

# Disability



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## INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

### Introduction

Athletics is a sport which can easily include people of all skills and ability levels, and including athletes with a disability simply requires some basic good coaching practice to make it a great experience for you and all your athletes.

Attitude is EVERYTHING.

Often people with a disability are categorised by what they cannot do and not by what they are able to do. A person in a wheelchair is seen as being unable to walk, instead of a person being able to move in a wheelchair. As a teacher, you must work with what an athlete CAN do, as no two people with a disability will be the same.

Whilst every person with a disability is different, there are some considerations to remember including:

- Making the activity challenging yet achievable.

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- Do not lose the integrity of the sport when making modifications.

The needs of a student with a disability are the same as for an able-bodied person, in that:

- The need for clear communication is great.
- Assessment of the individual's ability is required.
- The KISS principle will still apply.
- Feedback should be in a positive manner.
- Students with a disability will want to participate in sport for all the same reasons as able-bodied students:
  - Improved fitness levels
  - Improved coordination skills
  - Enjoyment
  - Participation
  - Social factors
  - Competition

We must not forget that athletes with a disability are no different and they too will also need a structured athletic program that includes competition.

There are few, if any disabilities that will totally preclude participation in athletics. However, the level of participation, together with your willingness to create the opportunities, and your athlete's enthusiasm to have a go, athletics will be a sport that everyone will enjoy. Remember, attitude is everything.

## Coaching Principles

There is no need to change your coaching principles to include a student with a disability; good coaching practice is all you need to make the experience in athletics enjoyable and rewarding for both you and all your students.

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Here are some areas to consider when running your activities:

- Be aware of the impact that negative attitudes can have on students' athletics experience and have some strategies to put in place when, and if you need them, for example recognise 'team effort', encourage support for effort between the students, reward positive comments, rather than punish negative ones, etc.
- Use athletic terminology; do not be too concerned about changing 'run' to 'push' for example. What you say is important, but the best part of athletics is taking part in the activities, not what you say.
- Be aware that the selection of activity and participation levels may depend on the objectives of the program, as well as the ability of the student, the available space and time, and the available equipment at the school or venue where athletics is being delivered. So to maximise inclusion in the program, consider these issues when deciding which activities to conduct.
- Determine what modifications may be needed (coaching, equipment, etc) but only modify if and when you need to.
- It may be a good idea to ask the student what they expect their level of participation to be. This will allow the teacher to assess at what level the student will be able to take part and to also judge if the activity is suitable. The student will be your best resource.
- Use verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Encourage appropriate technique whilst allowing the athlete to work out the best methods.
- Keep all instructions simple, breaking down complex skills into basic tasks.
- Incorporate games as an activity where all can be involved, which is good for all students.
- Coach in small groups of like ability.

## Adapting to suit Athletes with a Disability

With minor adjustments, a coach will be able to cater for ALL levels of abilities. The TREE acronym (Teaching, Rules, Equipment, Environment) is an instant way of remembering HOW to change the activity to better cater for all participants.

## Teaching Style

In teaching the various skills involved with athletics, there are a number of alternative teaching styles (visual, verbal, tactile) that may be used to cater for different learning styles and preferences.

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For example, use a questioning approach rather than just telling/instructing students what to do; or buddy participants of similar/different ability levels together so they can learn from each other.

## Rules

Rules can be redefined to enhance inclusion and enjoyment of your activities. If the activity is not engaging to participants, consider changing the rules. For example, substitute:

- Walking for running.
- Rolling for jumping (wheelchair athletes).
- Underarm throw for shot.
- Rolling with a discus instead of a throw.
- Sitting or kneeling for a standing event.

## Equipment

Do not be afraid to use lighter throwing implements, or brightly coloured cones to mark out a target area, or different height bars/hurdles, rather than simply the standard athletics equipment.

## Environment

Athletics can be played in a variety of environments (or playing areas) so consider some of the following:

- Changing between indoors and outdoors.
- Shorten the distance in a sprint race from 100m to 60m.
- Allow the athlete to stand closer to the bar in high jump.
- Allow a shorter run up in the long and triple jump; use an auditory call at the take off point.
- Increase the athlete's chances of success, thereby increasing enjoyment of the session.

## Key Points

TREE is ideal for all participants, not just people with a disability.

- For example, a child who is easily distracted and poorly coordinated, may have an intellectual disability, or they could be someone without a disability, but is distracted

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because they are bored or lack confidence, have not played much sport before, or are having problems with their eyesight. How you modify to include them is the same.

- Good coaches already use alternative strategies for including students with a range of ability levels. These coaches will already have the skills to provide a great athletic experience for those with a disability.
- Do not limit modifications to the ones listed, as they are simply examples of how the TREE approach can be used.
- Do not presume that athletes with a disability will need the activity to be modified, some may, and some may not – see what they can do first.