

# SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**There are programs designed specifically to empower people with and without I/DD to participate together in sports. One example is Unified Sports, a program of Special Olympics.**

**Learn more and get involved:**  
[www.somaine.org/programs/unified-sports/](http://www.somaine.org/programs/unified-sports/)

Children are more likely to participate in group activities when they feel accepted and included by their peers. While physical education teachers, activity leaders, and coaches cannot force friendships, they can create conditions that foster positive relationships among children. Here are some tips to make activities more socially inclusive.

## **Be a role model.**

- Emphasize the values of respect, cooperation, and collaboration in the activities you lead.
- Plan activities that promote cooperation and teamwork over competition and winning.
- Demonstrate that you enjoy having each child in your program or class.
- Establish a “no tolerance” rule for bullying.
- Lobby against exclusionary policies, such as cutting students from team sports.

## **Build a child’s social standing.**

- Emphasize each child’s strengths by planning some activities where they can demonstrate their skills or sports knowledge.
- Give each child opportunities to lead or to have special responsibilities.

## **Make relationships a priority.**

- Include social skill development in lesson plans and activities.
- Praise and reward children for being inclusive.

## **Use peers as a resource.**

- Establish a buddy or mentoring system.
- Play games in which everyone has opportunities to be both a helper and to be helped.

