

Creating inclusive learning spaces

Creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment is important for your learners. There are a few ways you can do this.



Whether you are working with learners one on one or in a group, considering your learner's physical needs and creating an appropriate physical environment will lead to more enjoyable and successful learning sessions for everyone involved.

Some considerations include:


- Having stable internet connection
- Having appropriate technology for learners to borrow, e.g. tablets or computers, operating systems, virus software and software packages
- Comfortable furniture and equipment
- Wheelchair accessibility and other accessibility requirements
- Easy parking and distance to public transport at your venue
- At a time of day where people can attend eg outside school pick up hours
- Well lit and aired rooms.

Accessibility features

In digital terms, accessibility is about making technology easier to use for people with disabilities or those who have specific requirements. Although some accessibility features require special software downloads, many are built into the operating system of your computer or mobile device. These features usually cover the following sensory areas:

-  **Vision:** Features for blind or low-vision users. Features such as text-to-speech allow users to hear what's on the screen instead of reading it. Other features like high contrast themes and enlarged cursors, make it easier for users with limited vision to see the screen.
-  **Hearing:** Features for deaf or low-hearing users. Closed-captioning helps to convey audio information to deaf users in visual forms. Mono audio

systems transmit right and left audio signals through both earbuds and headphones so users with limited hearing in one ear will not miss part of what they are listening to.

-  **Motor Function:** Keyboard shortcuts are convenient for many people, but they are especially helpful to those with difficulty physically manipulating the mouse. For users who have difficulty pressing several keys at once, sticky keys allows them to press keys one at a time to activate a shortcut.

These features can be explored in your device's operating system settings. Do take some time to familiarise yourself with these functions on both Mac and Windows devices. Keep in mind that a learner's accessibility needs aren't always obvious or learners may not be comfortable disclosing them straight away. You can assess their level of comfort during the first session and when you're getting to know your learner. You can also proactively offer them use of these features if you feel it would enhance their learning experience.

Sometimes learners would require cognitive/linguistic adjustments that require you to present information in simple and easily understood language. Though there are no accessibility features for this, you could make reading, writing and comprehension of complex material a lot easier for your learner by delivering content in more than one way (e.g text and video) focusing attention on important content and minimising distractions.

For more information on built-in accessibility features, check out the resources below:

- [5 tips to make your device easier to use](#) video
- Visit the [Be Connected website](#), and search for accessibility
- Good Things [accessibility resource library](#).

Assistive technologies

Software and hardware can do a lot to make devices and technology more accessible for users, but some learners may require extra hardware or assistive technology. Most assistive-technology devices are similar to keyboards and speakers and can be plugged into the main computer.

Below are some examples of assistive technology that may help your learners.

- **Screen magnifiers:** Placed over a computer's monitor, they make the contents appear magnified.
- **Alternative Keyboards:** For people who have difficulty using standard keyboards. Some keyboards have larger keys that are easier to press, some have alternative key arrangements, including arrangements for people who can only type with one hand or with a limited number of fingers.
- **Switch operated peripherals:** Devices that allow people with limited mobility to control technology with very small motions, even if they are not able to operate peripherals with their hands.

As a Digital Mentor, you are not required to make assistive devices available to your learners, but it's good to know the different options available and where to find them so that you can pass this information on to your learner, or spend some time exploring the many options available together.

For more information on accessibility, you can visit the following websites:

- [The National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#)
- [The Centre for Accessibility Australia](#)

Positive learning environments

Enthusiasm is really important when delivering digital skills sessions. Your learners will be a lot more invested in what you're telling them if they can see that you yourself really believe in the benefits from being online. Ways you can show your enthusiasm include:

- **Linking the learning to familiar and positive experiences:** For example, introduce a video calling session by linking it to calling family.
- **Share your own experiences:** Highlight the benefits of being online.
- **Show your excitement at being able to support your learners on their digital journey:** This will boost their enthusiasm, so try to think of positive examples such as saving money online, keeping in touch with your family

and friends or even being able to borrow a book from the library without even leaving the house.

- **Stay positive and upbeat:** Discuss the positive aspects of getting online. Some learners will understandably be dubious about giving their information out to someone or something they know little about. Try and keep the conversation positive by reminding them that the reason they're there is to learn how to be safer online.
- **Remain patient:** This can be a real challenge sometimes - don't get frustrated or annoyed. If someone's not learning something, try going over it in a different way or using an analogy to liken it to something in their everyday life.
- **Motivate:** Sometimes motivating learners can be hard, so take a look at Good Things' online course ['Motivating learners'](#).
- **Make it fun!** Think about how you can turn practicing a digital skill into a game, or make having a go enjoyable. For example, the Be Connected website has games that let your learners practice touchscreen skills. Or, can you relate the practicing of the skill to something they may be interested in, such as learning how to search for recipes online.

For more information, you can take a look at the Be Connected resource ['Creating a positive learning experience'](#).