

# Scottish Parliamentary Election 2021

Supporting people who have learning disabilities to vote

A guide for family carers and supporters



This year's Scottish Parliamentary elections take place on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

This guidance answers some common questions from family carers and supporters about supporting the person you care for to vote.



The  
Electoral  
Commission

## The right to vote

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There's a lot of misunderstanding about whether everyone who has a learning disability can vote.

In fact learning disability and legal capacity have no bearing on whether someone has the right to vote.

The voting age has been lowered for this election for the second time, from 18 to

16. So regardless of learning disability, as long as you are...

- 16 or over on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- a British, EU or qualifying Commonwealth citizen
- resident in Scotland

...you can vote in the Scottish Parliamentary elections.

## Welfare Guardianship and Power of Attorney

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Any person who is subject to a welfare or financial guardianship, or power of attorney, still has the right to vote.

However people who usually make decisions on behalf of their family member cannot decide how that person should vote.

If your family member wants to vote in the election, they must decide themselves who they want to vote for.

## Registering to vote

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Recent changes to the voter registration system mean that people who may have been previously registered as part of a household now have to register individually.

So it's important that if your family member would like to vote, you make sure they are on the electoral register.

This is the first Scottish Parliament election where people can register to vote online. Simply go to [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) and fill out the online form.

There is also a paper a large print registration form available at the link above, if this is easier for your family member.

If you don't have access to the internet, you can contact ENABLE Direct and they will post you out the forms you need. Just call Family Connect on 0300 303 0228.

### Important date

**6<sup>th</sup> April** is the deadline to register to vote. But don't delay!  
Better to do it now than risk missing out.

## Postal vote

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If your family member would find it difficult to get to the polling place on election day, you can apply for a postal vote when you register.

Simply tick the box on the online or paper form, and you will be sent another form to fill in.

Postal voting papers will arrive about a week or two before election day. This will give your family member more time to complete their ballot paper. But they must post it back in time so it arrives by election day on 6th May.

As a family carer you cannot decide on behalf of your family member who to vote for. But you can support them to complete their postal vote if they need help.

### Important dates

**6th April** is the deadline to apply for a postal vote – so make sure you have sent back the form by this date. The form must arrive by 5pm.

**6th May** is election day – if your family member has a postal vote they must send it back in time to arrive by this day. You can also take a postal vote to any polling place if you run out of time.

## Proxy vote

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A proxy vote is where a person asks someone else to vote for them.

It does not mean you can decide on behalf of your family member who to vote for. But if they know who they want to vote for, but would like you to mark their ballot paper for them – for example because they can't read the ballot paper, or don't feel confident going to the polling place – you can apply for a proxy vote.

A person with a learning disability must have legal capacity to make the decision to ask someone to vote on their behalf. And in order to be a proxy voter, you must have the right to vote in this election yourself.

You must apply separately for a proxy vote using a paper form. The form can be accessed online at [www.gov.uk/apply-vote-proxy](http://www.gov.uk/apply-vote-proxy)

You can choose to apply for a proxy vote for reason of disability. Or if your family member is going to be on holiday on the day of the election and does not want to vote by post, you can apply for a proxy in this circumstance too.

If you don't have access to the internet, you can contact Family Connect and they will post you out the forms you need. Just call **0300 303 0228**

### Important date

**27th April** is the deadline to apply for a proxy vote – so make sure you have sent back the form by this date. The form must arrive back by 5pm.

## Supporting your family member to vote at a polling place

A lot of family carers are unsure what support they are allowed to offer their family member at a polling place.

If you explain to the staff at the polling place that you are there to support your family member, they may ask you to fill in a form to say that you helped.

As a family supporter, you can...

- accompany your family member to the polling place
- support your family member to understand their ballot papers, explaining what is on them
- mark your family member's ballot papers if they wish.

But you can't decide who to vote for on behalf of your family member – the decision is theirs.

The polling place staff are there to help you and your family member too – so don't be afraid to ask!

If you encounter any problems at the polling place – for example you are told you are not allowed to help your family member – you can ask to speak to the Presiding Officer (the member of staff in charge at the polling place). If you are still having problems and need to speak to someone else, you can ask the Presiding Officer to contact the Returning Officer for the local area to resolve any issues.

### Important date

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May** is election day. Polling places are open from 7am to 10 pm, and you can go along at any time you like to vote.

## Deciding who to vote for

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It's important to understand that as a family carer, you cannot decide on behalf of your family who they should vote for. It's their decision to make.

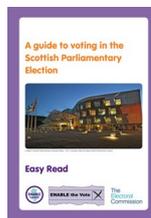
And like anyone else, someone who has a learning disability has the right to choose who they want to vote for any reason they like. It is not up to anyone else to judge if the person's reasons for choosing someone are valid or not.

ENABLE Scotland has developed a series of resources to support people who have learning disabilities to take part in the election and vote.

### Accessible information about the election and voting



A picture walkthrough of voting at a polling place



Easy Read factsheets about the Scottish Parliamentary election and types of voting.

These can be found on the ENABLE Scotland website: [www.enable.org.uk/enablethevote](http://www.enable.org.uk/enablethevote)

### Voting workshops

ENABLE Scotland's network of ACE Groups, ACE Youth Groups and ACE Connect – for adults and young people who have learning disabilities – are putting on voting workshops over Zoom.

The workshops aim to support people to think about politics, talk about issues that are important to them, and give them the knowledge and confidence they need to enable them to vote.

Contact ENABLE Scotland's ACE team for more information about workshops:  
[aceconnect@enable.org.uk](mailto:aceconnect@enable.org.uk)

## Speed dating with local politicians!

At ENABLE Scotland we think the traditional “hustings” event – where people ask questions and politicians debate – isn’t always the best format for getting the information you need to help you decide who to vote for.

So instead we’re inviting people who have learning disabilities from across Scotland to meet their local candidates – speed dating style!

The events are taking place throughout April and are a chance for people to meet their prospective MSPs in a more informal setting, and ask questions about issues that matter to them.

The facilitated events are open to anyone who has a learning disability.

You can find more details about these events at [www.enable.org.uk/enablethevote](http://www.enable.org.uk/enablethevote)

## Easy Read manifestos

Political parties usually publish their manifestos around a month before the election. In the past their commitment to providing manifestos in Easy Read format has been patchy – and if they do, they’re usually published far later – too close for many people to get hold of them before the election.

ENABLE Scotland has called for the main parties in Scotland to produce Easy Read manifestos for the Scottish election. We look forward to seeing which parties deliver!

During April, keep an eye out on parties’ websites to see if they’ve published anything. Your family member may be interested in one party in particular, or may find accessing different Easy Read manifestos helpful in making up their mind.

## Important dates

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19 <sup>th</sup> April	Deadline to register to vote
6 <sup>th</sup> April	Deadline to apply for a postal vote - 5pm
27 <sup>th</sup> April	Deadline to apply for a proxy vote - 5pm
6 <sup>th</sup> May	Election day! Polling places are open 7am to 10pm