

FEE REDUCTION AND WAIVER POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Policy Purpose

We are aware that for some families and individuals the cost of living crisis can be a barrier to accessing our activities/events. Often household budgets are unable to stretch to what may be considered a 'non-essential' expense.

The majority of our users (vulnerable adults, parents/carers of their children/young people with additional needs) can already feel isolated and we would never want them to feel further isolated by the cost of our activities/events becoming a barrier to them joining in.

We always try to keep fees to a minimum - usually no more than £4 for our regular activities of 1 -2 hours in duration. If an activity/event is particularly expensive or a longer period of time (half to a full day out for example), then fees may be in the region of £5 to £10.

We have always had a fee reduction and waiver policy and have always helped cover the costs of activities/events for users in hardship when required. However, we haven't previously made this policy public. In this document we want to make it easier to ask about fee reductions and waivers and to make this topic clear and easy to understand for our users to read for themselves.

Criteria to be granted a fee reduction or waiver

In general, users can apply for a fee reduction/ waiver if one or more of the following apply:

1. They cannot afford the fee
2. They have multiple children attending and cannot afford the combined fees

An application to reduce or waive fees may be rejected for a range of reasons, including:

1. If the applicant has not provided information requested about the household financial circumstances
2. If the applicant has not taken reasonable steps to ensure they have funds to pay subsequent fees (including seeking advice/support from our Benefit/Family liaison support workers)
3. If an activity is fully booked (we are unable to create extra spaces or tickets). Applications for fee reductions/waivers should be made as soon as possible. If we open a waiting list for any activity or event, then users can request to join this (each activity/event will be explicit in explaining if this is available and how to join).

Reductions or waivers offered

Users can apply to pay either a reduced fee or have the fee waived for a specified amount of time.

Regular activities (weekly/fortnightly/monthly)

For a regular activity where the fee is usually £3 to £4 per session payable half-termly or termly, we will offer a reduction in the fee or fee waiver for a specified time only. The amount of the reduction and the specified time will be unique to the user applying and to the discussions and information we are given.

For example a family with 2 children attending the monthly Teen Club in Wokingham (£4 per month for each child), may be asked to pay the full fee for the first child and a reduced fee or a free space for the 2nd child for the whole half-term. They therefore receive help for approximately 3 or 4 sessions in total.

A family with 1 child attending fortnightly multi-sports, may receive a reduced fee or a free space for a specified number of sessions, or for a few sessions, or for the whole half-term.

Each applicant will have a confidential discussion about why they are unable to pay, what amount is affordable to them and how long they will require help for. We may ask to see proof of circumstances.

One off activities/events

For a one off activity or event (day out, party etc), users can apply for a fee reduction or waiver if they are unable to meet the full cost on this occasion. The amount of the reduction given will be unique to the user applying and to the discussions and information we are given.

For example a family may wish to attend a Christmas Party but cannot afford to pay for spaces for all 5 children, may be asked to pay for the 1st and 2nd children and the remaining children are given free spaces.

How to apply

For one off events, users must contact us as soon as bookings/tickets are released to have a discussion with us about fee reductions.

In all instances we ask users to contact us, in confidence by emailing or calling:

Wokingham or West Berks - Children or Family Activities: rachael@asdfamilyhelp.org
Wokingham or West Berks - Adult Activities: jayne@asdfamilyhelp.org / 07733 601755
Pembrokeshire - All Activities: melissa@asdfamilyhelp.org / 07384 733658

When you email or call us, please provide as much information as possible including:

1. Are you asking for a fee reduction or waiver?
2. What activity or event are you asking for?
3. How many tickets/spaces are you asking about/How many children do you have?
4. Why are you unable to pay? Please provide as much information as possible

We will contact you to discuss further (usually within 48 hours). Once we have discussed with you and have all the information required we will try to give you a decision with 48 hours, in writing (email). We will specify the details of the amount of the reduction or waiver and the specific time limit it applies.

The decision will be mutually agreed between ASD Family help and the applicant based on their individual circumstances and the activity/event costings.

Usually applications will be based on trust. We may at times ask for proof of an applicant's financial position.

All fee reductions must be approved by a manager listed above (who has overall responsibility for their project area & budgets).

The fee reduction or waiver can be applied to all users of the charity.

Limitations to this policy and procedure

In order to protect our charity's financial welfare, we ask that users are mindful of the total amount of money they are asking to receive in fee reductions/waivers. Applications may cover more than one activity/event, more than one child or a regular ongoing activity.

ASD Family Help will keep an audit of how many users have received a fee reduction or waiver, the name of the user, which activities they are receiving a reduction/waiver for and the total amount received. This data will be monitored by the relevant Project Manager and the Charity Operations Manager.

ASD Family Help generally operates a no refunds/credit policy once an activity or event has been booked and paid for. The charity will, by default, accept that payment towards covering the cost of the activity/event or as a donation to the charity (dependant on the costings/budget for each activity/event). On occasion, we are given over-payments by other users which are specifically to be used to help other users in need.

We do ask that users do their utmost to contact us if they cannot attend an activity or event, ideally 24 hours before the start of the activity. This is to ensure we can offer a cancelled space to another user, especially for those activities that have waiting lists. It also helps us plan our activities with resources and staff.