

# TIPS TO ADAPT PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

to Include Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

**TIP: Learn about a child by reading their Individual Education Plan 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.



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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.maine.gov/doe/physicaled/adapted/index.html](http://www.maine.gov/doe/physicaled/adapted/index.html)**