

Considerations Involving Disabled Youth Participation in Sport

All kids deserve a positive youth sports experience led by a supportive coach regardless of their circumstances. It is important for coaches to keep in mind that the benefits of sport participation for nondisabled youth are the same benefits disabled youth may experience; with even a few added benefits.

Benefits of Sport Participation for Disabled Youth



Sport participation can be more fun than working out in a PT clinic or on a PT mat



The opportunity to be part of a team and learn teamwork



Camaraderie, making friends, social interaction



Chance to connect with a caring adult and building a network of support amongst peers



Movement, physical activity



Develop Time Management skills



Increased self-esteem, building confidence



Practice Goal Setting



Sense of Belonging



Build leadership skills

Why Sport for the Disabled is CRITICAL

Individuals/youth with disabilities experience:

Increased Isolation

- Prevalence of always/often feeling lonely is 45% for those with a disability vs 10% of those without
- COVID exacerbated these feelings of loneliness & isolation

Mental Health

- 18% of disabled experience “frequent mental distress”
- Many experience enhanced mental stress of trying to conceal a disability and/or “fitting in”
- Stress levels increase for the disabled as they are concerned with how others view, treat or exclude them

Obesity

- Individuals with disabilities are 4.5x less active than those without a disability
- Obesity rates for disabled are 38% higher than those without and obesity can negatively impact mobility

Exclusion

- Best-selling author, Brene’ Brown mentions that pain sensors that activate when you experience physical pain are the same pain sensors that activate when one experiences exclusion.

Tips for Inclusion of Disabled Youth in Sport Programs (Coaches Can:)

Embrace the opportunity

- Focus on the positive of creating inclusive and diverse learning opportunities for all athletes.
- Appreciate your role as an advocate to support all your athletes and their desire to be successful in sport.

Treat the athlete with a disability as an athlete

- Focus on an athlete’s skill and ability – not their disability
- Set sport and training goals as you would with any other athlete

Provide opportunities for disabled youth to be a leader and foster independence

- Let them choose warm-up drills or lead the huddle
- Ask them to help with practice setup, tear down and put equipment away

Collaborate with disabled athlete to modify sport techniques, if needed

- Adapt a workout, training just as you would for an athlete with a temporary injury
- Ask the athlete for their thoughts on accommodations to include them in being a part of the solution

Learn about sport accommodations

- Reach out to local adapted sport organizations
- Research adaptations on national governing body website