



Supporting children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities on Restart a Heart Day

Before the day

If possible, find out in advance whether any students taking part in Restart a Heart Day will need adjustments or extra support.

In particular:

- Will they have a teaching assistant with them?
- Will they need the session to be quieter than usual?
- Is there a best place for them to be seated in the room? See below for more information.
- Would it be helpful to assign a volunteer to them for the session to give one-to-one support, or will this make them more uncomfortable?
- If they can't get down on the floor to practice CPR, would a chair/bench/table be helpful?
- Would the [Makaton training video](#) be more appropriate for them rather than the usual training video?
- Is there anyone who has witnessed a cardiac arrest, or other distressing situation, who may be upset by the session?

On the day

- Don't panic – whatever the student's needs, they can usually be supported and included. Ask school staff to help if needed.
- Almost anyone can learn CPR – and if not, they can still learn something important and useful, e.g. how to call for help, or how to guide someone else to do CPR.

Position in the room

- Some students may be better seated near the front, to better see and hear.
- Others will be better near the exit, so they can leave quickly if they need to.
- Others will be better at the back, so they do not feel they are in the spotlight.
- School staff should be able to help with this.

Additional support

- Some students will have a one-to-one teaching assistant to support them.
- Others may benefit from being allocated a Restart a Heart volunteer to provide one-to-one support (if there are enough volunteers to allow this).
- Some students may need extra support, but may not feel comfortable being singled out, so working with them in a small group of students may be helpful.

Noise

- Restart a Heart sessions are often quite noisy – especially if you practice shouting for help! Some students will find the noise very difficult to tolerate, especially if they are autistic and have sensory processing differences.
- It may be appropriate to keep things quieter, and talk about shouting for help without practicing it, for example.
- It may be that the student has ear defenders which allow them to be in noisy environments.
- Alternatively, it can be helpful to say “if you don’t like loud noises, now is the time to put your hands over your ears” or similar, to the whole class.
- If a student cannot tolerate the noise of the session, they may still be able to take part from a distance, or through a window.
- If this is not possible, and there are enough volunteers, could they have a quieter session, either with a teaching assistant or a small group of friends, during a breaktime?

Communication

- For students with communication differences, or those with a learning disability, it may be important to speak slowly and clearly, avoid technical terms, and minimise extra noise (e.g. chatty volunteers and students or noises from the corridor).
- Eye contact can be very helpful for some people, but quite distressing for others.
- Keep instructions simple and clear.
- Break the steps down and focus on each separately. Pause the video when you need to, to help with this.
- Repetition can be helpful, as can visual communication such as demonstrations, and “concrete” learning, such as lots of practice on the manikin.

Video

- The [Makaton training video](#) might be more appropriate for some students, particularly if there are learning disabilities and/or communication differences. It is a lot shorter than the standard video, but can be paused to emphasise, demonstrate and allow practice, and can be repeated if appropriate (it includes the COVID-19 pandemic guidance of placing a cloth over the person’s face, which can be ignored or explained, depending on the students’ needs).
- If the [standard training video](#) is used, it can still be paused where needed, for emphasis, demonstrations and practice, although additional time may be required for the session.

Students with physical disabilities

- Some students may have physical disabilities which means they cannot get on the floor to practice CPR. This does not mean they cannot learn and take part. It is important they are still able to learn the steps involved, even if they may not be able to actually deliver CPR in some situations. Knowing the steps means they may be able to recognise cardiac arrest, call for help and instruct someone to start CPR if needed.

- Some students may be able to stand, with a manikin on a table or chair.
- Others may be able to sit on a chair with a manikin on a table or another chair, or on a bench with the manikin next to them.
- Some may be able to sit on the floor, but unable to kneel.
- Others may not be able to perform CPR due to disabilities or injuries to their arms. They should be supported to do the parts they are able to do (e.g. shouting for help, checking for signs of life) and encouraged to talk someone else (another student, a teaching assistant or a volunteer) through the other steps.
- It's okay to be flexible with this and find what works for the student.

Visual impairment

- Students with visual impairment can still take part, but may need additional support from a teaching assistant or volunteer.
- The extent to which they can take part will depend on their individual needs.
- Many students with visual impairment may be able to perform all steps of the process, with support.
- Checking for signs of life may involve shouting for a response from the person, shaking a shoulder or arm, and listening and/or feeling for breathing.
- They may be able to locate the appropriate place for compressions if given a clear description of a physical starting point to feel for – e.g. feel for the lower ribs, then the xiphisternum, or feel for the abdomen and move up until you feel the bony ribs.

Hearing impairment

- Position in the room has been addressed above. It may be helpful for some students to be able to see volunteers' faces, e.g. if lip-reading.
- Some students with hearing aids may find it very uncomfortable when there is lots of noise and shouting – see section above.
- Students can still check for signs of life without needing to listen for breathing.
- People who are deaf or have hearing loss can call 999 in different ways:
 - Through the Relay UK app, which is a free speech-to-text translation service. This connects the caller to a relay assistant who types what is said by the 999 call handler so the caller can read their responses. Users either tap the 999 button in the app, or dial 18000.
 - Via a textphone, dial 18000 to connect to 999 and a relay assistant, and follow the on-screen text prompts.
 - Through BSL (British Sign Language) – users can click on “call 999” on the website <https://999bsl.co.uk/>
 - SMS to 999, if registered in advance. Users send the word “register” to 999 to register their phone with the service. They can then send an SMS to 999 in an emergency, stating which service, why and where, e.g. “Ambulance. Man not breathing. Outside Nibbles Pizza. Glossop Road Sheffield S10”. This service takes longer than the alternatives above.

Students who may become distressed

- Some students may have either witnessed a cardiac arrest or been seriously unwell themselves. It can be traumatic to relive such a situation. If a young

person needs to leave the session, check with school staff whether they would like an opportunity to rejoin a later session or to practice CPR in a quieter, more relaxed environment. If they do not want to do this, respect their wishes and feelings. School staff will usually have access to the training video and manikins if the young person changes their mind.

- Do not try to counsel the young person or talk through their experiences. This is not part of the role for volunteers on the Restart a Heart programme, and can cause more harm in some instances. Signpost to school support staff or local services where appropriate.
- This document may also be helpful as it offers support for bystanders who have given CPR: <https://restartaheart.yas.nhs.uk/survivors/support-for-bystanders-who-have-given-cpr/>

Produced by Yorkshire-based Dr Liz Herrieven, Consultant in Emergency Medicine and Learning Disability Physician (July 2026)