

Active Park

MANUAL FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR INCLUDING
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN SPORT
ACTIVITIES



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INTRODUCTION

This manual is aimed primarily for volunteers and youth workers working at community level with children and youth with disabilities. The manual is also useful for teachers – primary teachers and Special Education teachers. For teachers, the manual can provide some tips and guidance although it is also recognized that school-based activities are largely governed by the official school syllabuses. The manual can give guidance and advice in a range of settings, e.g. in informal play sessions, more formal sports coaching sessions, school PE lessons and sports events. The manual recognizes the value of sport and play both for competition and recreation. It is important to address both of these and not to over-emphasize competition, as this can lead to exclusion of players who are less able. Sport and play is not just about winning – it's also about taking part! Through sport and play, we should be helping everyone to develop their own potential, to fulfil their own goals, regardless of whether they win trophies! This is nicely summed up in the motto of the Special Olympics (the worldwide sports movement for people with intellectual impairment).

It has been demonstrated again and again that physical education enhances cognitive function and academic performance. Social skills and collaborative teamwork are also benefits of a balanced physical education program. So, let's make physical education inclusive and accessible to all children/youngsters so that they can learn the life lessons that can't be taught in a traditional classroom.

MODELS OF INCLUSIVE SPORT

There are various ways in which children with disabilities can participate in sport, and there are various degrees to which inclusion can be possible. The form of inclusion which is possible with a given child depends on the child's impairment (its type and severity), and the nature of the sport/physical activity. Several models have been put forward to explain the variety of possible forms that inclusion in sport can take. This manual will present the 'Continuum of Inclusion'. The model is useful for understanding inclusive sport. Disability sports include adapted sports, but also those sports which have no mainstream equivalent because they were created specifically for people with disabilities. These include goalball and boccia (which will be explained later). Adapted physical activity refers more broadly to adaptations in physical activity more generally, including sport, play and physical education.

Regular sport – at this level of inclusion, children with disabilities are included into regular, mainstream sport with no adaptations at all. This includes, for example, deaf youth taking part in athletics events. They can participate equally alongside people who are hearing in almost all events. Another example is participation of people with physical impairments in sedentary games, such as chess, carom, etc., or standing games such as darts or cue sports (snooker, billiards, pool). A wheelchair-user, for example, can play against a person without a disability with no adaptation to the game, and with no need to organize separate games/tournaments for the players with disabilities. A person with a disability affecting one arm would be able to play darts against people with no disability.

Regular sport with accommodation – in this case, the child with disability can participate in regular, mainstream sport but with some accommodation or modification, to allow the child to compete equally with other players (but not to give an additional advantage). An example is the case of Oscar Pistorius, the South African double-amputee athlete who competes alongside athletes without disabilities with the aid of two prosthetic legs. After a lengthy legal process, the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that the use of these prosthetic legs gave Pistorius equal opportunity with other athletes and not an unfair advantage. Children with disabilities may be able to take part in other regular sports with children without disabilities, without adapting the sport, with the aid of their mobility aids. For example, a child with a foot deformity who wears orthotic shoes may be able to play cricket as well as any other children without having to adapt the game to accommodate his needs.

Regular and adapted sport – at this level of inclusion, the sport itself is adapted to allow people with and without disabilities to play together. An example would be in tennis doubles, where one player has a disability and the other does not. The player without a disability follows normal tennis rules (regular sport), while the player with a disability follows modified rules – she is allowed two bounces of the ball per volley instead of one (adapted sport). Another example would be a marathon which incorporates a wheelchair marathon within the mainstream race. Athletes with and without disabilities follow the same course, although start times are staggered and the results are separated between the two categories. The ‘Unified Sports’ also falls within this category in the Continuum of Inclusion. Unified Sports is a branch of Special Olympics, the worldwide movement of sport for people with intellectual impairment. Unified Sports, however, involves mixed teams of people with intellectual impairment (termed ‘athletes’) and without intellectual impairment (termed ‘partners’).

Adapted sport integrated – this level of inclusion is where athletes with and without disabilities participate in adapted or disability sport, e.g. in wheelchair sports such as wheelchair tennis or wheelchair basketball, athletes with and without disabilities both use wheelchairs. This can also be called ‘reverse inclusion’, where athletes without disabilities play sports which are normally for athletes with disabilities only. Boccia can be another example of ‘adapted sport integrated’. Boccia is a sport which was developed specifically for people with disabilities, but it can equally well be played in mixed teams of people with and without disabilities.

Adapted sport segregated – this is the final level of the Continuum of Inclusion. It is where athletes with disabilities participate in adapted sport in a completely segregated setting, without participation of athletes without disabilities. Examples of adapted sports are shown above. Even if children with disabilities are playing an adapted or disability sport, with no children without disabilities participating at all, there can still be some degree of inclusion. For example, parallel events/tournaments can be held, e.g. a wheelchair basketball match/tournament (segregated, only children with disabilities) can be incorporated within a mainstream basketball tournament, a wheelchair race (children with disabilities only) can be included in the program of a mainstream athletics meet, etc.

ADAPTING GAMES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

There's no question that for children with physical disabilities, sports participation can be a challenge. Kids may have limited mobility and/or tire more easily than their non-disabled peers. They may need special equipment or other assistance (such as specially trained coaches, teachers, or guides) to participate in exercise and sports.

For better implementation of games and sports below are listed the general adaptive strategies:

- Use targets or goals that make noise when hit by the ball, or radios under the basket in a game of basketball.
- Vary the size, weight and texture of balls so students with visual impairment can more easily tell them apart.
- Designate a quiet area where students can take a break from the noise and hubbub, and another area where students can take movement breaks with mini-trampolines or squeeze balls.
- Use simple visual reminders and cues, such as photographs of students performing each pose of an exercise routine, to help students remember steps, rules or movements.
- Use smaller playing areas with well-defined boundaries, including tactile boundaries.
- Use Velcro on balls as well as in gloves, in mitts and on paddles, so every student can have success.
- Have students pair up so partners can assist each other.
- Lower baskets and nets enlarge goals and targets and loosen or eliminate time limits.
- Give students choices to help them feel empowered in their physical education.
- Keep it consistent: Students with many types of disabilities benefit from knowing what to expect, including what the rules and expectations are, what types of activities they will be doing, what types of noises they will hear and make, and when all of these will occur

HOW TO INCLUDE STUDENT'S WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Studies have found that special education students are less likely to be enrolled in physical education compared to their general education peers. Separate studies have also found that special education students are more likely to develop childhood obesity and related health conditions compared to their general education peers. Additionally, special education students often have delays in gross motor skills due to conditions such as hypotonia or dyspraxia.

Physical education teachers around the world are coming up with new ways to include all students and get everyone moving. Here are six everyday challenges and solutions in physical education today, all of which can be written into a student's IEP.

Sensory Integration

Some of the major barriers to students with some types of neurological differences are loud music and fluorescent lights that are often present at the gym. Many students are also sensitive to bright sunlight outdoors and the sound of squeaking sneakers on the gym floor, making it difficult for physical education teachers to find an appropriate location for class.

The music problem is easy to solve – lower the volume or turn it off. Soundproof headphones may also be used indoors, and sunglasses can be used outdoors. Schools may find other indoor lighting options that are more cost-effective, taking advantage of green energy incentives for LED light bulbs or simply shutting off some lights are relying more on natural lighting.

Behavior

Behavior is always a concern in physical education classes, where there's plenty of movement and incidents can happen in rapid succession. Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) are a systematic, proven method to prevent negative behaviors and increase healthy interactions. The method may be summarized as "Prevent, Teach, Reinforce." Behavioral expectations are explained from the beginning with supports such as picture schedules. Then the class material is taught through positive interactions, and the lesson is reinforced by referring back to behavioral expectations and evaluating progress.

Class and Group Size

Physical education classes and groups are becoming larger and larger. Which is a big obstacle in inclusion of all children.

By working with the school's social worker, it is possible to create a positive experience for a student with special needs in a super-sized class. Peer-to-peer support groups can work together in class to ensure full inclusion.

However, the groups should consist of 5 to 10 students. They can cater to a specific group of children who all have the same disability or learning needs or can be a mixed group with unique abilities.

Team Building

Physical Education is the perfect opportunity for team building exercises. Instead of competitive games, the class can focus on creative games that only succeed when a whole team works together.

Accessibility

Accessibility in physical education classes is something that must be addressed to include all children. Hard surfaces such as concrete and asphalt may be dangerous for individuals with dyspraxia, and softer surfaces such as sand or wood chips make it difficult to maneuver a wheelchair.

Gym surfaces and outdoor mats are one way to make physical education more accessible. Another way is to level the playing field by having the whole class play a game such as sitting volleyball or scooter football.

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