

Adaptable Sport Programming in Lethbridge

Accessible and fun physical activities and sport for children with disabilities for Lethbridge, Alberta

Sources: Active For Life, Lethbridge.ca, Lethbridge Sport Council Sport Directory

Being active outside is essential for our mental and physical well-being. However, it can be difficult to find suitable activities for kids with disabilities. Common obstacles include accessibility, safety, finding adaptive equipment, and financial barriers. Below are a few ways to eliminate these hurdles so you and your kids can get active no matter your circumstance.

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1. Accessible playgrounds

“Playgrounds should be welcoming, fun, and encouraging places for all children to test the limits of their bodies and imaginations.” - *Active for Life* on why our communities need more playgrounds that are inclusive. “When a child with mobility challenges can’t access a play area because they’re unable to move on surfaces such as sand or pea gravel (both of which are difficult to cross with wheelchairs, for example), their opportunity to play and exercise ends before it can even begin.”

Accessible playgrounds focus on removing barriers so all people can play without limitation. Features like ramps and rubber surfacing come at a cost but make a play area fully accessible. Making a play space accessible is the first step. Having activities not solely based on physical abilities is also important.

Playgrounds often feature musical components for practicing rhythm (an important part of being physically literate), accessible slides with ramps, climbing webs with varying difficulties, and more. A truly inclusive or accessible play space provides access, promotes inclusive play between children of all abilities and develops the child not only physically, but also mentally, socially, and emotionally. When we provide children and families with inclusive environments, children feel respected, nurtured, and encouraged during play.

One playground design often does not fit all children’s needs. Starting from an understanding of what needs must be met and reverse engineering the playground is how inclusivity is accomplished.

Playgrounds should meet the needs of all ages and abilities. Inclusive playgrounds ensure that not only is everyone having fun, but they are learning as well. No one should ever have to sit on the sidelines of their local playground. Creating inclusive playgrounds that include expression swings, merry-go-rounds, and sensory play, ensures there is something for everyone.

The City of Lethbridge, in partnership with Lethbridge School District No. 51 and Holy Spirit Catholic School Division No. 4, maintains 113 publicly available playgrounds across the city. Many of these playgrounds feature amenities that children of all ages will enjoy, though not all of them are considered inclusive or accessible to all.

If you are looking for an accessible playground in Lethbridge here are a few places to check out:

North Lethbridge

- [Park Meadows School Playground](#)
- [Westminster School & Park](#)

South Lethbridge

- [Our Lady of the Assumption School Park](#)
- [Lakeview School Park](#)
- [Henderson Lake Park \(North Playground\)](#)

West Lethbridge

- [Gilbert Paterson School Park](#)
- [Gerald Probe School Park](#)
- [Canyon Crest Park](#)
- [Nicholas Sheran Park](#)
- [Crossing Playground](#)

2. Accessible Water Features in Lethbridge

Accessible pools are much different from accessible pool decks. A deck may be accessible with little to no means of getting the person with a disability into the water. Some great examples of accessible water features in Lethbridge are:

South Lethbridge

- [Fritz Sick Pool](#)
- [Henderson Pool](#)
- [Rotary Centennial Fountain](#)

West Lethbridge

- [Nicholas Sheran Spray Park](#)
- [Nicholas Sheran Pool](#)
- [Cor Van Raay YMCA at ATB Centre](#)

3. Accessible Trails

Accessible hiking trails allow people of any age or physical condition to enjoy outdoor time and great scenery. A smooth trail makes it possible for anyone to take a walk or ride through nature. Flat, wide paths ensure those with mobility aids can safely enjoy a stroll or a roll in the fresh air. Parking lots with ramps and curb cuts are necessary for wheelchair access as well as areas to rest off the path.

The City of Lethbridge's [pathway network](#) contains over 177 km of paved pathways and approximately 57 km of natural or gravel trails.

“Historically centered around the Coal Banks Trail, regional pathways connect neighbourhoods, parks and nature reserves throughout the entire City. Natural pathways are located in a variety of City parks as well and are a great way to explore the river valley parks. If you're looking to plan a route or just want to view our pathway network, [click here](#) for our interactive map. Click on sections of pathways to see the length of that segment and what material the pathway is built out of.” - City of Lethbridge Website

To find parks, playgrounds, maps and more, check out the **Lethbridge Parks App**! Click here for [Apple](#) | [Android](#) downloads.



4. Accessible Sport Organizations In Lethbridge

Creating a positive sport experience should be a priority for any coach or organization. That means fostering an inclusive, supportive atmosphere for all athletes. In addition to welcoming young athletes of all experience levels to the team, organizations should make sure their sport program can be modified when an athlete with a disability joins. While sometimes used interchangeably, adaptive sports and inclusive sports are not the same. Adaptive sport refers to changes made to a sport through specialized equipment, rule changes, or other adaptations that allow an athlete with a disability to participate. Inclusive sports refer to programs that have athletes with disabilities participate directly alongside athletes without disabilities.

Often, adaptive sports programs are run separately from mainstream sports programming. The focus in these programs is on the adaptive athlete. For example, if you're looking for adaptive sport options for athletes, some possibilities would be wheelchair basketball or blind bowling. Lethbridge Sport Council's online publication, [Sport Matters](#), features sport, physical activity, and active recreation opportunities for all ages, abilities, and experiences.

Another handy tool is the Lethbridge Sport Council online [sport directory](#). You can pick a sport of interest and the directory will list local, provincial and national sport organizations from that category. Click on an organization to learn more about them and see if their programming is of interest to you.

Examples of organizations focused on accessibility in Lethbridge would be:

- [Adaptable Outdoors](#)
- [Blind Bowling](#)
- [Wheelchair basketball](#)

Fun fact: The difference between bocce and boccia is that bocce is a game played on a long, narrow, dirt-covered court. Boccia is a Paralympic sport, similar to bocce, played by people with impaired motor skills. Lethbridge lawn bowling and bocce courts can be found [here](#).

5. Tips And Tricks For When You're Staying Close To Home

Source: Active For Life

Venturing too far from home can be daunting for some families. Medicine and feeding schedules, toileting, naps, etc. are often easier to manage at home, but this doesn't rule out outdoor fun. There are plenty of opportunities to be active in your own backyard or nearby outdoor space. Here are some ideas:

- Bring a yoga mat outside and follow an [online movement](#) or yoga video
- Make paper airplanes and fly them around the block
- Play bean bag boccia ball or try some [target throwing](#)
- Toss water balloons
- Go on a scavenger hunt around the yard
- Create an [obstacle course](#)
- Play frisbee, ring toss, or [hula hoop](#)
- Decorate bikes, strollers, or wheelchairs and parade down the street
- Have an outdoor [dance party](#)

When you are planning outdoor activities, consider movement, imagination, and fun and you can't go wrong.

6. Equipment

Not every activity requires equipment, but items to have in your collection could include:

- Resistance bands for various strengthening exercises
- Yoga mat
- Bean bags
- Balloons and bubbles
- Utility ball or [Beeper ball](#) (it makes a sound for those with a visual impairment)
- Hula hoop and skipping rope (to be used in a multitude of ways beyond the traditional)
- Swing ball or a t-ball stand
- Velcro easy-catch ball and glove

Some organizations have equipment lending libraries. Check for opportunities to borrow and test out adaptive bikes and trikes, beeper balls, and other adaptive equipment. Facebook groups are another great place to source gently used equipment for purchase or exchange.

Lethbridge Sport Council's [Lending Library](#) includes items for rent or loan like artificial ice surfaces, court floors, spike ball, washer toss, cornhole, sport exploration kits and more.

7. Finances

Many outdoor activities are free (e.g., playing at the park, stretching on a blanket on the grass, chasing bubbles, flying a kite, bouncing a ball against the wall, [Lethbridge Roving Gyms](#)), while some structured programs and activities have associated costs.

There are several resources on the Lethbridge Sport Council [Website](#) for you to check out, including information about local [Sport and Active Recreation Fee Assistance Programs](#). Some additional resources include:

- You may be eligible for funding for your child's activity via the [Jumpstart program](#).
- [KidSport](#) provides grants to help cover the costs of enrolment so that all kids ages 18 and under can play a season of sport.
- [MOVE by GoodLife Kids](#) is a free virtual physical activity program for Canadian youth ages 12 to 21 with intellectual disabilities and/or autism.
- City of Lethbridge [Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program](#) for residents who face financial barriers to participating in recreational and cultural opportunities. Each qualifying individual can receive up to \$200* for one activity in the first half of the year (January - June), and \$200* for one activity in the second half (July - December).
- [Tetra Society](#) of North America builds innovative solutions for people with physical disabilities to overcome environmental barriers, providing greater independence, quality of life, and inclusion. They are an associate member of Lethbridge Sport Council with more information housed on the [member's directory](#).
- [Calgary Flames Sports Bank](#) has helped put lightly used sports equipment in the hands of children at Lethbridge Sport Council initiatives in the past. The sports bank was founded by Bill Comrie and the Comrie Family in August of 2014. In July 2020, the Calgary Flames Foundation became the title partner and continues the great work. They gather donations of gently used sports equipment which is screened to ensure it is safe and usable for kids and then distributed to those in need.

We encourage municipalities to make accessible playgrounds, pools and activities for the public to use. We encourage sport organizations strive to be more flexible and create programming that is both adaptable to participants and accessible to all. These efforts combined will make more inclusive opportunities so all people can experience positive sports programming.

Do you know of a program or other information that is missing from this resource? We want to hear about it, please email us at info@lethbridgesportcouncil.ca