

Adapted physical sports: A practical way of including and rehabilitating of children with disabilities

Adapted Physical Activity (APA) is a way one can modify activities to make them inclusive and enjoyable for all including children with disabilities (CWDs). Integration and inclusion through adapting Physical Activities in mainstream sports is presently a key focus especially in developed countries though still in its infancy in developing countries particularly Uganda, where it was introduced in 1998 by a non-profit social venture, initially called Adapted Physical Activity International Development that later changed to Playable. It has been proved to increase participation, opportunities for social inclusion and competition for people with varying abilities including CWDs yet not fully explored and embraced in Uganda. There is an adapted sports league run by Playable and the Kids League every holiday though still limited to a small number of people, especially in the urban.

Uganda promotes the participation of children in sports which is evidenced in physical Education being compulsory in primary schools. There are also a number of sports academies such as the Edgars Sports Academy, clubs that are involved in various sports disciplines like football, volleyball to mention but a few which if lobbied and sensitized can include people or children with disabilities as a section of their membership.

This article is intended to help sports instructors, physical education teachers and patrons of child rights clubs to increase the participation of children with disabilities in sports. Adapted sports can be implemented for all the disabilities save for the “severe ones” and through the shared knowledge this can be possible for all the disabilities.

When adapting a foot ball game; consider altering the sizes of the balls to suit the abilities of most of the athletes for example using a size four ball because it is lighter and can easily be kicked by athletes with cerebral palsy who may have weak muscles and uncoordinated movements.

Having a flag and a whistle if you have included deaf athletes; the flag will be raised together with a blown whistle in case there is a foul while the referees have to be in a place where they can easily be seen by deaf athletes.

The field should be well leveled and free from any sharp objects especially if there are athletes without lower limbs where most of their body parts may be in contact with the ground. They mostly use their hands to play which in most cases may not be in gloves and in case of any harmful objectives, they will be wounded. The team must be selected carefully in order to balance the abilities of the athletes to avoid one team being more powerful than the other. This is done to make the game more enjoyable to all athletes.

Locally available materials should be used, such as banana fibre with something wrapped inside that can produce sound if you are to include blind athletes. The Ringers produce sound that can help the blind to locate the direction of the ball. You may also opt for a ball with loud colors for example red or yellow

that can easily be seen by athletes with low vision. You may start with a single category of disability playing with their peers without disabilities and you master the games you will be in position to include more than one disability.

The above points demonstrate how one can adapt the different material for a foot ball game. The playground must be accessible even for children in wheelchairs for them to use the facility.

The length and width of the field should be reduced taking into consideration the varying abilities of athletes. For example, you may make it half-way the size of an ordinary field depending on the abilities of your athletes.

It is important to attend adapted sports trainings by sports instructors that manage different sports disciplines. This will enable you to acquire different skills and even appreciate the idea of including disability in sports.

You could also reduce the number of hours played per game depending on the athletes you have in the game. Allow athletes crawling to use their arms to move the ball while providing protective gears, for example, knee caps. You may improvise by tying a piece of cloth around the knees or elbows in case of absence of modern wares. The athletes using clutches should be advised on how best they can use their clutches to avoid injuring other athletes. You may also advise some athletes to take up some positions depending on their abilities but ensure you consult them. Early exposure of CWDs to sports can arouse their interest for sports and may encourage interested individuals find out more about adapted games for children with disabilities on the internet.

The coach should be creative by limiting the adaptations since this may make the game boring to other athletes without disabilities. Important also is to brief athletes about their colleagues and always have an evaluation of activities with a few questions to the children to find how best they enjoyed the game.

In conclusion adapting physical activities and sports has tremendous benefits for children with disabilities, the communities and families. This process leads to improvement of the mental and physical wellbeing of the child, improves their self esteem, promotes the concept of inclusion as a human rights approach. The sports and games can be a powerful tool for social awareness about the different abilities to enable an appreciation of varying abilities.

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References

Playable www.playable.org

International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity www.ifapa.biz

PE central www.pecentral.org