



## PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER 16

### Driving

#### Driving and SLCN

Being able to drive increases your mobility and independence, and often marks an important milestone in the process of growing up. On the face of it, there is no obvious reason why a speech or language difficulty should prevent anyone from learning to drive, but speech and language impairments are often associated with a number of other difficulties which can make it harder for some young people. These difficulties include:

- › Poor auditory working memory. This affects the ability to remember a question long enough to answer it accurately, to follow instructions correctly, or to apply new information you have just been given.
- › Difficulty processing auditory or visual information. This affects the ability to make sense of questions or instructions, or things happening on the road, and respond appropriately and promptly.
- › Difficulty with focusing attention. This can mean having to concentrate hard to avoid being distracted and may make it difficult or even impossible to hold a conversation or listen to the radio while driving.
- › Poor spatial awareness can make it harder to judge distances and carry out manoeuvres. In some cases, it can affect the ability to distinguish between right and left.
- › Poor coordination skills can make it hard to move hands and feet at the same time, especially if they are doing different things.
- › Sequencing difficulties can make it hard to carry out a sequence of movements or follow instructions in the right order.

This means that some young people with speech and language difficulties will take much longer to learn to drive than other young people and may need to take their test several times before they pass.

Some young people find it easier to learn on automatics as they are much less complicated than conventional cars.

Once they have mastered the skill of driving, they can always progress to a non-automatic later, if they wish, though this will mean passing the relevant test.

If you are at all doubtful whether your son or daughter could or should learn to drive, it might be helpful to pay for an assessment at a mobility centre. They can identify any difficulties that might cause a problem, suggest strategies that might help and may be able to recommend particular instructors. For your nearest centre see:

**[www.mobility-centres.org.uk](http://www.mobility-centres.org.uk)**

#### Applying for a licence

You need to be 17 to start learning to drive a car or a motorcycle up to 125cc. Exceptionally, you can start driving at 16 if:

- › You receive the Personal Independence Payment mobility component at the enhanced rate or Disability Living Allowance mobility component at the higher rate and qualify for a motability vehicle or
- › You drive a moped

Before you start learning to drive, you need to obtain a provisional licence and you can apply up to three months before your birthday. Gov. uk, the Government website, has information about how to apply for a licence, including an online application facility:

**<http://tinyurl.com/9qjedoc>**

A first provisional licence costs £50.00.

If as a family, you receive any of the relevant qualifying benefits, your son or daughter may be eligible for the Family Fund's Driving Ambitions Grant, which provides funding for a combination of:

- › Provisional licence
- › Theory test
- › Learning materials such as books or DVDs
- › First Taster lesson

For more information, see:

<http://tinyurl.com/oz8t2ta>

### *Declaring a Disability*

If your son or daughter has a disability or medical condition which might affect their ability to drive, you are legally obliged to declare it on the application form. If you do not, you could be fined up to £1000.

The government information website **Gov.uk** has a list of conditions they think might affect your ability to drive and whether or not you **must** or **might need** to declare them. Interestingly, speech and language difficulties, along with other specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, are not mentioned at all, suggesting that they are not considered to be a barrier to driving.

Conditions that you must disclose are called *notifiable* conditions and include epilepsy, strokes, neurological conditions, mental health problems, physical disabilities and visual impairments. You can view the list here:

<http://tinyurl.com/o72cbez>

If you declare a disability or medical condition, the DVLA will need to decide whether to grant your son or daughter a licence. If they need more information, they may:

- › Contact your son or daughter's GP or consultant. If you feel another professional, such as a speech and language therapist, is the best person to advise on your son or daughter's disability, you should indicate this on the application form, and give their name and contact details. Do check with them first that they are happy for you to do this.
- › Arrange for your son or daughter to be assessed by another doctor
- › Ask your son or daughter to take a driving assessment, probably at your local mobility centre.

They aim to inform you of their decision within three weeks, but if they need to seek further information, it can take up to 90 days. If they refuse your application for a licence, you can appeal to the magistrate's court.

### Learning to Drive

Young people learning to ride a motorcycle **must** attend a course before they can start driving on the road. There is no set fee for these courses; it depends what the organisation running them charges. To find a course close to you, you can search here:

<http://tinyurl.com/q846yrg>

Theoretically, you can teach your son or daughter to drive a car yourself, but professional lessons, while expensive, are usually considered a worthwhile investment. You can help to cut costs by practising with your son or daughter between lessons.

It is advisable to choose an instructor carefully, and make sure they understand the implications of your son or daughter's disability. Your local mobility centre may be able to recommend suitable instructors, or if you know other parents of young people with similar disabilities, try asking who they used.

Some driving schools offer the chance to start learning on simulators. This can be helpful for young people who are particularly nervous, or who might find learning to drive harder than others. See the links below for more tips on learning to drive.

### The Driving Tests

In order to obtain a full licence to drive either a car or a motorcycle, you must first pass the theory test, and when you have done that, a practical test. The organisation overseeing driving tests is called the Driving Standards Agency (DSA).

The website **Gov.uk** provides an online facility for booking tests here:

<http://tinyurl.com/b249ynp>

The relevant pages also give you the phone number to ring if you have any problems or need to discuss special needs.

Prices vary depending on the test and the time of day you are taking it, but start from £31 for the theory test and £62 for the practical.

For more details, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/driving-test-cost>

There are a number of books and CD-Roms available which help you practise for the tests. **Gov.uk** lists several in its information about driving tests. Some of the other links listed below mention other resources.

### *The Theory Test*

This consists of two parts:

- › A series of 50 multiple choice questions which you answer on a touch-screen computer, and
- › A hazard perception test which tests your ability to spot possible dangers or hazards and general forward planning. It involves viewing 14 video clips, each lasting about a minute, and indicating when you see a developing hazard.

You are allowed a 15 minute practice before taking the theory test. The pass mark for the multiple choice section is 43/50 and for the hazard perception test 44/75.

When you have passed your theory test, you are given a certificate which is valid for two years. If you do not pass your practical test within this time, you will have to take another theory test before trying again.

For more information about the theory test, see:

**<https://www.gov.uk/driving-theory-test>**

### *The Practical Test*

The practical test aims to establish whether you can drive safely. It involves:

- › An eyesight check
- › Answering two vehicle safety questions
- › A test of your driving ability, which will include 10 minutes of independent driving.

For more information see:

**<http://tinyurl.com/nj8zh2y>**

The motorcycle practical test consists of two modules. The second is very similar to the practical test for cars. The first module tests your ability to perform certain manoeuvres off-road.

## Reasonable Adjustments and Concessions

People with disabilities can request special arrangements to help them with the tests. You need to say what help you would like when you book. Do be aware that you may be asked to provide proof of your disability.

Depending on your particular needs, this would probably need to be a letter from a doctor or a professional such as a teacher, educational psychologist or speech and language therapist. The DSA will also accept the British Dyslexia Association online test as evidence of a reading difficulty.

### *The Theory Test*

- › If you can't speak or understand written English very well, you can ask for a voiceover i.e. a recording of someone reading out the questions and answers in English or one of a number of other languages. You can ask for the questions and answers to be repeated as often as you like.
- › If you can provide evidence of a reading difficulty you can qualify for extra time for the multiple choice part of the test – in some cases, this can be up to double the usual time of 57 minutes.
- › If you have problems understanding language, it may be possible to book an oral language modifier. You would need to discuss this with the DSA before booking your test.
- › If new places or experiences make you very anxious, you may be able to arrange a prior visit to the test centre. It may also be possible to arrange for someone else to accompany you to the booking-in process and even sit outside in the waiting area while you take the test. In extreme cases, you may even be able to take the test from home.

### *The Practical Test*

Whether or not you have special needs, you are entitled to take someone with you to ride in the back of car. Some people take their driving instructor, but you could ask a friend or relative. They are not usually allowed to say anything or take any part in the test, but, if your son or daughter needs extra support, you might be able to negotiate a relaxation of this rule in order to, for example:

- › Repeat anything the examiner says in simpler language
- › Explain to the examiner what your son or daughter is trying to say, or
- › Notice if they are getting stressed and draw it to the examiner's attention. They might need to stop briefly to have a chance to calm down.

It is common practice to schedule a longer slot for candidates with special needs or a disability so that they have time beforehand to discuss with the examiner what help they might need.

Talking might not, of course, be very easy for young people with speech and language difficulties, so it is probably best to contact the DSA before you book the test to agree what special arrangements will be made for your son or daughter. This could include extra time for the test (if they need more time to answer questions, for example). Other adjustments that are frequently offered include:

- › If you would find it easier, you can ask to write down the number plate you are asked to read rather than say it out loud
- › For the independent driving you might be asked if you prefer to follow traffic signs or written instructions and a diagram.
- › The NAS have a template letter on their website explaining what help an autistic person might need. You may be able to adapt it for your purposes:  
**<http://tinyurl.com/pzt9gbc>**
- › See the links below for suggestions of other reasonable adjustments you might find helpful.

Remember that the driving test is designed to check whether you can drive safely. It is not a test of your memory, comprehension, or map reading skills. It is fine to ask the examiner to repeat something you did not understand or have forgotten.

## References and Further Information

**Gov.uk** has information about:

- › Driving licences and an online application facility: **<http://tinyurl.com/aghvodu>**
- › Learning to drive, driving tests and an online booking facility: **<http://tinyurl.com/b249ynp>**, and
- › Driving with a disability: **<http://tinyurl.com/q5cnrvs>**

**The Site**, a website for students and young people aged 16–25 run by YouthNet UK, has information about

- › Learning to drive: **<http://tinyurl.com/nzuvuaa>**
- › The law on learning to drive: **<http://tinyurl.com/2c7bmn>**
- › Driving safely: **<http://tinyurl.com/oyaxxel>** and
- › What to do if you are involved in an accident: **<http://tinyurl.com/oaf924o>**

**The British Dyslexia Association** has a section on its website entitled Driving Tests, with lots of useful tips about learning to drive as well as detailed information about requesting special arrangements for driving tests :  
**<http://tinyurl.com/n3pog6>**

**The Dyspraxia Foundation** has a section about driving on its website containing helpful advice about learning to drive and a number of useful tips: **<http://tinyurl.com/yc3v5t4>**

**The National Autistic Society** has a section about driving on its website with information about applying for a licence, learning to drive and driving tests. This includes a draft letter you can use or adapt to explain your needs and request appropriate special arrangements: **<http://tinyurl.com/pzt9gbc>**

**SpLD Transitions**, a Welsh website aimed at young people with dyspraxia or other specific learning difficulties and their families, has a factsheet on learning to drive, applicable throughout the UK: **<http://tinyurl.com/q4g5lnp>**

**The Forum of Mobility Centres** is a network of independent organisations throughout the UK who offer information, assessment and advice to people with a disability or other condition that may affect their ability to drive. For more information and contact details for the individual centres, see:

**[www.mobility-centres.org.uk](http://www.mobility-centres.org.uk)**.

**The Family Fund** awards grants to families with a child with a disability or other complex needs. Their *Driving Ambitions* programme provides help for young people aged 16 or 17 who would like to learn to drive. For more information, see the application form: **<http://tinyurl.com/q2uwcpp>**.

## Afasic Publications and Services

*Young Person's Identity Card*: £0.50

*Watch Your Language* – professionals' pack: £17.00

*Creating Learning and Communication-Friendly Environments for Young People* – 10 tips for colleges, employers and agencies working young people who have communication difficulties): £1.00

**The Afasic helpline** – open 10.30 – 2.30, Monday to Friday, tel: **0300 666 9410** or **0207 490 9420/1**