment (85%).
- **By number of impairments:** Those with one impairment compared to young people with multiple impairments (81% vs 72%).
- **By age:** Young people aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (87% vs 66%).
- **By gender:** Boys compared to girls (83% vs 69%). In our sample, this difference isn't observed in non-disabled boys and girls (92% vs 88%).

- **By social grade:** Those in higher social grades (AB) compared to those in lower social grades (DE) (85% vs 72%).
- **By ethnicity:** Black young people compared to White young people (90% vs 77%).
- **By enjoyment:** Those who love being active vs. those who don't like it (92% vs. 25%).

Similarly, the majority of parents and caregivers of young people feel that sport and activity is for their child, with those with young non-disabled people more likely to agree (84% vs 79%). Parents and caregivers of young disabled people most likely to agree that sport is for their child are:

- **By age:** Parents of young disabled people aged five to eight compared to those of young people aged 14-16 (83% vs 72%).
- **By social grade:** Those in higher social grades (AB) compared to those in lower social grades (DE) (83% vs 69%).
- **By ethnicity:** Parents of White young people compared to those of Black young people (80% vs 61%).
- **By enjoyment:** Those young disabled people who love being active compared to those who don't like it (82% vs. 67%).

More than half of young disabled people agree that sport is for disabled people.

Young disabled people are more likely to agree than young non-disabled people that sport and physical activity is for disabled people (57% vs 50%), as are their parents and caregivers (54% vs 46%). For young disabled people, this perception remains similar across age groups, with those aged five to eight just as likely to agree as those aged 14-16 (57% vs 53%).

However, young non-disabled people are more likely to agree that sport is for disabled people as they get older, with six in ten young non-disabled people aged 14-16 likely to agree compared to four in ten young non-disabled people aged five to eight (60% vs 39%).

Other young disabled people who are most likely to agree that sport and activity is for disabled people include:

- **By ethnicity:** White young disabled people compared to Black young disabled people (59% vs 34%).
- **By enjoyment:** Young disabled people that love being active compared to young disabled people who don't like being active (60% vs 44%).

Parents and caregivers of young disabled people more likely to feel nervous about their child being active.

Parents and caregivers of young disabled people are more than twice as likely to feel nervous about their child playing sport and being active than those with young non-disabled children (36% vs 15%).

Specifically, parents and caregivers of young disabled people are most likely to agree that they feel nervous about their child being active if their child is a young person with a physical impairment (50%).

Capability to be active

Young disabled people feel less confident being active, with only half of young disabled people finding exercise and sports easy.

Figure 9: Young people's agreement of their capability to take part in sport and activity.

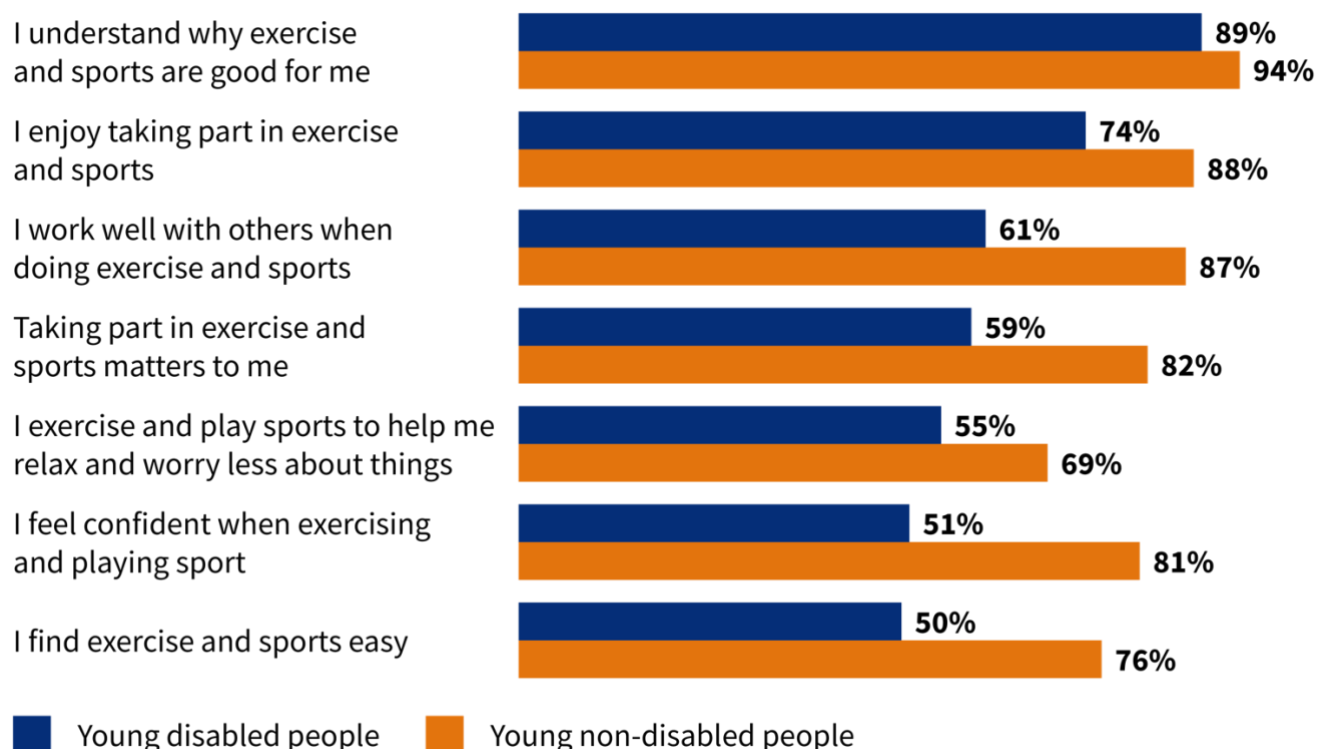


Figure 9 shows that young non-disabled people are more likely to say 'yes' when asked if they understand the benefits of being active, whether they enjoy being active, or whether they work well with others when doing exercise and sports compared to young disabled people.

Young disabled people are more likely to highlight difficulties regarding their capability to be physically active. Only half (51%) of young disabled people report feeling confident when exercising, compared with eight in ten (81%) young non-disabled people. Disabled girls are three times more likely to say they do not feel confident compared with non-disabled girls (24% vs 8%). Additionally:

- **By impairment type:** Four in ten (39%) young people with a physical impairment report it is not easy to be active, while a third (33%) of young people with multiple impairments also do not find being active easy compared to only 15% of young people with one impairment.
- **By ethnicity:** Black young disabled people are more likely to say that they work well with others when being active than White young disabled people (73% vs 45%).
 - Black young disabled people are more likely to say they exercise and play sports to help them worry less about things than White young disabled people (76% vs 40%).

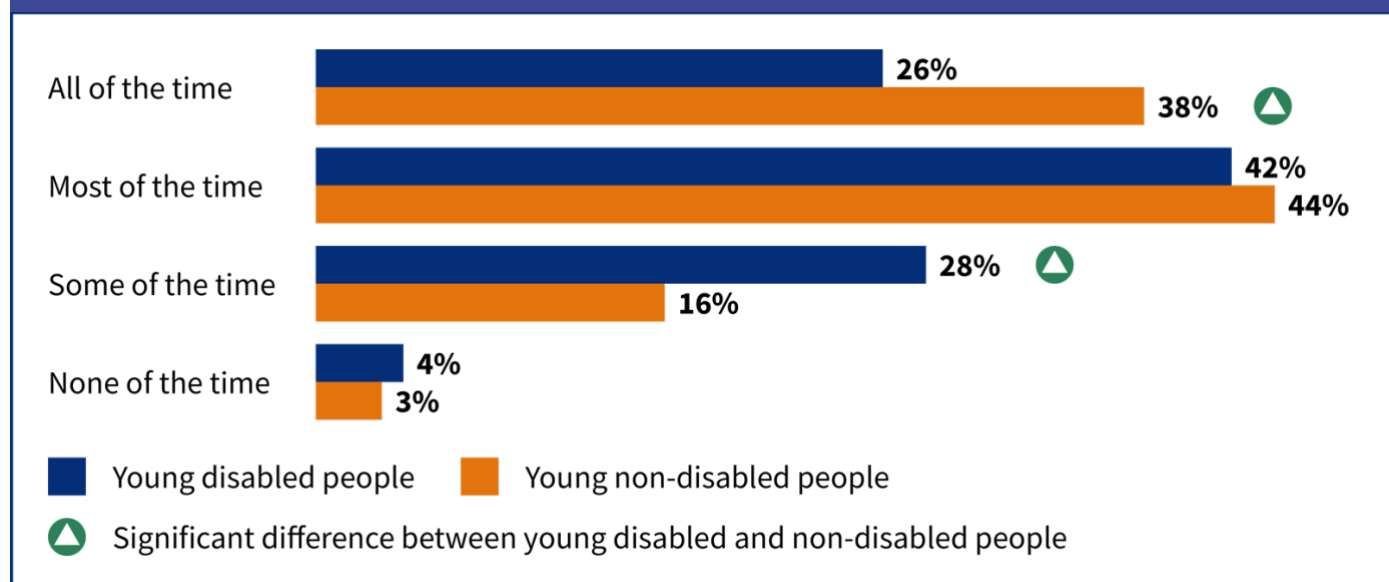
Opportunity to be active

Just one quarter of young disabled people can take part in school activity 'all of the time'.

Four in ten (38%) young non-disabled people say they can join in with sport and activity at school 'all of the time' compared to one quarter of young disabled people (26%) (Figure 10). Young disabled people most likely to say they can take part 'all of the time' at school are:

- **By impairment type:** Young people with visual or other impairments (33% respectively), compared to those with physical impairments (14%) or mental health problems (19%).
- **By age:** Those aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (34% vs 22%).
- **By gender:** Non-disabled girls compared to disabled girls (37% vs 24%).

Figure 10: Opportunity to be active at school for young disabled and young non-disabled people.



Half of young people are happy with how active they are, with four in ten young people wanting to do more.

Young people are equally as likely to want to do more activity, regardless of disability, with four in ten (43%) young disabled and young non-disabled people wanting to do more activity respectively. However, young disabled people most likely to want to do more activity include:

- **By impairment type:** Those with visual impairments (56%).
- **By multiple impairments:** Those with three or more impairments compared to those with one impairment (54% vs 40%).
- **By age:** Young people aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (52% vs 39%).
- **By social grade:** Those from higher social grades (AB) compared to those from lower social grades (DE) (57% vs 32%).

- **By ethnicity:** Black young people compared to White young people (71% vs 40%). This is similar for young non-disabled Black and White people (60% vs 38%).

Young disabled people most likely to say they are happy with how active they are include:

- Young people with one impairment compared to those with multiple impairments (52% vs 34%).
- Those from lower social grades (DE) compared to higher social grades (AB) (57% vs 36%).
- However, one third (36%) of young disabled people who don't like being active also say they would like to do less activity.

Over half of parents and caregivers of young disabled people want them to be more active.

While four in ten (43%) young disabled and non-disabled people want to do more activity, parents and caregivers of young disabled people are more likely than parents of young non-disabled people to say they would like their child to be more active (55% vs 37%).

In contrast, parents and caregivers of young non-disabled people are more likely to say they are happy with the amount of activity their child does than parents and caregivers of young disabled people (61% vs 43%).

Over half (58%) of parents and caregivers of disabled boys want them to be more active.

While parents and caregivers of non-disabled boys and girls are equally likely to want their child to do more activity (36% vs 38%), parents and caregivers of disabled boys are more likely to want their child to be more active than those with a disabled girl (58% vs 49%).

Three-quarters of parents and caregivers of Black young disabled people want their child to be more active.

A similar trend presents itself for parents and caregivers of White and Black young non-disabled people, who are predominantly happy with how much activity their child does (63% vs 62%), however parents of Black young disabled people are more likely than parents and caregivers of White young disabled people to want their child to be more active (73% vs 52%).

Parents and caregivers of young disabled people who are 'less active' want them to be more active.

More than two thirds of parents and caregivers of 'less active' young disabled people want them to do more activity than parents of those who are 'fairly active' (69% vs 46%). On a related note, parents and caregivers of young disabled people are most likely to want their child to be more active if their child 'doesn't like' being active compared to those who 'love it' (85% vs 45%).

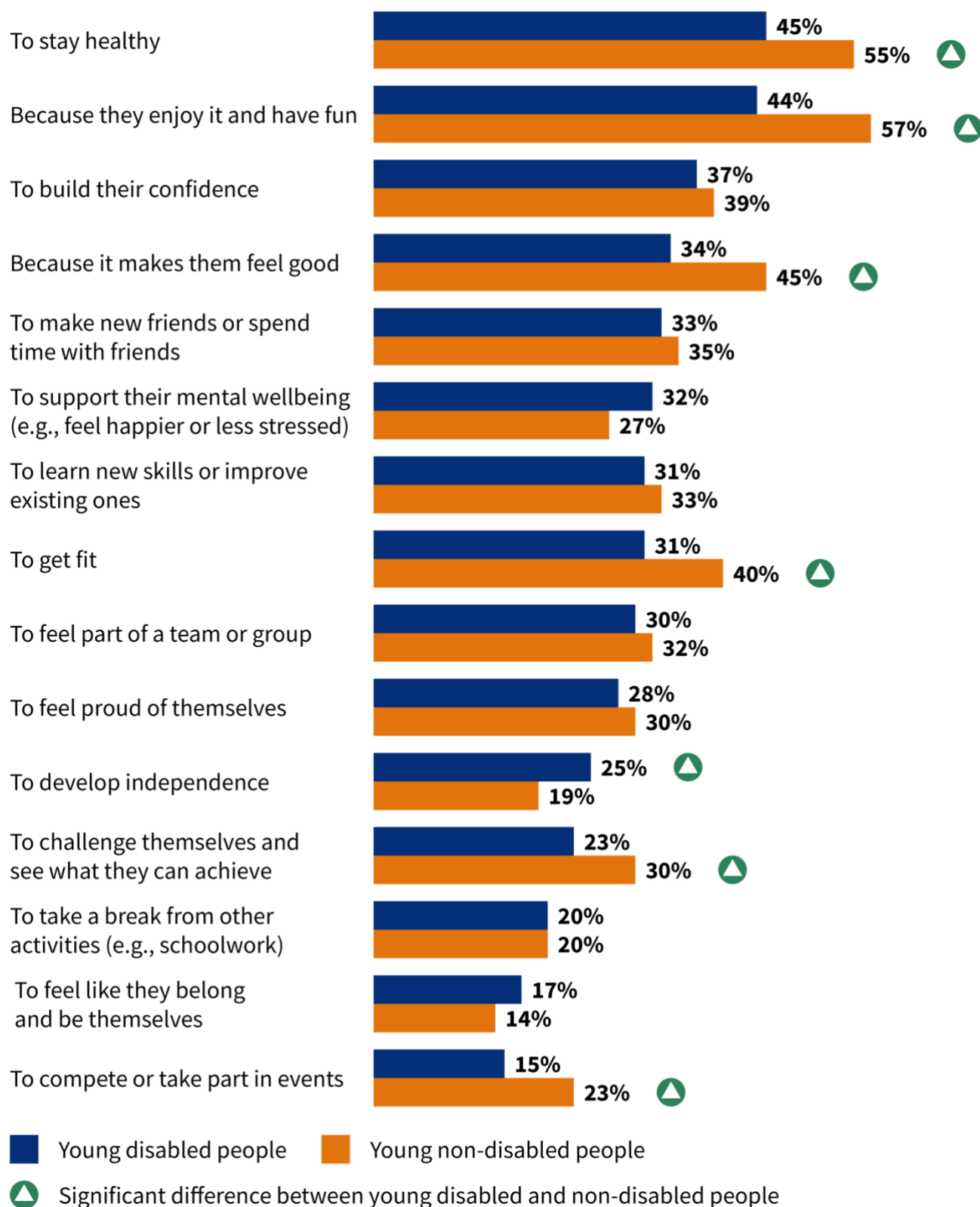


Motivation to be active

Young people were asked with their parents and caregivers why they take part in sport, exercise and other activities. For young disabled people, staying healthy (45%), having fun (44%) and building confidence (37%) are the three main reasons why they take part in sport and activity (Figure 8).

Young non-disabled people share similar motivations to be active, with having fun (57%), staying healthy (55%), and feeling good (45%) as the three main reasons highlighted in this research.

Figure 11: Reasons why young disabled and young non-disabled people choose to be active.



Young disabled and young non-disabled people enjoy being active, however this decreases with age.

While most young people say they 'like or love' playing sport and being active, young disabled people are less likely to agree than young non-disabled people (85% vs 95%).

Young disabled people most and least likely to enjoy sport and activity include:

- **By impairment type:** Those with a hearing impairment (94%) or visual impairment (92%), compared to young people with social or behavioural issues (80%).
- **By number of impairments:** Those with one impairment compared to those with three or more (87% vs 78%).
- **By age:** Those aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (94% vs 78%). This appears to be a trend with age, with those aged 9 to 11 (87%) and 12 to 13 (81%) increasingly less likely to enjoy sport and activity.
- **By gender:** Boys compared to girls (89% vs 79%). In this sample, this gender gap is not seen among non-disabled boys and girls (95% vs 94%).
- **By social grade:** Those in higher social grades (AB) compared to those in lower social grades (DE) (92% vs 82%). This trend is also present for young non-disabled people (97% vs 89%).
- **By ethnicity:** Black young people compared to White young people (98% vs 84%). In this sample this difference is not observed among young non-disabled people (98% vs 94%).

In addition, young disabled people are more likely to say they 'dislike or hate' being active than young non-disabled people (12% vs 5%).

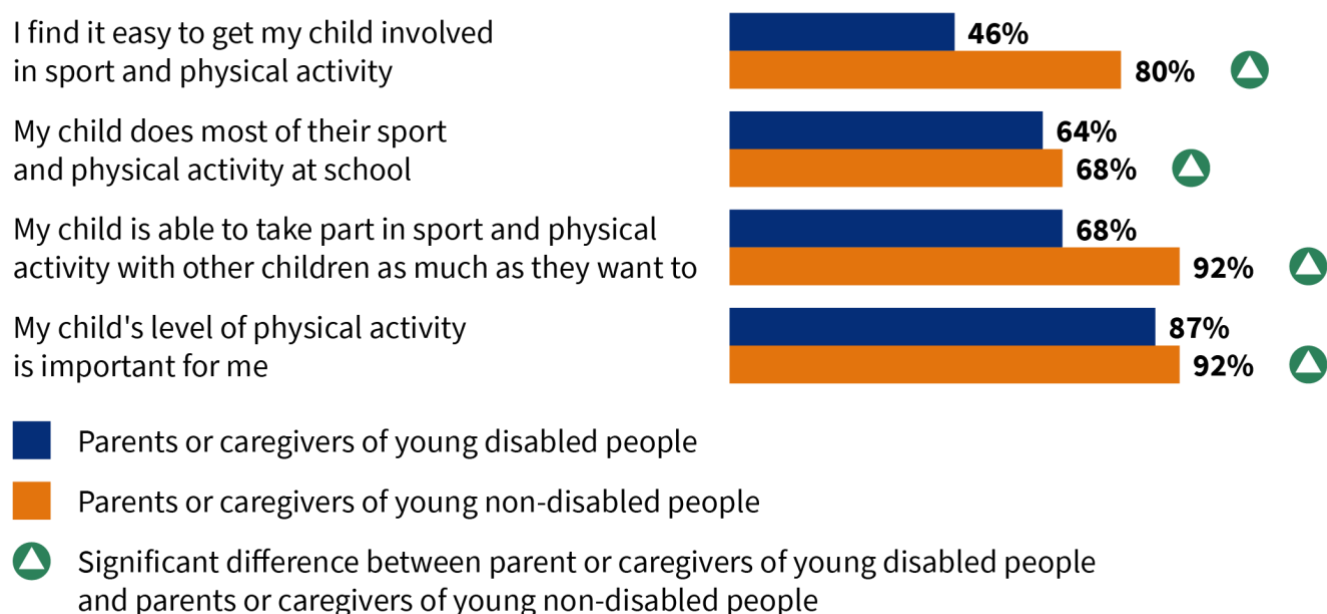
The majority of parents and caregivers of young disabled people say their child does most of their activity at school, whilst less than half find it easy for their child to get involved in sports and physical activity in general.

Eight in ten (80%) parents and caregivers of young non-disabled people agree that they find it easy to get their child involved in sport and activity compared to less than half of parents and caregivers of young disabled people (46%) (Figure 12). Parents and caregivers of young people with social or behavioural issues are least likely to agree compared to those supporting young people with vision impairments, who are most likely to agree (38% vs 56%).

Parents and caregivers who support young disabled people are most likely to agree that they find it easy to support their child to be active include:

- **By age:** Those with young people aged five to eight (56%) compared to 12 to 13 (43%) and 14-16 (38%).
- **By social grade:** Those in higher social grades (AB) (60%).
- **By enjoyment:** Those with young people who love being active (73%).

Figure 12: Perceptions of parents and caregivers of their child's opportunity to be active.



Additionally, nine in ten (92%) parents and caregivers of young non-disabled people are likely to agree that their child is able to take part in sport and activity with other children as much as they want to compared with only two thirds (68%) of parents and caregivers of young disabled people.

While parents and caregivers supporting young people with vision impairments are most likely to agree with that statement (78%), only six in ten (60%) of those supporting young people with social or behavioural issues agree their child had the opportunity to be active with other children as much as they want.

Other parents and caregivers least likely to agree that their child could be as active with others as much as they want include those supporting:

- **By multiple impairments:** Young people with multiple impairments compared to young people with one impairment (60% vs 72%).
- **By activity levels:** 'Less active' young disabled people compared to those who are 'fairly active' (59% vs 75%).
- **By enjoyment:** Young disabled people who don't like being active compared to those who love being active (44% vs 80%).

Barriers to activity

This chapter explores what young people, and their parents and caregivers, feel prevents them or makes it more difficult to be active or take part in sport and activity. As reported in My Active Future, there are wider structural, organisational and cultural barriers that affect sport and activity participation. These include funding pressures affecting the amount, frequency and quality of local provision, and the broader factors that young people and their parents experience in their day-to-day lives (such as cost of living, transport, social support).

Focusing on the psychological and practical barriers for young people to be active, My Active Future reported the top barriers for young disabled people to be their impairment (40%), not feeling comfortable (37%) and wanting to do other things (29%). In contrast, young non-disabled people highlighted wanting to do other things (62%), cost (54%) and getting there and back (45%) as primary barriers to being more active.

This research outlines the barriers experienced by young people in relation to a question asked about what stops or makes it more difficult to take part in sports³³. Using the COM-B model of behaviour change to frame such experiences, we address these reported barriers by factors that may affect a young person's capability, opportunity and motivation to take part in sport and activity. We then explore how young disabled and young non-disabled people's wellbeing can act as a barrier to being active.

Capability

Young disabled people are more likely than young non-disabled people to experience barriers relating to their physical or psychological capability to be active or take part in sports.

One in five young disabled people feel their impairment makes it difficult to be more active.

One in five (22%) young disabled people think their impairment, health condition, illness or disability stops them from being active (Figure 13). This further reflects how young people can perceive their own bodies, impairments or differences as a central barrier to being active. How young people framed this response in the context of the medical or social models of disability is beyond the scope of this research, it highlights how young people view their impairment as a top barrier to taking part.

³³ Q: We now want to know what stops your child from or makes it more difficult for them to be active or to take part in sports.

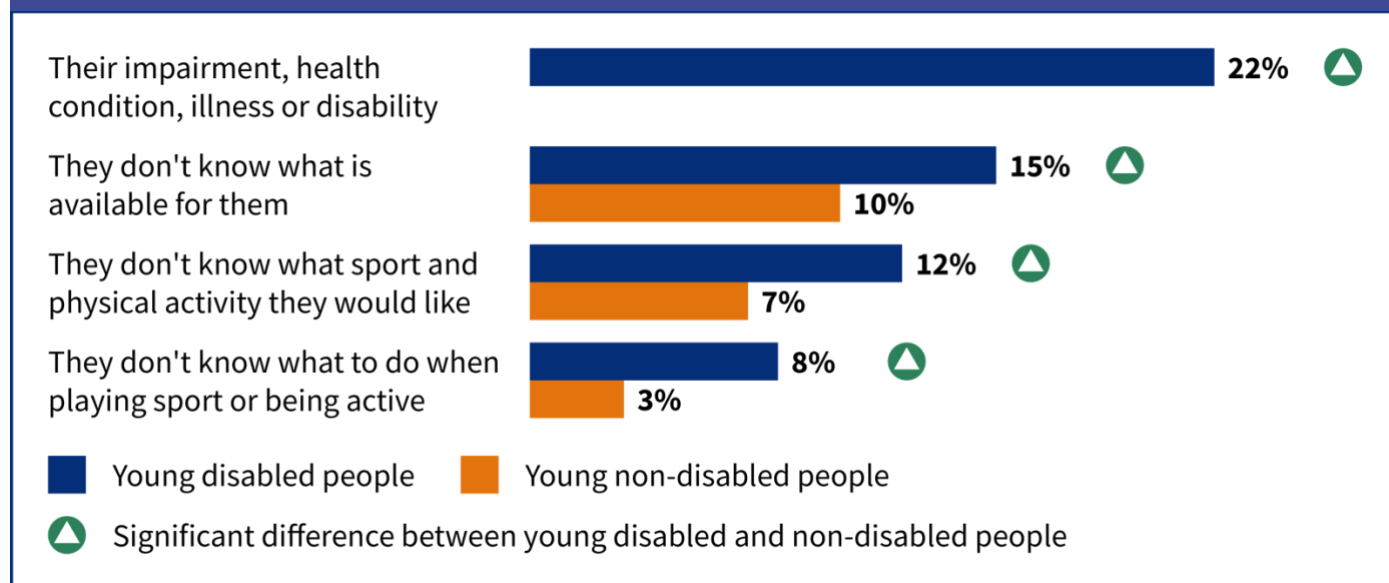
Young disabled people who feel their impairment stops or makes it difficult for them to be active include:

- **By impairment type:** Those with a physical (44%) impairment, whereas young people with a vision impairment are least likely to highlight their impairment as a barrier to being active (21%).
- **By multiple impairments:** Young people with multiple impairments are twice as likely to feel their impairments affect their ability to be more active than young people with one impairment (42% vs 18%).
- **By enjoyment:** Young people who don't like being active are also twice as likely to feel their impairment stops them from being active than those young people who love being active (33% vs 16%).

In addition:

- Young people with multiple impairments are almost twice as likely to not know what opportunities are available to them than young people with one impairment (30% vs 16%).
- One quarter (23%) of young people with a hearing impairment don't know what to do when playing sport or being active.

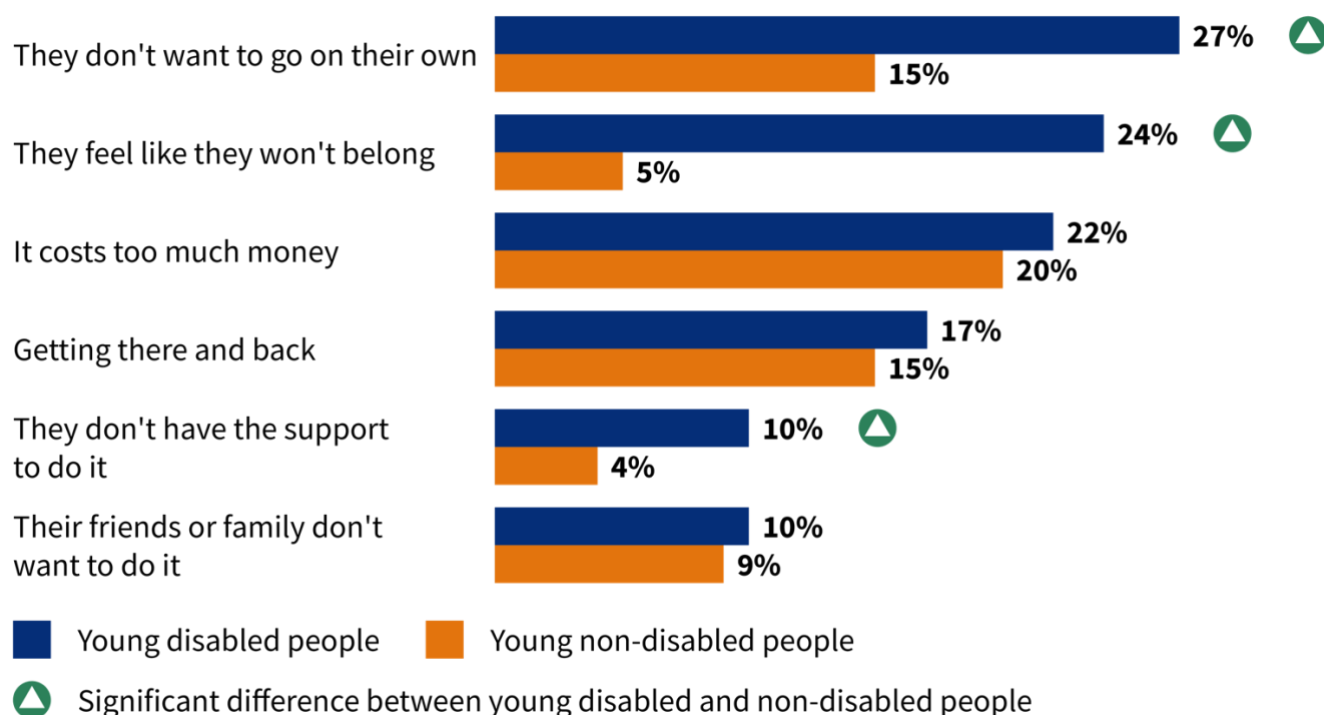
Figure 13: Capability barriers to being active for young disabled and young non-disabled people.



Opportunity

Not wanting to go out on their own, not feeling like they belong, and the cost of activities are three main barriers that prevent young disabled people having the opportunity to be active (Figure 14). Young disabled people are more likely to be impacted by social and physical barriers relating to their opportunity to be active than young non-disabled people.

Figure 14: Opportunity barriers to being active for young disabled and non-disabled people.



Young people with multiple impairments are most likely to not be active due to not wanting to go on their own.

Young disabled people are nearly twice as likely as young non-disabled people to highlight not wanting to go out on their own (27% vs 15%). Specifically, not wanting to go out on their own impacts young disabled people, including:

- **By number of impairments:** Almost half of young people with three or more impairments compared to a quarter of young people with one impairment (45% vs 26%).
- **By age:** Disabled young people aged 9-12 and 14-16 are both as likely to state this barrier compared to disabled young people aged five to eight (34% vs 22% respectively).
- **By enjoyment:** Disabled young people who don't like being active compared to those who love being active (35% vs 20%).

Feeling like they won't belong makes it difficult for young disabled people to be active.

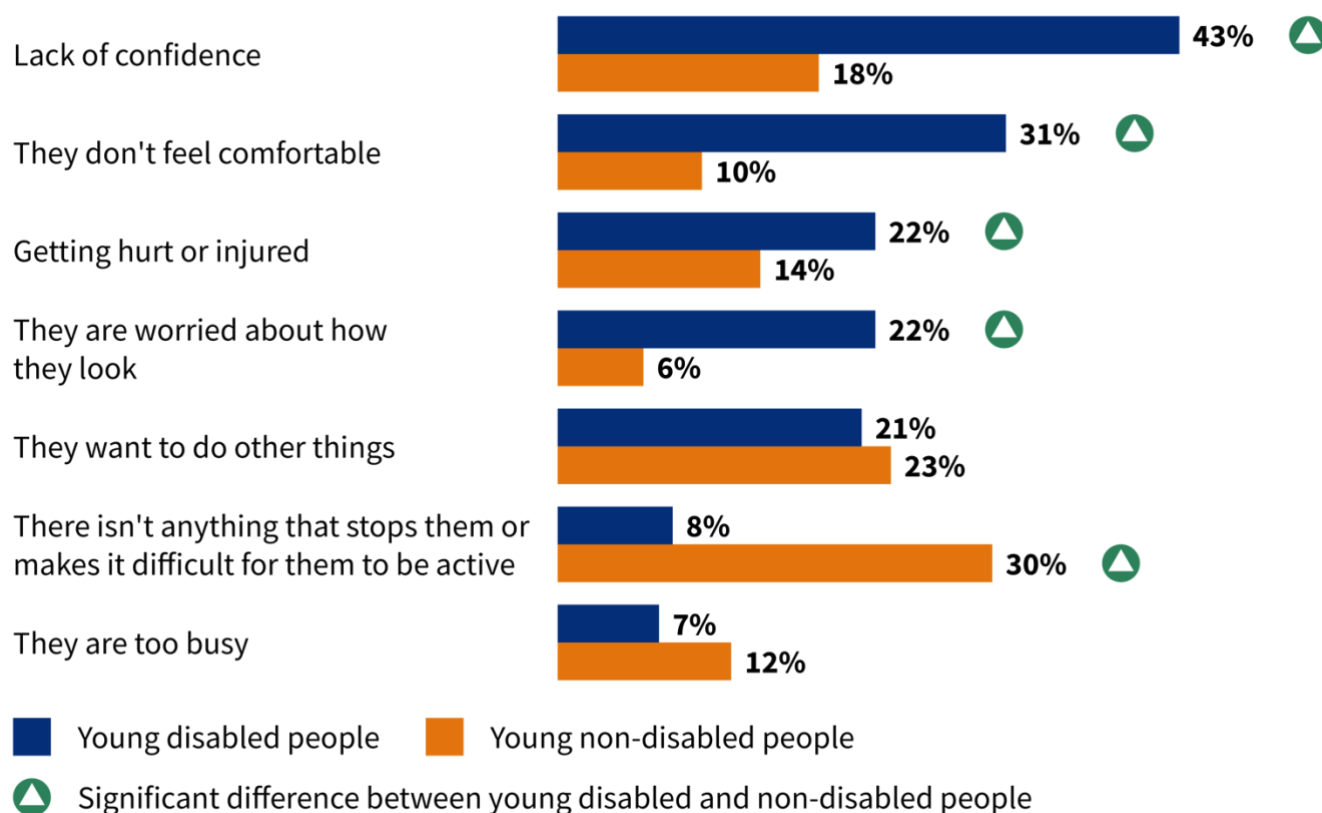
Young disabled people are almost five times more likely to say that feeling that they won't belong acts as a barrier to being active than young non-disabled people (24% vs 5%). This is most likely felt by:

- **By impairment type:** Young people with physical impairments compared to those with vision impairments (36% vs 15%).
- **By multiple impairments:** Those with multiple impairments compared to young people with one impairment (45% vs 19%).
- **By activity levels:** Young disabled people who are 'less active' (32%).
- **By enjoyment:** Young disabled people who don't like being active (36%).

Motivation

Young disabled people are most likely to highlight a lack of confidence, not feeling comfortable, and getting hurt as motivational barriers to being active than young non-disabled people (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Motivation barriers to being active for young disabled and young non-disabled people.



Lack of confidence is the top barrier for young disabled people, especially those with multiple impairments.

Young disabled people are more than twice as likely as young non-disabled people to say that a lack of confidence stops or prevents them from being more active (43% vs 18%). This is more likely for young disabled people:

- With a hearing impairment (63%).
- With a mental health problem (57%).
- With multiple impairments compared to those with one impairment (63% vs 37%).
- Who don't like being active than those who love (62% vs 33%).

Young disabled people are three times as likely to highlight not feeling comfortable as a predominant barrier to being active or taking part in sports (31% vs 10%).

Young disabled people most likely to state they don't feel comfortable being active include:

- Almost half of young disabled people with a mental health problem (46%).
- Four in ten young people with multiple impairments compared to those with one impairment (40% vs 26%).
- Young disabled people who don't like being active are more than three times as likely to say they don't feel comfortable being active than those who love being active (67% vs 19%).

In addition to a lack of confidence and not feeling comfortable, young disabled people are more likely to fear getting hurt or injured than young non-disabled people (22% vs 14%), with those with physical impairments (42%) or multiple impairments (37%) most likely to identify this barrier.

In addition, young disabled people are more than three times more likely to worry about how they look (22% vs 6%). This is most felt by young people with mental health problems (37%) and those with multiple impairments (36%).

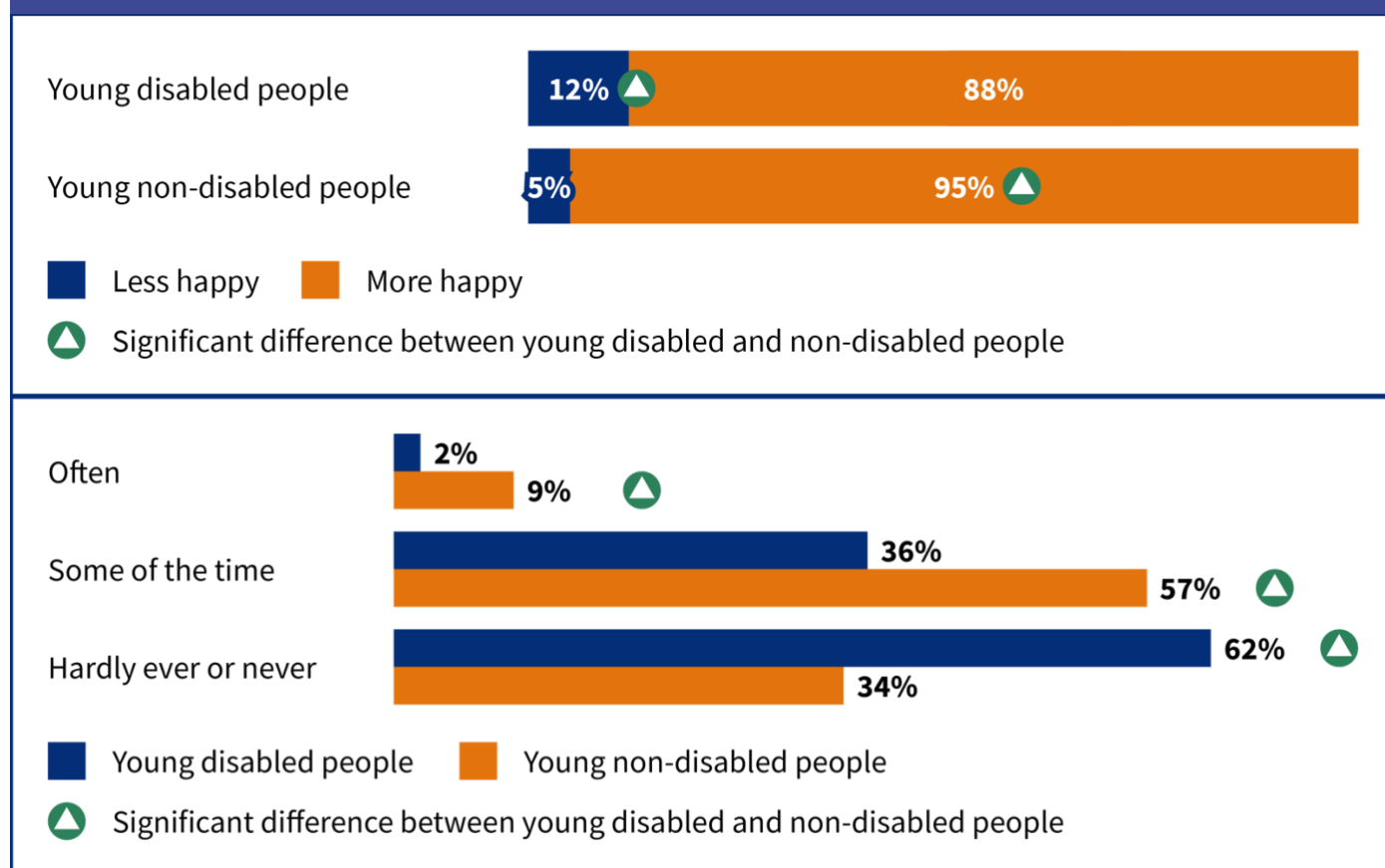
Consistent with findings in My Active Future, young non-disabled people are three times as likely to say that there isn't anything that stops them from being active than young disabled people (30% vs 8%).

Social isolation and physical activity

Young disabled people are less happy and more lonely than young non-disabled people.

Physical activity has a positive association with mental wellbeing in adults and young people, with life satisfaction increasing with the increased amount of physical activity³⁴³⁵. This section explores differences in loneliness and mental wellbeing, measured by happiness, between young disabled and young non-disabled people. They were asked two questions³⁶ which were kept separate as part of this research. Young people were asked to rank their perceived happiness with their lives on a scale from 0 to 10, and report loneliness from 'hardly ever or never' to 'often'.

Figure 16: Happiness and loneliness in young people.



³⁴ [Active Lives Adult Survey November 2023-24](#), Sport England. 2025

³⁵ [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey](#), Sport England. 2025

³⁶ Q: Overall, how happy are you with your life as a whole? On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = not at all happy and 10 = completely happy. Less happy = scores 0-5; More happy = scores 5-10; Q = How often do you feel alone?

While most young people score themselves as happy, young non-disabled people are more likely to be happier than young disabled people (95% vs 88%), and less likely to be unhappier (5% vs 12%) (Figure 16). Young disabled people who score themselves as less happy, include:

- Those with mental health problems (26%).
- Young people with multiple impairments (22% vs 8% one impairment).
- Young people aged 14-16 (18% vs 4% disabled young people aged five to eight).
- Disabled girls (15% vs 6% disabled boys).

Young non-disabled people are almost twice as likely to feel that they are hardly ever lonely compared to young disabled people (62% vs 34%), while young disabled people are more likely to say they are lonely some of the time (57% vs 36%) or often (9% vs 2%). Little has changed since My Active Future, where two-thirds of young disabled people said they felt alone compared to a third of young non-disabled people (66% vs 31%). For young disabled people, those most likely to often feel alone include:

- Black young disabled people (17%).
- Young people with mental health problems (16%).
- Those with multiple impairments (15%).
- Young people aged 9-11 (13%).

Young people's preferences for being active

This chapter builds on young people's experiences of being physically active and seeks to highlight how young people would choose to be active. Understanding these factors can support providers with facilitating sports and activities that are tailored to the wants and needs of young disabled and young non-disabled people.

Young disabled and young non-disabled people were given a number of paired statements which listed several factors of the type of sport and activity they wished to take part in. They were asked to choose one statement from each pair which they felt best described the activity they liked. If they liked both, they were asked to choose the one they liked best³⁷. Next, young people were asked who they wished to take part in activity with³⁸, and where they would prefer to be active³⁹.

³⁷ Q: There are many different types of sport and activity. Some of them are noisy, some are quiet, some are played indoors and some outdoors. You may like doing them just for fun or you may like to win! Now, please tell us what kind of activity and sport you like. Please choose from the pairs below. If you like them both, please choose the one you like the best.

³⁸ Q: Would you say your child would like to take part in sport and physical activity with ...

³⁹ Q: Where does your child prefer to take part in sport and physical activity?

How do young people like to be active?

Young disabled people are less likely to want to do activities that are outdoors and with others compared to young non-disabled people.

To echo similar findings to My Active Future, the majority of young disabled and young non-disabled people say they prefer playing sport and activity for fun, with others, outdoors. However, there is a sizeable proportion of young disabled people who prefer activities that are quiet, indoors, or on their own (Table 2).

Table 2: Type of sport and physical activity preferred by young disabled and non-disabled people.

What kind of activity and sport do you like?	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people
Noisy	33%	62% ▲
Quiet	67% ▲	38%
Just for fun	76% ▲	66%
Playing to win	24%	34% ▲
On my own	23% ▲	9%
With others	77%	91% ▲
Indoors	27% ▲	18%
Outdoors	73%	82% ▲

▲ Significant difference between young disabled and non-disabled people.

Young people with mental health problems prefer quiet activities.

Young disabled people are more likely to like quiet activities than their non-disabled peers (67% vs 38%), whereas young non-disabled people are more likely to prefer noisy activities (62% vs 33%).

Young disabled people who are most and least likely to prefer quiet sports and activities include:

- **By impairment type:** Young people with mental health problems (76%) or social or behavioural issues (76%) compared to young people with a vision impairment (58%).
- **By multiple impairments:** Young people with multiple impairments compared to one impairment (83% vs 60%).
- **By ethnicity:** White young people compared to Black young people (69% vs 44%).

- **By enjoyment:** Young people who don't like playing sports or doing activities compared to those who love playing sport (91% vs 50%).

Disabled girls prefer being active just for fun.

Both young disabled and young non-disabled people are most likely to prefer being active just for fun (76% vs 66%) than playing to win. Young disabled people who are most and least likely to play sports and activities just for fun include:

- **By multiple impairments:** Young people with multiple impairments compared with those with one impairment (86% vs 75%).
- **By gender:** Disabled girls compared to boys (82% vs 72%), whereas a proportion of disabled boys are more likely to want to play to win than disabled girls (28% vs 18%).
- **By enjoyment:** Young disabled people who don't like playing sports or doing activities compared to those who love being active (83% vs 66%). Young disabled people who love being active are twice as likely to prefer playing to win than those who don't like being active (34% vs 17%).

The majority of young people prefer being active with others.

While young disabled and young non-disabled people prefer being active with others (77% vs 91%), young disabled people are also more likely to say they like being active on their own (23% vs 9%).

Indoor activities are preferred by young disabled people who don't like sports and activities.

The majority of young disabled and young non-disabled people prefer to be active outdoors (73% vs 82%), while one quarter of young disabled people prefer indoor activities (27%).

Young disabled people who are most likely to prefer indoor activities include:

- Those with multiple impairments compared to those with one impairment (38% vs 25%).
- Those that don't like being active compared to those who love it (55% vs 21%).

Activity levels reinforce preferences for sports and activities.

These preferences also differ for young disabled people by activity level. Those who are 'less active' are also less likely to prefer activities that are noisy, competitive, or outdoors compared to young disabled people who are 'fairly active' (Table 3).

Table 3: Type of sport and physical activity preferred by young disabled people, by activity level.

Type of sport or activity	‘Less active’ young disabled people	‘Fairly active’ young disabled people
Noisy	27%	38% ▲
Quiet	73% ▲	62%
Just for fun	81% ▲	72%
Playing to win	19%	28% ▲
On my own	26%	20%
With others	74%	80% ▲
Indoors	32% ▲	22%
Outdoors	68%	78% ▲

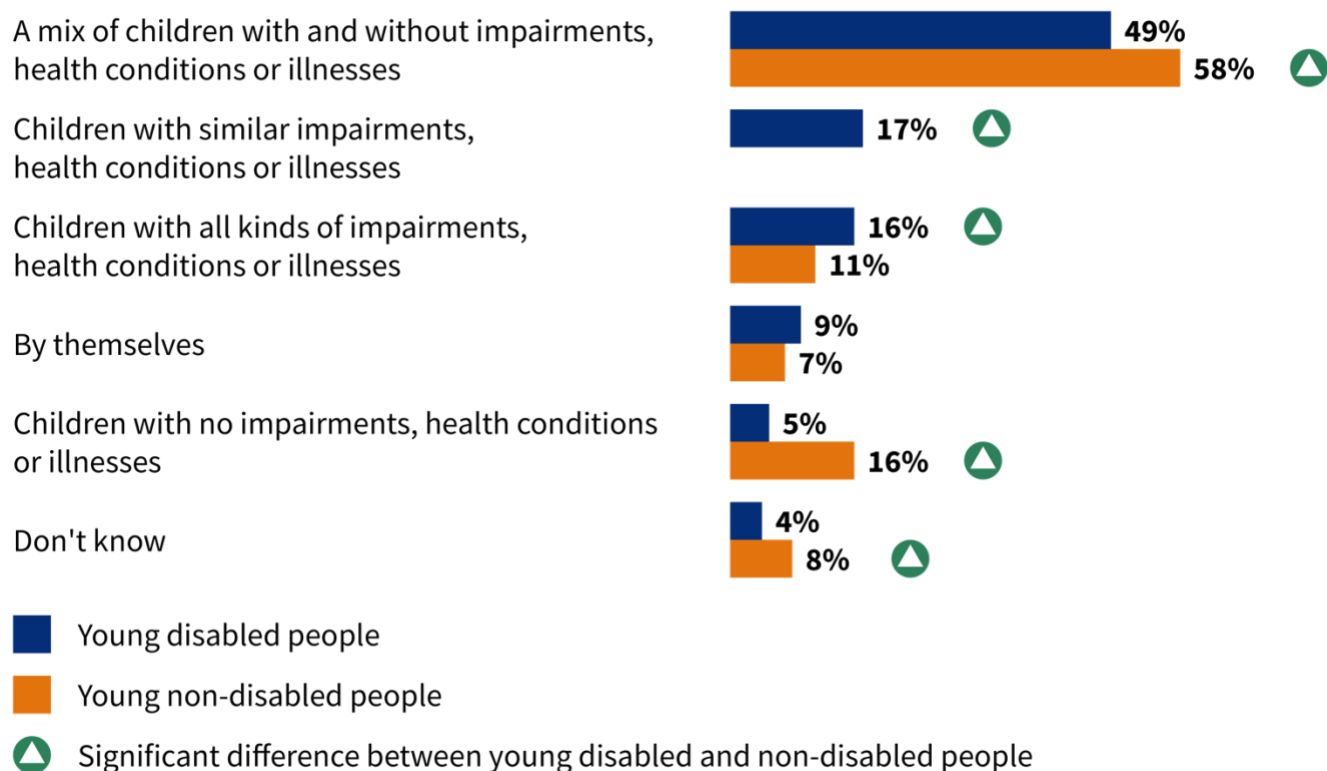
▲ Significant difference between ‘Less active’ and ‘Fairly active’ young disabled people.

Who do young people like to be active with?

A majority of young people want to take part in activity with a mix of disabled and non-disabled children.

Young people are more likely to want to take part in inclusive sports and activities, with half (49%) of young disabled people and six in ten (58%) young non-disabled people showing a preference for taking part with a mix of young disabled and young non-disabled people (Figure 17). However, almost one fifth (17%) of young disabled people say they prefer to take part in sport and activity with other young people with similar impairments, while a similar proportion of young non-disabled people say they prefer to take part in sports and activity with young people without an impairment, health condition or illness. While this further supports inclusive activity, it reminds us that inclusive activity is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Figure 17: Who young people want to take part in sports and physical activity with.

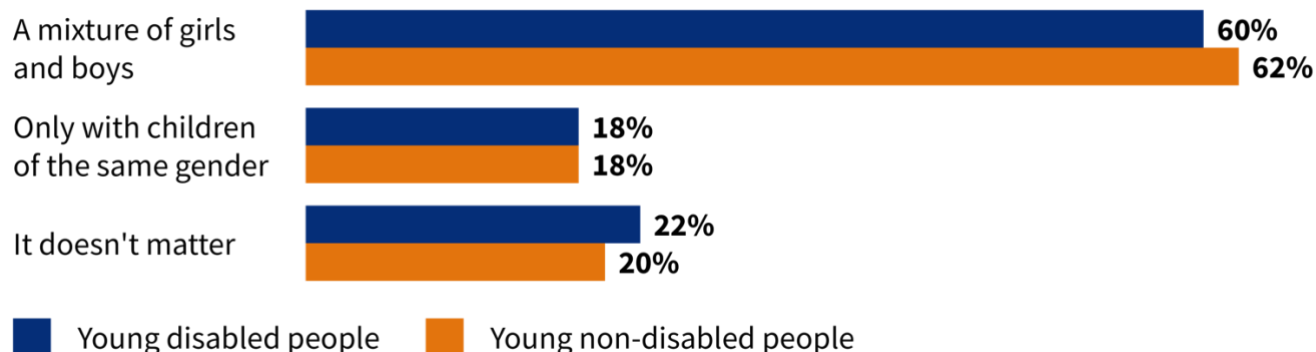


Activity levels appear to influence the preferences of young disabled people. Those who love being active are most likely to prefer inclusive activity compared to those who don't like playing sports or activities (53% vs 35%). In contrast, young disabled people who don't like being active are more likely to prefer being active with other young people with similar impairments to them than those that love being active (24% vs 12%).

For young non-disabled people, those aged 14-16 are most likely to want to take part in sports and activities with other young non-disabled people (24%), while non-disabled boys are more likely to also share this preference than non-disabled girls (19% vs 13%).

Additionally, most young people want to take part in activities with a mix of girls and boys.

Figure 18: Preferences for who young people want to take part in sports and physical activity with



As well as wanting to take part in inclusive activities, the majority of young disabled and young non-disabled people also highlight that they would like to take part in sport and physical activity with a mixture of girls and boys (60% vs 62%) (Figure 18).

Young disabled people most and least likely to prefer being active with a mix of girls and boys includes:

- **By impairment type:** Young people with a hearing impairment compared to a learning impairment (80% vs 56%).
- **By age:** Young disabled people aged five to eight, and nine to 11 compared to those aged 12-13 and 14-16 (73% aged five to eight vs 46% aged 14-16).
- **By enjoyment:** Young disabled people who love being active compared to those who don't like being active (69% vs 29%).

Young non-disabled people most likely to prefer being active with a mix of girls and boys include:

- **By age:** Young disabled people aged five to eight, and 9-11 compared to those aged 12-13 and 14-16 respectively (73% aged five to eight vs 51% aged 14-16).
- **By ethnicity:** Black young disabled people compared to White young disabled people (75% vs 60%).
- **By activity levels:** Young disabled people who are 'fairly active' compared to those who are 'less active' (66% vs 54%).

Older girls are most likely to want to be active with other girls.

Both young disabled and young non-disabled people aged 14-16 highlighted their preference for being active with young people of the same gender compared with other young people. Nearly three in ten young disabled people aged 14-16 highlighted this preference compared to young people aged five to eight (28% vs 16%), whereas a quarter of young non-disabled people of the same ages shared this preference (26% vs 15%).

Additionally, disabled girls are more likely to state they want to be active with other girls compared to disabled boys (25% vs 14%).

Furthermore, young disabled people who don't like being active are more than three times as likely to want to be active with those of the same gender than those who love being active (42% vs 11%).

Where do young people like to be active?

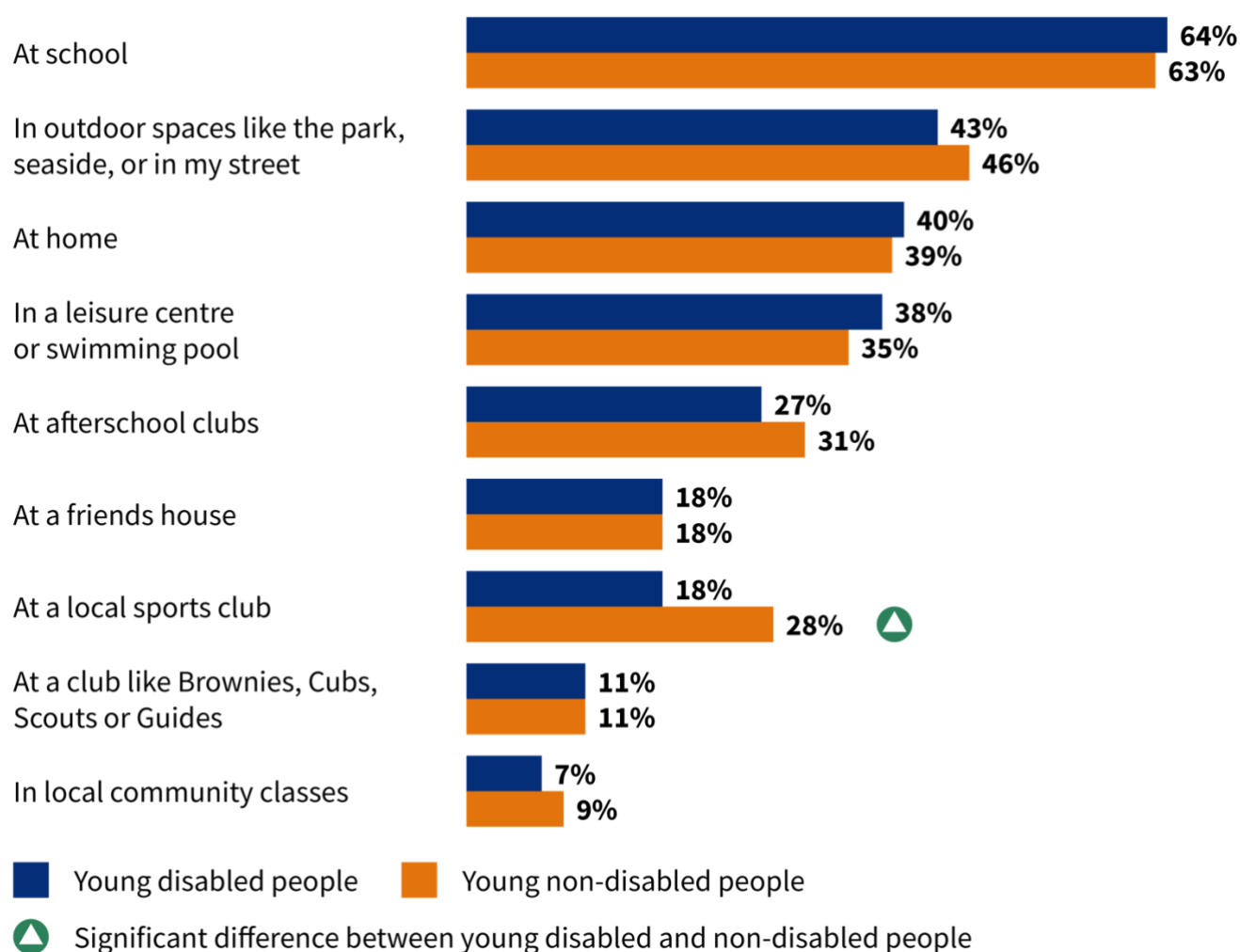
School is the most preferred place for young people to be active.

Despite only a quarter (26%) of young disabled people and two in five (38%) of young non-disabled people saying they could be active at school as much as they want 'all of the time', school is the most preferred place for young disabled and young non-disabled people to take part in sport and activity (64% vs 63%).

Likewise, young disabled and non-disabled people are just as likely to prefer being active outside of school settings in outdoor spaces (like parks, the seaside or in their street), at home, or at a leisure centre (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Preferences of where young people want to be active.



For young disabled people, school is the preferred place to take part in sport and activity. This is most evident for those including:

- **By impairment type:** Young people with other (70%), learning (66%), social (65%) impairments compared to those with a hearing impairment (46%).
- **By age:** Those aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (68% vs 58%).
- **By activity levels:** Those 'fairly active' compared to young disabled people who are 'less active' (67 vs 58%).
- **By enjoyment:** Those who love being active compared to those who don't like it (71% vs 53%).

When not at school, young people prefer to be active in outdoor spaces.

Outdoor spaces are the next preferred location for young disabled people to be active, with four in ten (43%) preferring to take part in sport and activity in spaces such as the park, seaside or street. This trend appears to decrease as children get older, with young disabled people aged five to eight more likely to want to be active in outdoor spaces than those aged 14-16 (53% vs 39%).

Other young disabled people who have a greater preference for being active outdoors include:

- **By ethnicity:** Black young disabled people compared to White young disabled people (68% vs 41%). There is no difference between Black and White young non-disabled people (43% vs 44%).
- **By activity levels:** Young disabled people who are 'fairly active' compared to those who are 'less active' (48% vs 37%).

Home is the third most preferred space to be active for young disabled people. Differences in preference across groups of young disabled people include:

- **By impairment type:** Those with physical impairments compared to those with social or behavioural issues (56% vs 37%).
- **By age:** Those aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (51% vs 33%).
- **By social grade:** Young disabled people in higher social grades (AB) compared to those in lower social grades (DE) (49% vs 36%).



My Active Future

Table 4: What young people would like to do more of.

Would you like to do more of these (answering Yes)	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people
Go to a park or play area	86%	90%
Go to the leisure centre or swimming pool	83%	84%
Play at a friend's house	83%	81%
Play at home or in your street	80%	77%
Do more PE at school	59%	73% ▲
Go to afterschool clubs	57%	65% ▲
Go to a sports club session	54%	69% ▲
Go to classes like karate or dance	51%	57% ▲
Play for a sports team	47%	63% ▲
Go to competitions	38%	58% ▲
Go to a club like Brownies, Cubs, Scouts or Guide	34%	44% ▲



Significant difference between young disabled and non-disabled people.

Young people shared similar wants regarding the type of activity they would like to do more often (Table 4). Most young disabled and young non-disabled people would like to do more activities at a park or play area, go to a leisure centre or swimming pool, or play at a friend's house or at home. Young non-disabled people, however, are more likely to want to do more PE at school, go to afterschool clubs, attend a sports club session and play for a sports team than their disabled peers.



Young disabled people most likely to want to go to the park or play area more include:

- Young people with a learning or concentrating impairment compared with those with a hearing impairment (88% vs 74%).
- Those with one impairment compared to multiple impairments (90% vs 81%).
- Young people aged five to eight compared to all other age groups, in particular those aged 14-16 (95% vs 78%). Young non-disabled people aged five to eight are also more likely to want to go to the park than young non-disabled people aged 14-16 (95% vs 77%).



Young disabled and young non-disabled people are just as likely to want to go to the leisure centre or swimming pool more often. However, young disabled people most likely wanting to go include:

- Those with multiple impairments compared to one impairment (91% vs 78%).
- Girls compared to boys (88% vs 81%).



Eight in ten young disabled (83%) and young non-disabled (81%) people want to play more at a friend's house. Young disabled people most likely wanting to play at a friend's house include:

- Those with vision impairments compared to those with a mental health problem (90% vs 77%).
- Young people aged five to eight compared to older young people aged 14-16 (91% vs 75%).
- Those in higher social grades social grades (89% vs 73%).



Further differences are observed across young disabled people who want to do more activities at home or in the street. These include:

- Young people aged five to eight compared to all other age groups. Young disabled people age five to eight are most likely to say yes compared to those aged 14-16 (90% vs 69%).
- Those in higher social grades (AB) compared to those in lower social grades (DE) (89% vs 73%).

Young people with mental health problems are least likely to want to do more PE at school.



Young non-disabled people are more likely to want to do more PE at school than young disabled people (73% vs 59%). However, young disabled people most likely to want to do more PE at school include:

- Those with hearing impairments compared to those with mental health problems (71% vs 47%).
- Young people with one impairment compared to those with multiple impairments (63% vs 57%).
- Young people aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (71% vs 48%).
- Boys compared to girls (65% vs 50%).
- Those in higher social grades compared to those in lower social grades (66% vs 52%).
- Black young people compared to White young people (83% vs 57%).
- Those 'fairly active' compared to young people who are 'less active' (66% vs 51%).



More than two-thirds of young non-disabled people want to do more sports club sessions compared to over half of young disabled people (69% vs 54%). Differences across young disabled people include:

- Young people with hearing (74%) or vision (70%) impairments compared to those with mental health problems (42%).
- Those with one impairment compared to those with multiple impairments (58% vs 49%).
- Young people aged five to eight compared to those aged 14-16 (57% vs 45%).
- Boys compared to girls (58% vs 48%).
- Black young people compared to White young people (85% vs 50%).
- Young people in higher social grades than those in lower social grades (69% vs 38%).
- 'Fairly active' young people compared to 'less active' young people (64% vs 51%).

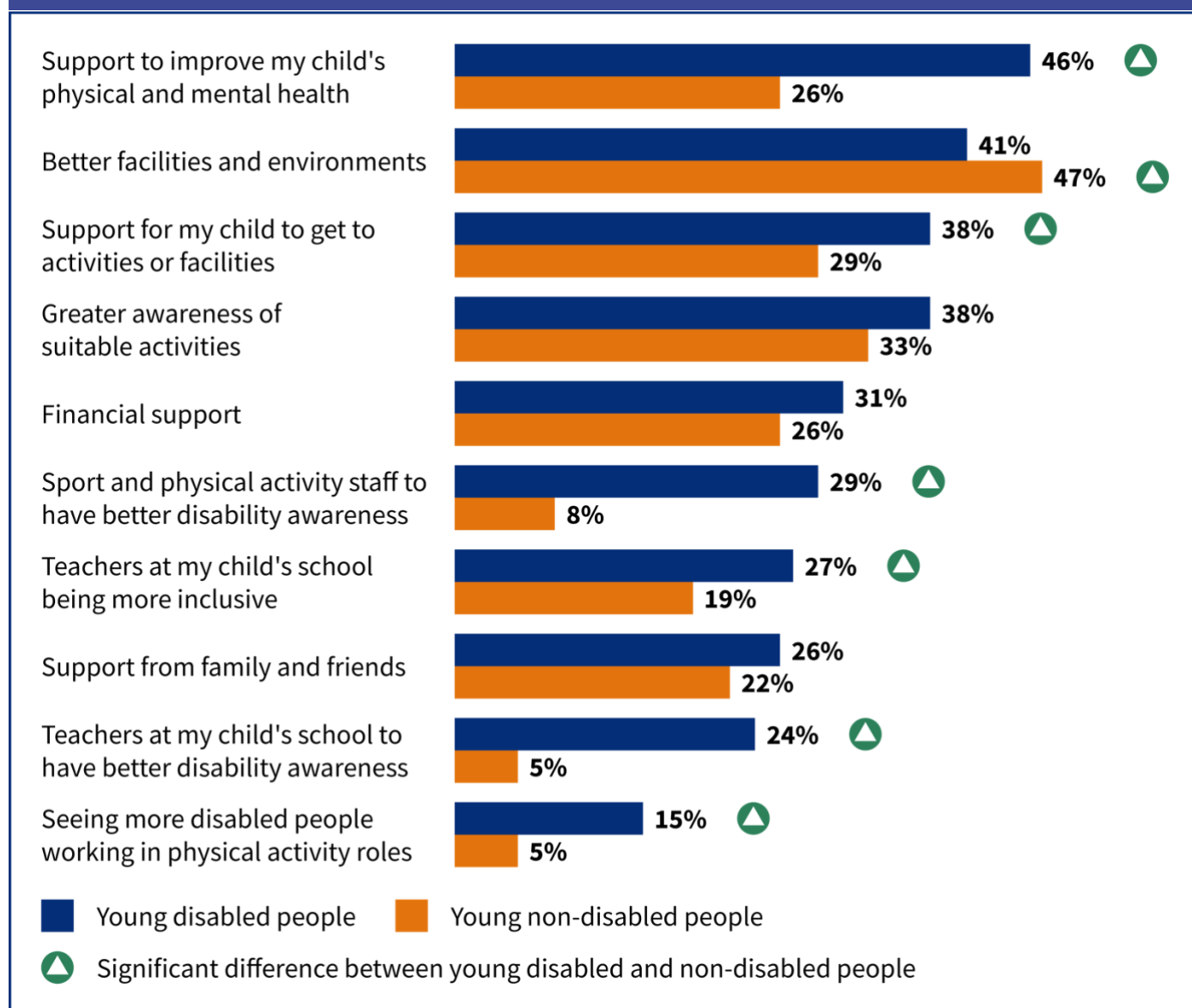


Nearly two-thirds of young non-disabled people would also like to play for a sports team compared to less than half of young disabled people (63% vs 47%). Young disabled people most likely to want to play for a sports team include:

- Those with hearing impairments compared to those with mental health problems (63% vs 38%).
- Those in higher social grades compared to those in lower social grades (61% vs 26%).
- Black young people compared to White young people (73% vs 44%).
- 'Fairly active' young people compared to those 'less active' (57% vs 35%).

Support to help young people to be more active

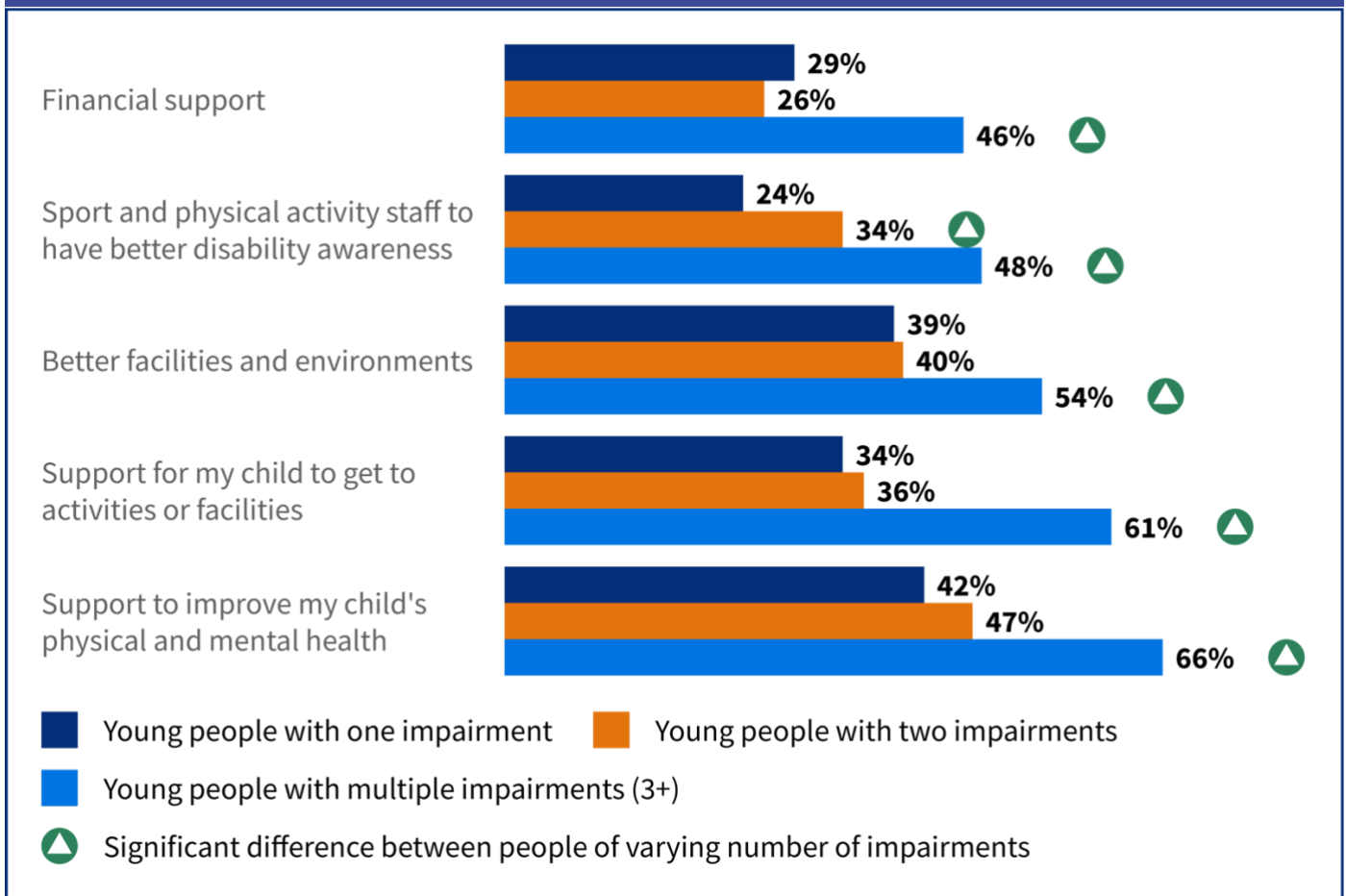
Figure 20: Support that parents and caregivers of young people feel would help their child be more active.



Parents and caregivers of young disabled and young non-disabled people share similar perceptions on what support would help their child to be more active. Support to improve their child's physical and mental health, better facilities and environments, support for their child to get to activities and facilities, a greater awareness of suitable activities, and financial support are the primary areas of support parents and caregivers feel can support young people to be more active (Figure 20).

Parents and caregivers with children with multiple impairments are more likely to highlight the needs for the support mentioned than young people with one or two impairments (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Areas of support parents and caregivers of young disabled people need to support their young person to be more active.



Nearly half (46%) of parents and caregivers of disabled young people highlighted the need for support to improve their child's physical and mental health compared with a quarter of parents and caregivers of young non-disabled people (26%). This is amplified for parents and caregivers of young disabled people with:

- Multiple impairments compared to young people with one impairment (66% vs 42%).
- Mental health conditions (57%).

In addition, parents and caregivers of young disabled people with specific impairments highlighted particular areas of support that could help their child be more active. These include:

- Young people with hearing impairments wanting support from family and friends (43%), teachers at their child's school being more inclusive (46%), and teachers to also have better disability awareness (46%).
- Young people with a physical impairment wanting sport and physical activity staff to have better disability awareness (58%), as well as seeing more disabled people working in physical activity roles (36%).
- Young people with multiple impairments compared to one impairment wanting teachers at my child's school to be more inclusive (40% vs 24%), sport and physical activity staff to have better disability awareness (48% vs 24%) and teachers at my child's school to have better disability awareness (36% vs 21%).



Conclusion and recommendations

This research highlights a persistent and widening gap in physical activity participation between young disabled and young non-disabled people. Despite similar motivations and preferences, young disabled people face more barriers, fewer opportunities, and lower confidence, especially those with multiple impairments or mental health problems.

This research acts as foundation for a wider three-year research project, therefore conclusions from this insight are aimed at supporting this ongoing research alongside the sports and activity sector.

Exploring intersections

The widening activity gap and persistent barriers require targeted, intersectional interventions. Disabled girls, Black disabled young people, those with mental health problems or multiple impairments are particularly underserved.

Inclusive design must build on the preferences of young people

While most young people prefer inclusive activities, a significant minority prefer impairment-specific environments. Inclusion must be flexible and responsive to individual needs. Further qualitative insight must explore these findings to understand what facilitates and prevents young people wanting to be active with each other.

Schools remain central to activity

School remains the most preferred setting for activity, yet only 26% of young disabled people can participate 'all the time'. Investment in inclusive school sport is critical. This includes both inclusive facilities, education for teachers and wider support staff, and logistical considerations around transport and time for appropriate sport and activity within the school curricula.

Support networks are key

Parents and caregivers need further support, from financial aid to staff training to support their children be more active. Furthermore, parents and caregivers must also feel like they belong in sport and activity settings through social connection and beyond, ensuring that their behaviour in supporting their child to be active is sustained.

Physical literacy

This research aligns closely with the concept of physical literacy, which includes motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding. Key insights to take forward from this report include:

- **Motivation:** Both young disabled and young non-disabled people are motivated by fun, health benefits, feeling good, and confidence-building.
- **Confidence:** Young disabled people report significantly lower confidence, especially girls and those with mental health problems.
- **Competence:** Only half of young disabled people find sport and exercise easy, compared to three-quarters of their non-disabled peers.
- **Knowledge and understanding:** Most young people understand the benefits of being active, but young disabled people are less likely to feel capable of acting on that knowledge.

These findings reinforce the importance of building physical literacy early, especially for disabled children, to support lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity. It is also essential to align future insight with the framework of physical literacy and that young people have positive experiences of sport and activity that are fun, inclusive and aid individual development.



Appendix 1

Demographic sample of survey respondents by age:

	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people	Disabled boys	Disabled girls	Non-disabled boys	Non-disabled girls
5 to 8	29%	36%	28%	30%	37%	36%
9 to 11	23%	22%	23%	23%	23%	21%
12 to 13	23%	15%	24%	21%	14%	16%
14-16	26%	27%	25%	27%	26%	27%

Sex:

	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people
Boys	61%	50%
Girls	39%	50%

Ethnic group:

	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people
White (including British, Irish, any other white background)	84%	69%
Black or Black British (Caribbean, African, any other Black background)	8%	18%
Mixed (including white & black Caribbean, white & black African, white & Asian, any other mixed background)	5%	6%
Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese or any other Asian background)	2%	6%
Other ethnic groups (any other ethnic group)	0%	1%

Social grade:

	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people
AB	28%	37%
C1	18%	25%
C2	28%	19%
DE	23%	16%
Don't know	1%	1%
Prefer not to say	2%	1%

Type of school attended:

	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people	Disabled boys	Disabled girls	Non-disabled boys	Non-disabled girls
State school (e.g. comprehensive, grammar)	56%	72%	53%	60%	70%	73%
Private school (also known as Independent School)	9%	17%	9%	7%	20%	14%
Special educational needs school (SEND)	22%	1%	24%	19%	0%	1%
Selective school (e.g. academic, faith)	8%	7%	9%	6%	6%	8%
Alternative provision school	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Other (please specify)	4%	2%	3%	5%	2%	2%

Region:

	Young disabled people	Young non-disabled people
North East	3%	4%
North West	11%	13%
Yorkshire & Humber	9%	9%
East Midlands	9%	6%
West Midlands	12%	9%
East of England	8%	9%
South East	15%	14%
London	10%	16%
South West	9%	7%
Northern Ireland	2%	2%
Wales	6%	4%
Scotland	6%	6%



Appendix 2

Our approach to disability

During this research, we asked parents and caregivers of young people about their child's impairment. To align with the social model of disability, we reflected on use of language in the design of any data collection method and sought to repeat the learning from My Active Future⁴⁰. This learning identified:

Different children and families interpreted words associated with disability in different ways, including:

- Children do not often identify themselves as having an impairment or being disabled.
- Some parents introduce other language to their children to help them to explain their impairment in a positive and child-friendly way.
- Some children understand that they have a specific condition. Younger children do not use the name of their condition but explain its impact on their body.
- Parents like the word 'inclusive' but some struggle to understand what it means, and whether it means available to everyone with or without an impairment.

With this in mind, for this research, we repeated a similar process to that used in My Active Future, whereby we asked parents and caregivers to identify if their child had any long-term health conditions, impairments or illnesses that limit their daily activities. Impairments referred to anything that makes it difficult to do everyday things. Parents and caregivers then specified how their child is affected using predefined categories (i.e. vision impairment, hearing impairment, mental health problem, etc.; one impairment, two impairments, three or more (multiple) impairments).

Our survey identified respondents as disabled if they answered yes to both of the following questions:

1. Do you have any long-term health conditions, impairments, or illnesses? This could include, for example, physical, sensory, learning, social, behavioural, or mental health conditions or impairments. Long-term means that they have lasted, or are expected to last, 12 months or more?
2. Do these health conditions, impairments or illnesses have a substantial effect on your ability to do normal daily activities?

Our approach to sports and activity

We define sports and physical activity as activity that raises your breathing rate, which can include team sports like football, and also activities such as dance, exercise or fitness activities and walking and cycling.

⁴⁰ [My Active Future: Including every child](#), Activity Alliance. 2020

Statistical significance

This report summarises findings based on significant differences between young disabled and young non-disabled people. Arrows within graphics represent statistically significant⁴¹ changes across a group.

Theory

Findings about young people's attitudes about being active and the perceived barriers are presented based on a behaviour change model called COM-B⁴². COM-B looks at a person's capability, opportunity and motivation to be active, which can lead to changes in one's physical activity behaviour. The framework proposes that for any behaviour (such as being active) to occur, individuals must:

- **Capability:** have the physical, social and emotional ability to engage in the activity.
- **Opportunity:** have the social and physical environment required to facilitate a behaviour.
- **Motivation:** have the desire to take part (e.g. enjoyment, sense of belonging)

COM-B was chosen as it provides a clear structure to analyse the barriers and enablers to sports and activities. COM-B also aligns with principles of physical literacy, namely confidence, competence and motivation. We also frame the findings in this way to support the design of targeted interventions that aim to improve participation outcomes for young disabled people.

We aim to frame the findings through COM-B to highlight not just what the barriers to participation are, but why they matter and how they can be addressed to support more inclusive practice.

⁴¹ Significance is set at a level of 95% confidence, meaning there is a 5% chance that the difference we are seeing is down to random fluctuation

⁴² [The behaviour change wheel: a new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions](#), Michie, van Stralen and West. 2011

**Please contact our research team
to discuss how to access, interpret
and use the data in this report.**



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