

TIPS TO ADAPT PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

to Include Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

TIP: Learn about a child by reading their Individualized Education Program or by speaking with other adults in their life to determine which adaptations will help the child participate.



Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) need one hour of physical activity each day, just like their typically developing peers. Including children with I/DD in physical activity may require some adaptations. Here are some examples of adaptations and tips for making physical activity inclusive for children with I/DD.

Demonstrate activities.

- Use peer partners to model activities and social skills.
- Show videos of activities in advance, whenever possible.

Provide clear instructions.

- Keep verbal instructions specific and brief.
- Check to make sure all children understand the instructions before beginning the activity.

Use visual aids.

- Create and post routines. For example:
Warm Up → Practice Skills → Play Game → Cool Down → Clean Up
- Use a visual aid, such as photo activity cards, to help children make choices, understand expectations, and stay focused.
- Define boundaries and targets using colored tape or spots.

Change the rules of some games to give each child a chance to succeed.

- Give a child more “tries” than are normally permitted. For example, an extra shot in basketball or an extra pitch in softball.
- Allow children to play with partners.
- Let children recommend their own modifications to the rules.

Play games that emphasize cooperation rather than competition.

- Emphasize teamwork over speed and accuracy.
- Give every child an equal chance to play.
- Rotate teams so that skill levels are balanced.



continued

Adapt the environment to promote inclusion.

- Define the boundaries of a playing area by using zones, stations, and relays (see the 'Zones, Stations and Relays' handout).
- Lower the height of goals or nets as needed.
- Minimize distractions by putting away unnecessary equipment.
- Reduce noise for children who are sensitive to sounds by avoiding loud music and yelling.

Ensure that changing rooms, locker rooms, and bathrooms are accessible.

- Provide enough space to accommodate a wheelchair.
- Provide private or gender neutral changing areas for children who may have aides of a different gender.

Modify equipment to accommodate all abilities.

- Offer equipment such as bats, sticks, and rackets in lighter and heavier weights, and padded handles to make them easier to hold.
- Offer many different kinds of balls - lighter, heavier, bigger, smaller, and audible (with bells inside).
- Establish an equipment bank so that modified equipment can be shared throughout a school district and community.

Federal law requires that children with disabilities be provided with physical education (PE) at school. Typically PE instructors can make simple adaptations to ensure a child with a disability is included. However, some children may require more individualized support in order to benefit from PE. To learn more about Adapted Physical Education visit: www.heartlandaea.org/special-education/special-education-services/ape