



Lights, Camera, Captions!

Action pack

Deaf children are half as likely to go to the cinema as their hearing friends. Although cinemas do put on some subtitled screenings, there is often only one screening per film, or they are shown at times that are hard for families to get to.

We think this is grossly unfair. The magic of cinema is such an important part of growing up, and every deaf child deserves to experience it. Deaf children should be able to go to any film showing they want at all cinemas.

Think your child is too young for subtitles at the cinema? Extensive research shows that even very young children, both deaf and hearing, can benefit from subtitles on screen as it can support their literacy.

What can you do?

The more people that ask about subtitled screenings, the more likely cinemas are to put these on. And if lots of cinemas get requests for subtitles, they may even pass this message on to the cinema bosses.

Next time you and your child would like to go to the cinema, you could email or phone your chosen cinema ahead of the screening and request that they put subtitles on for your chosen film. You can find the contact details of your local cinema online.

There's strength in numbers too! If you know another parent of a deaf child locally, you could ask them to come along and they could also ask the cinema to put on subtitles. Or perhaps you'd like to reach out to your local NDCS group and organise a group visit to the cinema. If lots of you ask for subtitles, it will be much harder for the cinema to say no.

If you'd like advice about speaking to your cinema, do get in touch – campaigns@ndcs.org.uk. We'd be happy to chat it through with you.

➔ If your cinema refuses to put on subtitles, we'd really like to know about it – please email their response to us. We've also included some suggestions below on how to challenge the cinema further. We know that not everyone will feel comfortable doing this and that's absolutely fine too.



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How to challenge the cinema

If your cinema refuses your request for subtitles, ask them to put you in touch with the manager. We've put together some text you could use when emailing or speaking to them. Please do remember to be calm and polite when doing this.

1. Explain the reason they should show a subtitled film

Under the Equality Act 2010, organisations and service providers (including cinemas) are required to make "reasonable adjustments". This means they must make sure that any disabled person who uses their services is not placed at a substantial disadvantage.

Please explain to the cinema manager that:

My child can't access films without subtitles and they want to see this film. Organisations like cinemas must make 'reasonable adjustments' under the Equality Act. My child can't access films without subtitles so this is a reasonable adjustment. Can you please show subtitles on this film?

If they still say they can't show a subtitled screening, please ask them why, and do let us know what they said – campaigns@ndcs.org.uk

2. Responses you might expect from the manager

You might be offered tickets for a screening on a different date than the one you requested. We know there are very few subtitled screenings of children's films. We think you have a legal right to go to the cinema with your child when you want. It's up to you whether you accept these tickets or not, but if you reject the tickets and want to take the matter further, let us know – campaigns@ndcs.org.uk

- **Hearing people won't want to watch more films with subtitles**

It would be unthinkable for public venues like large cinema chains not to have a disabled toilet. A cinema can't just refuse to turn on the subtitles simply because someone doesn't like it – this is about equality. That's why we want the cinema industry to get serious about this, and turn the subtitles on whenever they are needed.

- **It will cost the cinemas a lot of money to do all this**

Almost all films come with subtitled versions, it is simply a case of using them which costs nothing.

- **Why can't deaf people just lip-read the films?**

Not all deaf people lip-read and it's especially hard for children who are still learning vocabulary. And even if they did, many films are animated, especially those for children, which makes lip-reading impossible.



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3. Make a formal written complaint to the cinema

If your conversation with the manager doesn't resolve the issue, you can choose to make a formal complaint against the cinema.

You can use our template email (below) to contact the cinema. Please copy us in and share the response you get with us.

Dear Cinema Manager,

I contacted your cinema on [INSERT DATE] to ask you to add subtitles to [INSERT FILM NAME] showing at [INSERT DATE AND TIME]. I wanted to watch this film with my child who is deaf.

My child needs subtitles to be able to access the film and when I asked you to turn on the captions for this screening, you refused to do so. This left us feeling very disappointed. [YOU MAY WANT TO INSERT HERE THE FURTHER IMPACT ON YOUR CHILD OF NOT HAVING SUBTITLES ON THE FILM E.G. FEELING LEFT OUT OF CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE FILM OR NOT BEING ABLE TO ATTEND A CINEMA BIRTHDAY PARTY].

I would like to point out that under the Equality Act 2010, all companies, including cinemas, are expected to make reasonable adjustments to make sure that disabled people are not disadvantaged or discriminated against. I don't feel that you made the reasonable adjustments that would have allowed my child to enjoy the film like other hearing children can.

Please explain to me why you feel that turning captions on is not an adjustment that you could reasonably make.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME]



Please let us know what happened with your challenge. Your feedback from engagement with cinemas is REALLY important. We will use the information provided by you and other families up and down the country to show the level of unfairness that is faced by deaf children who simply want to go to the cinema.



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4. Your rights at the cinema

Under the Equality Act 2010, organisations and service providers (including cinemas) are required to make “reasonable adjustments”. This means they must make sure that any disabled person who uses their services is not placed at a substantial disadvantage. A failure to make reasonable adjustments may be seen as discrimination in a court.

This is what’s called an “anticipatory duty”. This means that organisations and service providers must think about what they can do to ensure equal access for disabled people now and in the future. For example, it means that cinemas shouldn’t wait until a deaf person turns up before they start thinking about subtitled films.

What counts as a reasonable adjustment?

There is no legal definition of exactly what a reasonable adjustment is. However, if something is easy, inexpensive and straightforward to do, it should be seen as a reasonable adjustment. We would argue that subtitled films should be seen as a reasonable adjustment. Almost all new films now come with subtitled versions so if they are not showing them, it is most likely because the cinema has chosen not to use them.

No charge should be made to parents or the deaf young person for any reasonable adjustment. In particular, you shouldn’t have to pay more than a hearing person would to see a subtitled film.

If a cinema tells you they can’t show a film with subtitles, you should ask them to explain why they feel it would be unreasonable for them to do so. You should try and get this in writing if you can. If they cannot give you a good enough reason (and back this up with evidence), this may be seen by a judge as unlawful discrimination.

Please note that the Equality Act 2010 doesn’t apply in Northern Ireland. However, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 contains similar laws which also apply to cinemas in Northern Ireland.