The UK General Election 2017

Supporting people who have learning disabilities to vote

A guide for family carers and supporters

This guide answers some common questions about how to approach the UK General Election in relation to people you support.

This year’s UK General Election take place on 8th June.

ENABLE Scotland want to encourage more people who have learning disabilities to exercise their right to vote.

Support teams have an important role to play. You can support people with voting itself, and support people to think about who they want to vote for.
Voting

1. Does everyone I support get a vote?

The short answer – most likely, yes.

To vote at the UK general election you must be:

- Registered to vote
- 18 years of age or over on polling day
- be a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen.
- be resident at an address in the UK (or a UK citizen living abroad who has been registered to vote in the UK in the last 15 years)
- not be legally excluded from voting

A lack of mental capacity is not a legal incapacity to vote - an adult with incapacity still has the right to vote.

2. Can I vote on behalf of people I support?

You can’t decide for someone who they should vote for.

If a person you support knows who they want to vote for and can’t vote by themselves, they can ask you to vote on their behalf.

This is called being a proxy voter. As a proxy voter, you mark the person's ballot paper for them. You must mark the ballot paper with the choice they want to make.

If you are asked by the person you support to vote on their behalf, it is important that you discuss this request with your Team Facilitator before agreeing.

If someone wants you to be their proxy voter and you agree to do this, they have to fill in a form to apply. You can download the form from: www.yourvotematters.co.uk

If you don’t have access to the internet, you can call ENABLE Direct on 0300 0200 101 and they will send you the right form.

To be a proxy voter, you have to be registered and able to vote in the election yourself (see Question 1). You cannot be a proxy voter for more than two people, unless they are close relatives.
3. If I agree to be a proxy voter for someone, what do I need to do?

If a person you support has applied for you to vote on their behalf, you will be sent a special proxy poll card a couple of weeks before the election. The card will tell you where you should go to vote.

When you go to the polling station, tell the staff that you are voting as a proxy. If you take your proxy poll card it will make it easier for the staff to find the right ballot paper.

If you won’t be able to get to the polling place on the day of the election, you can vote as a proxy by post. You must apply to do this before 5pm on 23rd May.

Contact your local Electoral Registration Office for more information.
You can find their details on www.yourvotematters.co.uk

If you do not have access to the internet, you can call ENABLE Direct on 0300 0200 101 and they will give you the right number for your local Electoral Registration Office.

4. Can I support someone to register to vote, or apply for a postal or proxy vote?

Yes.

You can help someone use the internet to add their name to the voter list. The website is www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

You can also support them to fill in a form to register their vote. You can get the form from the website www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

However, they must sign the form themselves. If they are unable to sign this form, they should contact their Electoral Registration Officer.

If you don’t have access to the internet, you can call ENABLE Direct on 0300 0200 101 and they will send you the right form.
5. Can I go to the polling station with the people I support?

Yes.

You can accompany someone you support to the polling station.

If you explain to staff at the polling station that you are supporting someone, you should be allowed to help them in the polling booth too.

The staff at the polling station might ask you to fill in a form to say you have helped.

The staff should offer assistance to the person you support too if they need it.

6. Can a Welfare Guardian or someone with Power of Attorney decide how to vote on a person’s behalf?

No.

People who care for someone or usually make decisions on their behalf cannot decide how the person should vote.

If someone wants to vote in the election they must decide themselves who they want to vote for.

‘Once they have decided who to vote for, if they want someone to mark their ballot paper on their behalf, they can ask their Welfare Guardian or someone else to be their proxy voter (see Question 2).
Questions about talking about the election

7. Do I have to be neutral when I talk about the election?

We know it can be difficult not to let your own views come into discussions about the election.

But the people you support have the right to make their own informed choice about who to vote for.

You can support people to go along to places where they can discuss the election with other people, like a local ENABLE branch or local ACE group.

8. Should I encourage the people I support to vote in the election?

ENABLE Scotland would love to see more people who have learning disabilities voting in all elections.

Some people you support might not want to vote in the election - having the right to vote also means having the right not to vote!

But you can help them to understand how voting works and why it is important to take part.

You should not encourage people to vote for one party or candidate in particular – it is up to the people you support to make up their own mind.
10. How can I help the people I support understand the election and make an informed decision?

We don’t want to make any assumptions about people’s ability.

But we want to make voting and political issues as easy to understand as we can.

It’s best to talk about voting as you would any other complex decision. It’s a good idea to get other people involved who usually support the person, like friends and family. Then everyone who supports the person can approach the subject of voting.

Important dates

- **Monday 22nd May**: Deadline to register to vote
- **Tuesday 23rd May**: Deadline to apply for a postal vote - 5pm
- **Thursday 8th June**: Election day! Polling places are open 7am to 10pm
- **Thursday 8th June**: Deadline postal votes must arrive by 10pm