

Take Time! Physical Activity Program

Adapting Take Time! For Children with Disabilities



Children with disabilities and physical activity:

Children with disabilities are often excluded from physical activities. However, current research insists that physical activity can have an even greater positive impact on a disabled child's physical and emotional health than their non-disabled peers. Additionally, it has been established that physical activity habits created during childhood translate into lifelong physical activity practices.

Basic principles of adaptation:

Adapting physical activities for disabled children is based on the following precept: modify the environment and task to meet the needs of the child. Adaptation involves assessing the child's limitations then making external modifications to the task and environment, so the child can successfully perform a given task.

While principles of adaptation are generally used to teach disabled students movement activities, they may also be used to teach non-disabled students movement skills. Take a movement skill like juggling for example; young children do not have the hand-eye coordination to track fast moving objects (limitation of the child). Therefore, silk scarves are often used in place of balls to teach children how to juggle. Silk scarves are fairly light in weight and move slowly when tossed in the air, making them easier to catch than balls. These modifications allow the student to successfully juggle. Once the student becomes competent at juggling silk scarves, more challenging objects can be introduced. The basic premise of this example can be applied when teaching any movement skill.

Additional guidelines for adapting physical activities:

Guideline 1: Modify the activity only when needed and at the student's discretion.

If a student insists on doing an activity without assistance, respect his or her independence. Keep in mind that the student may feel as though he/she is getting special attention or put on the spot in front of classmates.

Guideline 2: When modifying an activity, don't over-adapt.

Exaggerated adaptations often limit inclusion and alienate the disabled student from their peers rather than helping them gain acceptance. Fellow students may view these adaptations as unfair. Adaptations must not appear to give the student an unfair advantage over their peers -- the modifications made must make sense to everyone.

Guideline 3: In most cases, the adaptations should be viewed as temporary and not permanent.

In some circumstances the adaptations you make must be permanent, however, in most cases any modifications should be viewed as an intermediate step that will help the student become competent in the actual activity.

Additional Adapted Physical Activity Resources:

- 1.) PE Central: Adaptations for Physical Activities - <http://www.pecentral.org/adapted/adaptedactivities.html>
- 2.) The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability - <http://www.ncpad.org/>