

HINTS FOR WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

WHAT IS AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY OR DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY?

Development is a step-by-step process that is related to the maturation of the central nervous system. With a delay such as an intellectual disability, development is altered so that adaptive and intellectual skills are impaired. Causes of intellectual disability include newborn trauma, infectious disease, chromosomal abnormalities, and errors in metabolism.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Most people who are intellectually disabled are mildly delayed. This means that they are able to attend school, be employed, and live in the community with some degree of supervision and assistance. Like everyone, Special Olympics athletes vary in abilities, likes and dislikes, and personality traits.

WHEN SPEAKING OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DISABLED

Always emphasize the individual, not the disability. For example, say "the person with Down syndrome" rather than the "Down syndrome person".

WHEN TEACHING SOMEONE WHO IS DELAYED

Repetition – On the average, it takes a person who is disabled longer to learn new skills. It helps to begin teaching a lesson with a skill in which the individual is competent in performing and then teach a new activity.

Praise – When you give praise, it must be sincere. Recognition before peers and coaches is an incentive to continue striving to achieve new skills.

Patience – It may take a person who is disabled longer to acquire a skill, but that doesn't mean that such an individual cannot learn. It is also important to teach a skill and then allow the person to independently execute the skill. If someone does their best but clearly requires assistance, it is appropriate to offer help. However, do so respectfully. For example, you could say, "That was a great try. May I work with you to learn how to swing the bat".

*Break down the skills – Explain and demonstrate a skill in advance. Then, break down the skill into small, manageable steps. For example, say "rest the bat on your shoulder". Then after this has been mastered, add "now swing the bat". This will be more easily mastered than "rest the bat on your shoulder and swing the bat". For many Special Olympics athletes, the goal of swinging a bat may have to be broken down into smaller steps. Breaking down skills is very important when working with individuals who have short attention spans. Frustration will also be **minimized** since you will be able to offer praise after smaller steps rather than waiting for the larger goal to be realized.*

Communicate – Most Special Olympics athletes have speech and language deficits. If you have difficulty understanding someone, do not hesitate to respectfully ask the person to repeat what was said slowly or more clearly. If the individual becomes overly embarrassed or frustrated, seek someone who knows the athlete such as a coach or family member and ask them to translate.

Expect socially appropriate behavior – To be accepted in our society, it is imperative that one behaves age appropriately. There is nothing cute about an adult Special Olympics athlete climbing on a coach or volunteer. You don't do an athlete a favor by accepting behavior that is not age appropriate or tolerated in other settings such as the home or work place. If an athlete wishes to inappropriately kiss or hug you, simply, but with respect, extend your hand and say,

"Since we are friends, it is more appropriate to shake hands, and I shake hands with friends like you".

Know your athlete – If you are responsible for an athlete during a practice, tournament, and especially during an overnight trip, it is essential that you know important things about your athlete.

Medical History – Many Special Olympics athletes have medical conditions of which you need to be aware. This history is summarized on the athlete's application (aka medical forms). Familiarize yourself and understand the nature of a medical problem and what to do if your athlete should experience symptoms.

Daily Living Routines – Familiarize yourself with any eating, toileting, or personal grooming routines or areas where your athlete may require assistance. Remember; don't hesitate to ask others who know your athlete to help.

ABOVE ALL, HAVE FUN!

Special Olympics is a wonderful program of sports training and competition. It can also be a rewarding teaching experience. Everyone involved: the athletes, coaches, volunteers and families will have fun without even trying!!!

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"BEATING THE HEAT"

By: Kim Keeley & Melanie Hildebrand, Athletic Training Students, Slippery Rock University

Staying safe during these hot temperatures isn't difficult as long as you remember a few simple guidelines.

- Allow for acclimatization (adaptation) in hot seasons. Cut back on exercise intensity and duration in hot weather. Slowly build back to previous level over the next 10 days.
- Drink up when it's hot. Once acclimatized, sweat losses will be higher, so fluid intake has to be greater.
- Don't be overly competitive under hot conditions. Try for a personal best on a cooler day.
- Don't just pour water over your head. It may feel great, but it won't help at all at restoring body fluids or lowering body temperature. Fluid has to go in the body.
- Exercise in the morning or evening when the weather is coolest.
- Avoid the sun's rays to minimize the radiant heat load.
- Wear light-colored, lightweight porous clothing.
- Do not change into a dry shirt at breaks or time-outs. Completely soaked shirts do better at cooling the body.

Not only is it important to drink plenty of fluids during practice and competition, but also it is essential to "stock up" on fluids before activity and replace them afterwards. Drinking 17-20 ounces of fluid 2-3 hours before and another 7-10 ounces of fluid 10-20 minutes before activity will give athletes the energy needed to compete. Increase this intake to 28-40 ounces per hour of play. Finally, drink 20+ ounces of fluid within 2 hours of finishing training.

Things to watch for during training: loss of energy and performance, muscle cramps, dizziness, light-headedness, cold clammy skin, nausea/headaches, high body temperature, dry skin, confusion or unconsciousness. If any of these signs or symptoms are noticed, the athlete should stop training, rehydrate, rest in a cool place or seek medical attention.

So as the temperatures increase, remember your fluid intake should too! By keeping these simple guidelines in mind, training for this summer's games will safely prepare the athletes for fun in the sun! (Remember to use sunscreen!) Good Luck athletes!