

Inclusive Coaching



Being inclusive means adapting and modifying coaching practices and activities to ensure every participant, regardless of age, gender, ability level, disability and ethnic background has the opportunity to participate if they choose to. Good coaches adapt and modify aspects of their coaching and create an environment that caters for individual needs and allows everyone to take part. The onus of inclusion rests with the coach.

Many people think that you need special skills or knowledge to coach participants with a disability. This is not the case. The basic skills of good coaching, when applied with an inclusive philosophy, will ensure the inclusion of all participants including people with disability becomes a natural part of coaching.

Planning for Inclusion

The acronym **CHANGE IT** provides a tool that can be used to help modify the activity to meet the individual needs of the participant:

Coaching style — e.g. demonstrations, or use of questions, role models and verbal instructions

How to score or win

Area — e.g. size, shape or surface of the playing environment

Number of participants involved in the activity

Game rules — e.g. number of bounces or passes

Equipment — e.g. softer or larger balls, or lighter, smaller bats/racquets

Inclusion — e.g. everyone has to touch the ball before the team can score

Time — e.g. 'How many ... in 30 seconds?'

When preparing a coaching program, examine what, if anything, needs to be adapted or modified. In other words, what or how the participant can:

- see (predominantly relevant to participants with vision impairment)
- hear (predominantly relevant to participants who are deaf or hearing impaired)
- move (predominantly relevant to participants with a physical disability)
- learn, recall or reproduce skills (predominantly relevant to participants with an intellectual disability)
- perform tasks and activities (relevant to all participants).

There are very few disabilities or medical conditions that completely preclude participation in sport. People with disability take part in sport and physical activity for the same reasons as other people; to improve fitness, develop new skills, increase social contacts, and to have the chance to achieve and receive recognition.

Qualities and skills of an inclusive coach

Patience: Recognising some participants will take longer to develop skills or make progress than others

Respect: Acknowledging difference and treating all participants as individuals

Adaptability: Having a flexible approach to coaching and communication that recognises individual differences

Organisation: Recognising the importance of preparation and planning

Safe practices: Ensuring every session, whether with groups or individuals, is carried out with the participants' safety in mind

Knowledge: Utilising knowledge of training activities and how to modify them in order to maximise the potential of every participant

Tips for coaches working with participants with a disability

- People with disabilities have the right to participate in sport. They are very capable of being involved and can tell the coach what they are able to do.
- The basic principles of coaching apply when coaching participants with a disability. Provided the coach is prepared to accept each participant as an individual.
- The needs, strengths and weaknesses of individuals will differ. The coach should assess each person's aspirations, needs and ability and plan a training program accordingly.
- It is not necessary to acquire extensive knowledge of the disability. The coach needs to understand how the impairment affects the participant's performance and be able to plan and deliver a training program that best suits the participant.
- Effective communication is essential, especially for participants who have sensory or intellectual disabilities.
- Do not under-estimate ability. Set realistic and challenging goals as you would for all participants.
- Medical conditions, such as diabetes, epilepsy, asthma and heart disease, should not preclude people participating in sport. Sensible precautions should be followed and the coach needs to be aware of the coaching implications of the person's condition and what to do in case of an emergency. (Important note: not all people with disabilities have medical conditions such as those mentioned above. In addition, some people without disabilities may have one of the above medical conditions. Do not restrict your medical screening to people with disability!)