



Adapting Physical Activity for People with Disabilities

People with disabilities and physical activity:

People 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 person's physical and emotional health than their non-disabled peers.

Basic principles of adaptation:

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

While principles of adaptation are generally used to teach disabled people movement activities, they may also be used to teach non-disabled students movement skills. Take a movement skill like juggling for example; some people do not have the hand-eye coordination to track fast moving objects. Therefore, silk scarves are often used in place of balls to teach them 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 them to successfully juggle. Once they become 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 individual's discretion.

If someone insists on doing an activity without assistance, respect his or her independence.

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

Exaggerated adaptations often limit inclusion and alienate the disabled from their peers rather than helping them gain acceptance. Some may view these adaptations as unfair.

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 individual become competent in the actual activity.

Additional Adapted Physical Activity Resources:

The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability - <http://www.ncpad.org/>