Summer is a time to bask in the sunshine, enjoy nature and take on new experiences.

“We hope our families at Gillette can participate in some fun in the sun and make good memories,” says Gillette Children’s therapeutic recreation specialist, Tammy Larson. “We understand that for our families daily life can be overwhelming at times. We want to make sure having fun is actually fun and not another complication for them.”

To help simplify summer plans, Gillette families can contact Therapeutic Recreation and talk to a specialist to get advice on indoor and outdoor activities. Not all families visiting Gillette are from Minnesota but the general suggestions can be adapted to other locales. “We have a big resource file list of places to go and things to do, including suggestions from other Gillette families. We need to have a physician referral to make sure their child is medically stable to take on some activities and then we’re happy to help,” Larson says.

Larson shares a few tips to make sure families of children who have mobility or health challenges can have enjoyable, do-able experiences.

**Accessible planning and resources are key**

- Take on smaller adventures at first and build up to bigger activities. “Try going to the Como Zoo in St. Paul, or a smaller zoo in your area, first before you travel out of state to visit a larger zoo,” Larson says. According to its website, the Como Zoo welcomes people to bring their own wheelchairs, electric scooters and strollers. You
can rent a wheelchair for $10.00 per day or an electric scooter for $30.00 per day.

- Pre-plan your summer adventure. Be sure to bring all of the medical items you need and pack a change of clothes, sunblock, and any special foods. “The Gillette therapeutic recreation specialists can talk to families on the phone and help them plan,” says Larson.

- Take advantage of special programs and sports activities geared towards people who have disabilities. For example, Larson suggests families might enjoy watching a wheelchair softball game. These games are an opportunity to let your child see athletes who are in similar physical condition play a sport and have fun on a team. The games are usually free.

- For outdoor activities, investigate organizations such as Capable Partners. This non-profit helps people fish, boat, hunt, and enjoy the outdoors in Minnesota no matter what their physical challenges.

**Accessible State Parks and Playgrounds**

Minnesota is home to many accessible playgrounds that are inclusive for children of all abilities. These accessible playgrounds often include wheelchair accessible swings, sensory-stimulation equipment and safety features. Gillette has created a map of accessible parks across the state to help families know about these resources. We hope you find this map helpful.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has an online list of accessible recreation organizations. The list includes information about accessibility at Minnesota State Parks, campsites, trails and fishing piers.

Tammy Larson cautions that families shouldn’t feel pressured to take on all-day activities or big adventures. Even a few hours sitting by a lake or watching a ballgame can be enjoyable and rewarding.