

# OVERCOMING BARRIERS

to Including Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Physical Activity

focus  
on the  
positive!

Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) sometimes have behavioral or communication challenges. When encountering a child with these challenges, an instructor may not know how to include that child in activities. Here are some tips to manage behavior and effectively communicate so that all children can be included in physical activities.

## General Tips

- Review a child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) to determine whether the child has any behavior or communication challenges.
- Ask other members of a child's team about effective behavior management and communication strategies, and use those same strategies with the child.
- Find out if a child's behavior poses any safety concerns, such as a risk of wandering off.

## Tips for Behavior Management

- Clearly explain rules and expectations around behavior before an activity begins.
- Allow a child to come up with their own solution to a problem. For example, if the child disrupts a game that is hard for them to play, ask the child how they would change the rules to make it easier.
- Provide choices. For example, if it is time to put away equipment and a child refuses to help, give the child a choice of clean-up tasks.
- Direct a child who needs a break to an individual activity. For example, give the child 5-10 minutes to spend on a stationary bike kept close to the activity area before returning to the group activity.

## Tips for Effective Communication

- Offer clear instructions. Say things like "Follow directions" and "Take turns."
- Do not assume a child will know to complete a step unless you tell them to.
- Allow enough time for a child to process instructions. Pause for at least 5 to 7 seconds before restating an instruction or giving a new one.
- Avoid using jargon or slang. Many children with I/DD can be very concrete in their interpretation of language. For example, if an instructor says "Run home!" during a softball game, a child may take off running toward their house.
- Do not ask a child if they want to do something when there is no real choice. Instead of, "Do you want to do your warm-ups?" say "It's time for warm-ups."
- Give positive directions rather than negative directions. Say "Please walk." rather than "Don't run."

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LET'S GO!

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