



COACHING KIDS WITH DISABILITIES

All youngsters on your team, regardless of ability, should be fully included in the season. While many people with disabilities have the ability to participate with little to no adaptations, some youth may have limited ability or experience of basic movement skills. It is important to modify your skills and drills, as well as playing sessions, to include them in the fun!



The Americans with Disabilities Act says public and private programs (including community sports programs) are not only obligated to include all kids but also has the right and responsibility to provide individual accommodations, support and/or adaptations for children with special needs to help them experience success.

Below is a list of general coaching tips to help you meet the needs of players with disabilities. It is recommended that you also consult the governing entity of your sport to get specific coaching advice.

GET TO KNOW YOUR PLAYER

- Meet with the youngster and their parent/guardian to learn more about their disability. Make sure to ask about the player's specific disability, pertinent medication information and about secondary disabilities, if any.
- Assess the youngster's skills and playing level using methods similar to what you would use with nondisabled players. Focus on identifying their abilities, not their disabilities.

MAKING MODIFICATIONS

- Modify only the aspects of the game that need to be changed while still maintaining the integrity of the game.
- When adapting skills or techniques, make sure to discuss the changes with your player first. Requesting their input, such as what they can or cannot do, respects the dignity and competence of the disabled youngster.

- Other team members can be a great source of ideas, so tap into their thoughts, too. Plus, this promotes another level of teamwork and strengthens team unity.
- Consider altering some of the rules to make the game easier or harder, depending on the ability level.
- Examine how you can adapt equipment. For example, use larger or softer balls to make hitting, catching and throwing skills easier, or use bats and racquets with a larger contact area.

COMMUNICATING



- Speak in a manner appropriate to the age of the player. Be careful not to patronize them by being simplistic.
- Make sure to speak to your player at their eye-level. For example, crouch down or sit in a chair to speak with a wheel chair user.
- Break skills and drills down into easily learned steps. Always demonstrate the skills, and repeat them in a variety of ways.
- Teammates may naturally have questions. A coach's responsibility includes helping children accept the differences of children with disabilities and answer questions in a respectful manner while also reminding youngsters that each of them is unique – and special – in their own way.
- If a cruel remark is made, react immediately and handle it in a non-embarrassing way for both the child who has the disability and the individual who made the remark. Make sure the team rallies around the child with the disability who heard the remark to immediately reinforce why that type of comment is unacceptable.

Additional Coaching Resources:

[Coaching Youth with Physical Disabilities videos](#) by the National Alliance for Youth Sports

[Hidden Disabilities in Sports](#)

[National Association for Sport and Physical Education](#)

Article Sources:

[Disability Sports NI](#)

