



**HERITAGE
AND SPORT**



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HANDBOOK FOR PROMOTION OF HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, SPORT ACTIVITIES AND NUTRITION



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HERITAGE AND SPORT

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Project “**Heritage & Sport**” main objective is to increase the level of physical activity of children in primary education with mental, developmental and physical disabilities. Partners are aware that there is a need for innovative approaches to motivate and include children with special needs in sport activities. One of the biggest obstacles to participation of all children in regular sport activities is accessibility. In the project “Heritage & Sport” partners will collect traditional European games and sports from partner countries and develop a Handbook of traditional games and sport which will be adjusted to the needs of children with special needs. Games adjustments will follow a modular methodology approach, to accommodate the groups who have the most obstacles to overcome. We are going to organize workshop and online trainings of volunteers and teachers and sport events in all partner countries that will be held in public areas as parks, open areas in nature and other free public sport facilities to include all children regardless of their parents income.





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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

This handbook is an essential component of a wider sports programme specifically designed for children with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. Its primary purpose is to provide a comprehensive guide to equip volunteers, youth workers and teachers with the knowledge, strategies and tools needed to effectively support and enhance the participation of these children in sport and physical activity. In doing so, it aims to promote a healthy lifestyle among this target group and ensure that all children, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to benefit from taking part in sports.

The content of this handbook has been carefully developed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by children with disabilities in sports settings. It offers practical advice, activity suggestions and motivational strategies tailored to promote an inclusive, safe and encouraging atmosphere for all participants. It also provides nutritional guidelines that are essential to maintaining the overall health and well-being of children with special needs, further supporting their physical activity.

Intended for use by volunteers, youth workers and teachers, this handbook is a valuable resource in a variety of settings, from schools and community centres to sports clubs and leisure programmes. It is designed to be flexible and adaptable so that it can be integrated into existing sports programmes or serve as the basis for new initiatives aimed at including children with disabilities in sports.

By following the recommendations and using the resources provided in this handbook, educators and facilitators will be better equipped to create and maintain an environment where every child, regardless of physical or cognitive ability, can participate in physical activity, gain confidence and lead a healthier lifestyle. This handbook is a step towards building a more inclusive community where every child has the chance to thrive through the joy and benefits of sport.



IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS AND NUTRITION

Physical activity and good nutrition are fundamental to children's development and play a vital role in their physical, mental and emotional well-being. For children with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities, these aspects are even more important and offer unique opportunities for growth, social integration and the improvement of various skills.

Benefits of Physical Activity

01

Physical health:

Regular physical activity helps develop strong bones, muscles and joints. It helps maintain a healthy weight and can prevent chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular problems, which can severely affect children with disabilities.

02

Cognitive development:

Participation in sports can lead to improved cognitive function. It improves concentration, memory and classroom behaviour, thereby supporting academic performance. Physical activity is known to stimulate brain growth and improve cognitive performance, which is particularly beneficial for children with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

03

Emotional wellbeing:

Sport provides an alternative to stress, anxiety and depression. It contributes to better mood regulation and increased self-esteem. The sense of achievement children feel when they learn a new skill or improve in their chosen sport can be a significant source of self-confidence.

04

Social skills:

Sports are a social activity by nature. They offer children the opportunity to interact with their peers, develop friendships and learn important social skills such as teamwork, communication and empathy. For children with disabilities, it can also be a way to promote social inclusion and reduce feelings of isolation.



ROLE OF NUTRITION

1. Energy and performance

Proper nutrition provides the energy needed to participate in sports and daily activities. A balanced diet ensures that children have the fuel they need for physical activity, supporting endurance and performance.

2. Growth and development

Good nutrition is essential for growth and development. Nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, protein and iron are vital for bone health, muscle development and overall physical growth, which is particularly important for children with physical disabilities.

3. Maintaining good health

A nutritious diet supports immune function, reducing the likelihood of illness and infection. This is especially important for children with disabilities who may have compromised immune systems or additional health concerns.

4. Cognitive function

Nutrition plays an important role in brain development and function. Essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals have a direct impact on cognitive processes, learning, memory and attention, which are critical areas for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.





SPORT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN

Physical Activity Guidelines

Physical activity is essential for all children, including those with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. Adapting activities to the needs and abilities of each child ensures that everyone can participate in and benefit from physical activity. The following guidelines provide a framework for age-appropriate physical activity, emphasising inclusivity and adaptability to meet the varying abilities of children within the target groups.

Early Childhood (Ages 0-5)



Focus: Encourage motor skills development through unstructured play and physical activities. Activities should be fun, engaging, and include a variety of movements.

Duration: Aim for at least 180 minutes spread throughout the day for toddlers (1-3 years) and preschoolers (3-5 years). This can include light activities like walking or more energetic play.

Adaptations for Disabilities: Use sensory-rich activities for children with developmental disabilities. For children with physical disabilities, focus on activities that enhance mobility and flexibility, using adaptive equipment if necessary.

01

Petanque

A simplified version of this French game can be introduced to young children. It involves rolling balls as close as possible to a target ball, fostering hand-eye coordination and gross motor skills. For children with physical disabilities, the game can be adapted by adjusting the weight of the balls and playing distance.



02

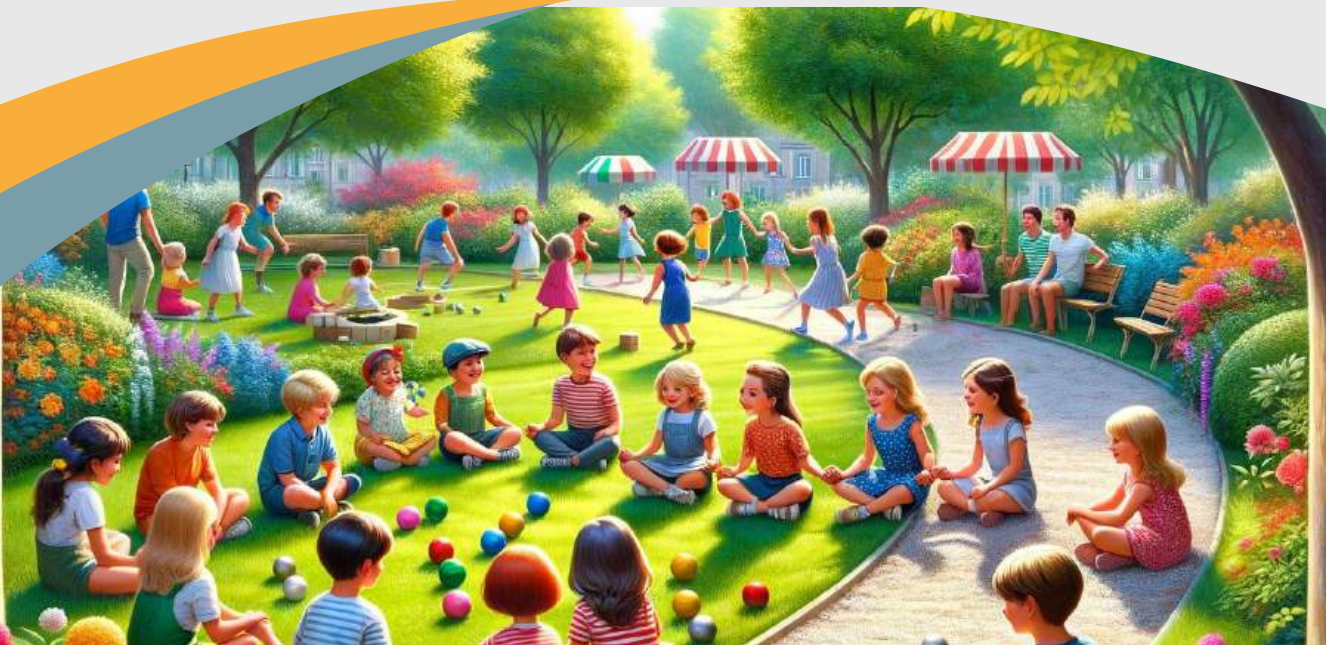
Ring-a-Ring o' Roses

This traditional game, known across Europe, encourages participation in a circle dance and song, promoting social interaction and motor skills. Adaptations can include seated versions or using assistive devices for mobility.

03

Duck, Duck, Goose

A game that promotes running and gentle chasing, suitable for developing agility and social skills. Modifications can be made to accommodate children with mobility issues, such as using wheelchairs or walkers in the game.





Children (Ages 6–12)



Focus: Introduce structured sports along with continued unstructured play. Emphasize skill development, teamwork, and enjoyment.

Duration: Children in this age group should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Activities should include aerobic exercises, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening activities at least 3 days a week.

Adaptations for Disabilities: Modify games and activities to ensure participation from all children. Use visual aids and simplified instructions for children with cognitive challenges. For those with physical disabilities, ensure the environment is accessible and consider using specialized sports wheelchairs or other adaptive equipment.

01

Rounders

An engaging team game similar to baseball, originating from Great Britain. It's excellent for developing teamwork, hand-eye coordination, and running skills. The game can be adapted for children with disabilities by modifying the bat size, ball type, and running distances.

02

Hurling/Camogie

These traditional Irish sports can be introduced with modified, softer equipment and smaller field sizes to ensure safety and inclusivity. They enhance hand-eye coordination, agility, and teamwork.

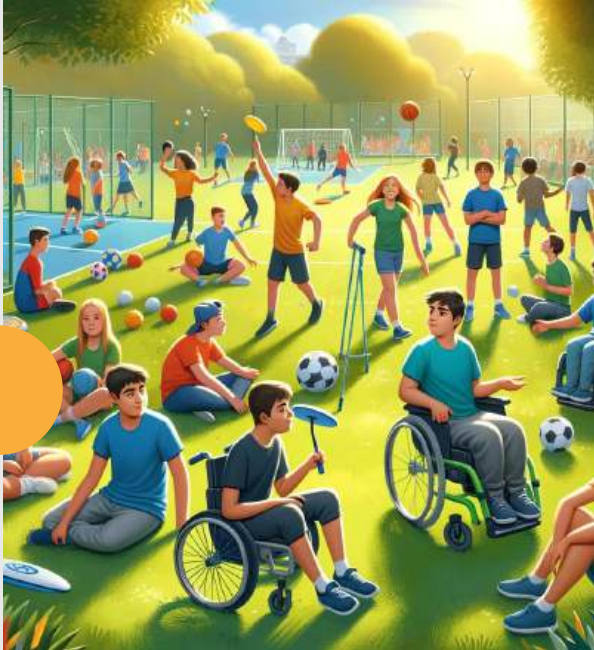
03

Sepak Takraw

Although not originally European, this sport has gained popularity in various parts of Europe. It's similar to volleyball but uses a rattan ball and allows players to use their feet, chest, head, and knees to touch the ball. The game can be adapted for children with disabilities by adjusting the height of the net and allowing modified rules for engagement.



Adolescents (Ages 13-17)



Focus: Continue with structured sports and physical activities that promote social interaction, competition, and physical challenge. Encourage personal growth and autonomy in choosing preferred activities.

Duration: Maintain at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Activities should be diversified to include aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening exercises.

Adaptations for Disabilities: Focus on inclusive sports that can be adapted for various abilities, such as wheelchair basketball or sitting volleyball. Encourage peer support and mentorship programs to enhance social inclusion and motivation.

01

Orienteering

This sport combines racing with navigation and is a fun way for teenagers to explore nature while developing strategic thinking and physical endurance. Adaptations for participants with disabilities might include modified courses and the use of assistive technology for navigation.

02

Archery

With historical roots across Europe, archery can be a highly inclusive sport that improves focus, hand-eye coordination, and upper body strength. Equipment and participation methods can be adapted for various disabilities.

03

Boccia

Originally from Italy but now a Paralympic sport, Boccia is highly inclusive and can be played by individuals with severe physical disabilities. It involves throwing leather balls as close as possible to a target ball, promoting precision and strategic thinking.



(General Guidelines for All Ages)

Inclusivity: Ensure all activities are inclusive and accessible, providing every child with the opportunity to participate.

Adaptability: Be prepared to adapt activities based on the individual needs and abilities of each child, using adaptive equipment and modifying rules as necessary.

Safety: Prioritize safety in all activities, ensuring that the environment, equipment, and the activities themselves are suitable and safe for children with disabilities.

Encouragement and Support: Promote a positive, supportive environment that encourages participation, effort and personal achievement rather than competition and performance.

Skill Development: Focus on the progressive development of skills, ensuring that activities are challenging yet achievable, to foster a sense of accomplishment and encourage continued participation.

Fun and Engagement: Keep activities fun and engaging to maintain interest and motivation among participants. Use games and creative adaptations to make sports enjoyable for everyone.





SPORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Participation in sport is a powerful tool for the holistic development of children, including those with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. Sport activities provide a unique platform for promoting physical, mental and social growth and contribute significantly to the overall well-being and personal development of young participants. This section outlines how sport contributes to different aspects of development, emphasising the inclusion of our target groups

Physical Development

01

Improved motor skills

Participation in sports helps to develop gross and fine motor skills. Activities that involve throwing, catching, running and jumping improve coordination, balance and flexibility.

02

Improved physical fitness

Regular physical activity through sport improves cardiovascular health, strength and endurance, contributing to overall physical fitness and the prevention of chronic disease.

03

Adaptability for Disabilities

For children with disabilities, sports can be adapted to suit their physical abilities so that they too can benefit from physical activity. For example, boccia and table cricket are excellent for developing hand-eye coordination and upper body strength in children with limited mobility.



Mental Development

01

Cognitive Skills

Sport requires decision-making, strategy and quick thinking, which improves cognitive function. Learning and following the rules of a game improves concentration and memory.

02

Emotional Regulation

Participating in sport helps children to deal with emotions such as frustration, excitement and disappointment, and builds resilience and stress management skills.

03

Confidence and Self-esteem

Learning new skills and achieving personal or team goals in a sporting environment builds self-confidence and self-esteem. This is particularly important for children with disabilities, as sport provides a platform where they can succeed and be recognised for their abilities.





Social Development

01

Teamwork and Cooperation

Most sports involve teamwork, which teaches children how to work together towards a common goal, communicate effectively and support their teammates.

02

Social Inclusion

Sports bring together children from various backgrounds, including those with disabilities, promoting social inclusion and empathy. Inclusive sports programs encourage interactions and friendships that might not have formed otherwise.

03

Discipline and Respect

Sports instill a sense of discipline and respect for others, including teammates, opponents, and officials. Learning to follow rules and accept decisions is a valuable life lesson extending beyond the sports field.





INCLUSIVE SPORTS PROGRAMS

Creating sports programmes that are accessible and enjoyable for children of all abilities is essential to promoting an inclusive environment where every child can participate, learn and grow. Inclusive sports programmes not only welcome children with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities, but also promote understanding, respect and friendship among all participants. Here are strategies for developing inclusive sport programmes that are adapted to meet the diverse needs of our target groups.

1. Universal Design for Sports Programs

Adaptability: Design sports activities that can be easily adapted for different abilities, so that every child can participate in a meaningful way. This may involve modifying rules, equipment or the playing environment.

Variety of options: Offer a range of sports and activities to suit different interests and abilities. Providing choices enables children to participate in activities they enjoy and are comfortable with.

2. Adaptive Sports and Equipment

Adaptive Sports: Include adaptive sports that are specifically designed or modified for people with disabilities, such as wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball and boccia. These sports provide equal opportunities for participation.

Specialized Equipment: Use adaptive equipment such as lighter or larger balls, modified bats or rackets, and sport-specific wheelchairs to facilitate participation. Ensure that playing surfaces are accessible to children using mobility equipment.





3. Training and Education

Staff training: Provide comprehensive training for volunteers, youth workers and teachers on inclusive practices, understanding disability and adapting sports activities. Knowledgeable and confident staff are key to the successful delivery of inclusive programmes.

Peer education: Encourage peer-led activities where children educate each other about inclusivity and disability awareness. This promotes a supportive community where children learn to adapt and play together.

4. Inclusive Communication and Engagement

Inclusive Language: Use language that is respectful and inclusive, focusing on abilities rather than disabilities. Language shapes attitudes and can create a welcoming environment for all participants.

Engagement with Parents and Caregivers: Collaborate with parents and caregivers to understand each child's needs, preferences, and potential adaptations that could enhance their participation.

5. Creating a Supportive Environment

Buddy systems: Implement buddy systems that pair children with and without disabilities. This promotes mutual understanding, friendship and peer support and increases the social experience of sport.

Positive reinforcement: Use positive reinforcement techniques to reward effort, improvement and achievement, regardless of the outcome of sporting activities. Recognising individual and team achievements boosts self-esteem and motivation.

6. Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Feedback Mechanisms: Establish channels for receiving feedback from children, parents, and staff. This feedback is invaluable for assessing the effectiveness of the sports program and identifying areas for improvement.

Regular Review and Adaptation: Continuously review and adapt the program based on feedback, evolving best practices in inclusive sports, and the changing needs and abilities of participants.

Inclusive sports programs play a critical role in promoting equity, health, and social inclusion among children of all abilities. Volunteers, youth workers, and teachers can create a positive, inclusive, and enriching sports environment that celebrates diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and achievement for every child.



SAFETY MEASURES IN INCLUSIVE SPORTS PROGRAMS

Ensuring the safety of all participants in sports activities is crucial, especially when working with children with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. A safe environment not only protects children from injury, but also encourages participation by making them feel safe. The following good practices are intended to guide volunteers, youth workers and teachers in maintaining a safe and positive atmosphere during sports activities.



Understanding Individual Needs

It is important to assess each child's physical capabilities, health conditions, and specific needs to adapt activities accordingly. This ensures that every child participates in activities suitable for their ability level and minimizes the risk of injury.



Adapted Equipment and Environment

Trainers ensure that all sports equipment is age-appropriate, well-maintained, and, if necessary, adapted to meet the needs of children with disabilities. For example, use lighter balls, soft-edged items, or equipment tailored for wheelchair users.



Protective Gear and Clothing

Trainers encourage participants to wear suitable clothing for physical activity, considering comfort, mobility, and the specific requirements of each sport. It is crucial to adapt protective equipment to fit children with disabilities properly.



Inclusion of Cool-Down and Warm-Up Sessions

Including warm-up exercises at the start of activities and cool-down exercises at the end can become the parts of sport programme. This will help to prepare the body gradually for physical effort and reduce the risk of muscle strain or injury.



Supervised Play and Structured Activities

The trainers provide clear, concise instructions and rules for each activity. Structured play helps prevent chaos and confusion, reducing the risk of accidents. They receive adequate supervision by maintaining a suitable adult-to-child ratio.



Training in First Aid and Emergency Procedures

All staff and volunteers should be trained in basic first aid to address minor injuries and recognize when professional medical attention is needed





MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING CHILDREN IN SPORTS

Motivation is a critical factor in engaging children in sport, particularly those with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. Recognising and using different motivators can greatly increase participation and enjoyment. This section provides an overview of the key motivators for children's participation in sport and offers strategies on how volunteers, youth workers and teachers can use these motivators effectively.

1. Enjoyment and Fun

Children are more likely to participate in physical activity if they find it fun and enjoyable. Integrating games, playful competitions and activities that promote laughter and enjoyment can increase engagement.

Strategy: Design sports sessions that are varied and include elements of play. Use adaptive games that are inclusive for children with disabilities, ensuring everyone can participate and have fun.

2. Skill Mastery and Personal Achievement

The desire to learn new skills, improve and achieve personal goals is a powerful motivator. Children take pride in mastering a task, whether it's hitting a ball, completing a race or learning to swim.

Strategy: Set achievable, personalised goals for each child and celebrate milestones, no matter how small. Provide consistent, positive feedback and recognition to reinforce their sense of achievement.





3. Social Interaction and Belonging

Sport provides a platform for social interaction, making new friends and feeling part of a group. This is particularly important for children with disabilities, who can often feel isolated.

Strategy: Promote a team environment where all children feel included and valued. Create opportunities for teamwork and cooperation and encourage friendships through buddy systems and group activities.

4. Health and Fitness Awareness

As children get older, they become more aware of the health and fitness benefits of sport. This can be a motivating factor, especially when they understand how physical activity contributes to their overall wellbeing.

Strategy: Teach children about the health benefits of regular physical activity in an age-appropriate way. Encourage them to notice how they feel better physically and mentally after participating in sport.

5. Role Models and Inspiration

Children are often inspired by athletes, coaches, or even peers who demonstrate enthusiasm and passion for sports. Having role models can spark interest and motivation to participate and excel in sports activities.

Strategy: Share stories of athletes, including those with disabilities, who have overcome challenges to achieve success in their sports. Invite guest speakers or involve inspirational figures in your program to motivate and encourage children.



6. Autonomy and Choice

Giving children the autonomy to choose which sports or activities they want to participate in can greatly increase their motivation. Feeling in control of their sporting experience allows them to pursue what they are truly interested in.

Strategy: Offer a variety of sports and activities, giving children the freedom to choose based on their interests and comfort level. For children with disabilities, ensure that there are accessible options to suit their abilities.



7. Positive Environment

A supportive, positive environment where children feel safe to try new things without fear of failure or judgement can increase motivation. Promoting effort rather than winning creates a more inclusive and encouraging atmosphere.

Strategy: Develop a positive, supportive culture within your sports programme. Encourage participants, staff and volunteers to support each other and emphasise the value of effort, improvement and participation over competition.



GOAL SETTING AND POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

The use of goal setting and positive reinforcement is essential to motivate children, including those with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities, to participate in sports. This approach not only encourages persistence and effort but also promotes a sense of achievement and self-esteem in children. The following techniques are designed to guide volunteers, youth workers and teachers in the effective use of goal setting and positive reinforcement in sports programmes.

Goal Setting with Children

01

Individualized Goals

Set personalised goals for each child, taking into account their abilities, interests and developmental needs. Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).

02

Inclusive Participation

Involve children in the goal-setting process. This empowers them and ensures that the goals are meaningful and motivating from their perspective.

03

Short-Term Milestones

Break down larger goals into smaller, achievable milestones. This helps maintain motivation by providing frequent opportunities for success and celebration.

04

Visual Goal Tracking

Use visual aids like charts or progress bars to track goals and milestones. This can be particularly motivating for children, providing a clear representation of their progress.

Positive Reinforcement Techniques

01

Verbal Praise

Offer immediate, specific, and genuine praise for efforts, improvements, and achievements. Highlighting the positive aspects of a child's performance, rather than focusing on the outcome, fosters a growth mindset.

02

Non-Verbal Reinforcement

Use non-verbal cues such as thumbs-up, high-fives, or smiles to acknowledge and encourage children, especially during activities.

03

Reward Systems

Implement a reward system where children earn tokens, stickers, or certificates for achieving their goals or demonstrating positive behavior. Ensure that rewards are meaningful and age-appropriate.

04

Peer Recognition

Encourage peer recognition and support by creating opportunities for children to praise and encourage each other's achievements. This can build a sense of community and belonging within the group.

05

Constructive Feedback

When giving feedback, focus on effort and what was done well, followed by specific, constructive suggestions for improvement. Present feedback in a positive light, as an opportunity for learning and growth.

06

Celebration of Achievements

Regularly celebrate achievements, both big and small, with the group. This can include sharing success stories, holding mini-ceremonies, or displaying achievements on a "wall of fame."

Training for Staff and Volunteers

Empathy and understanding: Train staff and volunteers to understand the diverse needs of children with disabilities and to approach goal setting and positive reinforcement with empathy and sensitivity.

Effective Communication: Equip staff with clear, positive and supportive communication strategies to ensure they can effectively deliver praise and constructive feedback.

Recognising individual differences: Emphasise the importance of recognising and valuing each child's unique abilities and contributions, and promote an inclusive environment where every child feels valued.



GAMES AND ACTIVITIES: ENGAGING CHILDREN OF ALL ABILITIES

Inclusive games and activities are fundamental to engaging children in sport and addressing a wide range of abilities and needs. This section provides a collection of games and activities designed to be accessible and enjoyable for children with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities, along with suggested modifications to ensure inclusivity.

1. Balloon Volleyball

Description: A fun, low-intensity game in which players use their hands to keep a balloon from touching the ground by passing it back and forth over a net or a designated line.

Modifications for special needs: Lower or remove the net for wheelchair users. Use brightly coloured balloons for children with visual disabilities and limit the number of participants to avoid overcrowding and ensure safety.



Image: Balloon volleyball

2. Obstacle Course

Description: Set up a course with a variety of simple obstacles for children to navigate, such as cones to weave around, mats to crawl over and hoops to jump through.

Modifications for special needs: Adjust the complexity and physical demands of the obstacles to suit different abilities. For children with mobility issues, include activities that can be completed while seated or with the use of mobility aids.

3. Target Toss

Description: Players take turns throwing bean bags or soft balls into a series of targets, such as hoops, buckets or marked areas on the floor, to score points.

Modifications for special needs: Use larger targets or closer distances for children with physical disabilities. For those with visual disabilities, use textured or sound-emitting objects as targets.

4. Parachute Play

Description: Children hold on to the edges of a large parachute and work together to make it float. They can also place light balls on top and try to make them bounce on the surface of the parachute.

Modifications for special needs: Make sure the parachute is light and easy to grip. If necessary, adapt the activities for sitting and use larger, softer balls for easier manipulation.

5. Relay Races

Description: Teams compete in a relay race, completing a simple task or covering a distance before passing a baton to the next team member.

Modifications for Special Needs: Adapt the race tasks to suit the abilities of all participants, such as walking, cycling or the use of assistive devices. The race can also include problem-solving or sensory activities for children with developmental disabilities.



Image:Relay Race

6. Boccia

Description: A precision ball sport that can be played individually or in teams. Players take turns rolling, throwing or kicking balls to get them closest to a target ball (jack).

Modifications for special needs: Boccia is inclusive by nature and can be easily adapted with assistive devices for players with severe physical disabilities, making it an excellent game for children of all abilities.

7. Simon Says

Description: A classic game in which one person gives commands (e.g. "Simon says, touch your toes") which the players must follow only if they are preceded by "Simon says". Helps with listening skills and physical coordination.

Modifications for special needs: Adapt commands to participants' physical abilities or intellectual disabilities including commands that can be performed while seated or with assistance.

8. Gentle Dodgeball

Description: A non-competitive, gentle version of dodgeball where soft, lightweight balls are rolled (not thrown) towards players, who must avoid being touched by the ball. If touched, the player performs a fun action or dance before rejoining the game.

Modifications for Special Needs: Ensure the balls are soft and easy to see for children with visual impairments. The play area should be flat and accessible, with clear boundaries for safety. Adapt the actions to the abilities of each child, allowing everyone to participate fully.



Image: Boccia balls

9. Adapted Duck, Duck, Goose

Description: In this adapted version of Duck, Duck, Goose, children sit in a circle and the "it" person walks around tapping heads or shoulders and saying "duck" until someone is chosen by saying "goose". The chosen "goose" then has to do a fun activity or movement before sitting down again.

Modifications for special needs: Activities or movements can be adapted to suit children's abilities, such as clapping, blinking or making a facial expression. This ensures that everyone can participate, including those with limited mobility or developmental disabilities.

10. Musical Chairs with a Twist

Description: A fun and engaging adaptation of the classic game of musical chairs, where children walk, dance, or move around a set of chairs while music plays. When the music stops, everyone must find a chair to sit in, but instead of removing chairs, tasks or activities are assigned to those without a seat.

Modifications for Special Needs: Ensure there's ample space between chairs for those with mobility aids. The tasks can be customized to suit various disabilities, such as simple hand movements for children with limited mobility or sensory tasks for those with visual or developmental challenges.



Image: Musical Chairs with a Twist

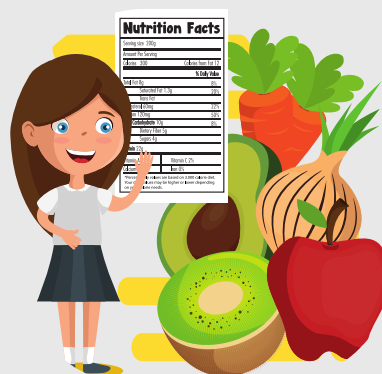
NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN

This section is designed to prepare volunteers, youth workers and teachers – who play a key role in shaping young people's lives – for a deeper insight into the fundamentals of child nutrition. The primary goal is to provide these key opinion leaders with a solid understanding of how balanced and thoughtful nutrition can have a significant impact on a child's physical growth, cognitive development and overall well-being.

Nutrition is fundamental to the growth of every child, but it takes on additional complexity and importance when considering children with different disabilities. Disabilities, whether physical, developmental or neurological, can have a significant impact on a child's nutritional needs and ability to meet those needs. For example, children with physical disabilities may have difficulty with the physical act of eating or may require special diets to prevent obesity due to reduced physical activity. Children with developmental disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorders, often have sensory sensitivities that can affect their food preferences and acceptance, leading to nutritional deficiencies if not carefully managed. Neurological disabilities can affect swallowing and digestion, requiring tailored nutrition plans to ensure safe and adequate nutrient intake.

In addition, certain disabilities can increase a child's nutritional needs, as the body requires more energy and nutrients to support health and development. In other cases, medications commonly prescribed for various disabilities can affect appetite, metabolism and nutrient absorption, further complicating nutritional management.

Understanding these nuances is crucial for those working with children with disabilities, as it enables them to adopt more personalised and effective approaches to nutrition that take into account the unique challenges these children face.



BASIC NUTRITION PRINCIPLES

Understanding Essential Nutrients: The body requires essential nutrients for health and they must be sourced from the diet. The six essential nutrients necessary for human health are proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and water. For example, carbohydrates are essential for energy and are found in foods such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Proteins, essential for growth and repair, can be found in lean meats, beans and tofu. Fats are important for brain health, and avocados and nuts are good sources. Micronutrients such as calcium and vitamin D are essential for bone health, especially for children with physical disabilities to support mobility and skeletal strength.

Nutritional Requirements Across Different Ages: Children's nutritional needs change as they grow. For example, toddlers need high-energy foods for growth periods, while teenagers need more iron, especially girls. Children with disabilities, such as those with Down's syndrome, may require dietary adjustments to effectively manage their weight, as they tend to have a lower metabolism.

The Impact of Nutrition on Development: Proper nutrition supports cognitive development and physical growth. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish and flaxseeds, are linked to improved cognitive function, which can be particularly beneficial for children with learning disabilities, enhancing focus and learning capabilities.



HEALTHY EATING HABITS

Creating a Positive Food Environment: Creating a stress-free eating environment can promote healthy eating attitudes. For children with autism who may have sensory sensitivities, creating a calm and familiar eating environment can help reduce mealtime stress.

Involving Children in Meal Planning and Preparation: Involving children in cooking can stimulate their interest in food. For children with physical disabilities, adaptive kitchen equipment can make participation safer and more enjoyable, encouraging independence.

Understanding Food Labels: Teaching children to read food labels encourages healthy choices. However this cannot be possible for every child and disability. For children with ADHD, understanding labels can help avoid foods with additives and high sugar content, which can worsen hyperactivity.

NUTRITION FOR ACTIVE CHILDREN

The Active Child's Plate: Active children need a balanced diet to keep their energy levels up. A child in a wheelchair may need fewer calories, but the quality of nutrients must remain high to support their health and prevent obesity. It is important to make modifications to the diet of children according to their activity during the day

Hydration Essentials: Staying hydrated is crucial, especially for children who may not recognise thirst cues, such as those with intellectual disabilities. The use of accessible cups and regular reminders can help maintain adequate hydration.

Timing and Composition of Pre- and Post-Activity Meals: Getting the timing of children with disability meals right improves performance and recovery. For example, a simple carbohydrate snack such as a piece of fruit before exercise can provide quick energy, while a protein-rich snack after exercise helps muscle recovery. The trainer and the family can follow these simple dietary needs.

ADDRESSING NUTRITIONAL CHALLENGES

Managing Picky Eaters: Offering a variety of foods without pressure can help. For children with intellectual disability, introducing new foods slowly and in different forms (e.g. smoothies or purees) can make new foods less intimidating. Rewarding techniques can be used for those who are picky.

Managing Food Allergies and Intolerances: Awareness and management of dietary restrictions are key. For a child with a gluten intolerance, providing gluten-free alternatives ensures that they can still enjoy meals without feeling excluded. Parent-Trainer communication is vital to follow the allergies and intolerances

Balancing Energy Intake with Activity Levels: Monitoring energy intake is important, especially for less active children. For children with limited mobility, focusing on nutrient-dense foods prevents excessive calorie intake while ensuring they get the nutrients they need.



IMPLEMENTATION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

This part serves as a guide for integrating physical activity and nutrition programmes tailored for children with intellectual disabilities into educational and community settings. It emphasises the development of a supportive infrastructure that includes training for educators and volunteers, community and parental involvement, and robust monitoring and evaluation practices. The aim is to create an inclusive environment that not only meets the special needs of these children but also promotes their overall well-being through physical activity and healthy eating habits.

Training Programs for Trainers, Educators and Volunteers

Workshops could include sessions on understanding the wide range of intellectual disabilities, from Down syndrome to autistic spectrum disorders, and how they can affect learning and physical abilities. For example, a workshop might demonstrate how to use visual aids and simple, repetitive instructions to teach a child with Down's syndrome how to participate in a group sport. These workshops are important as many trainers, educators or volunteers may not work with such children or have any educational background about disabilities.

Inclusive education techniques should involve training in adapted teaching methods to meet different learning needs, such as using tactile learning tools for children with sensory processing problems or incorporating sign language for children with communication difficulties. An example might be adapting a physical education lesson to include non-verbal cues for children who are non-verbal or have limited verbal communication skills.

Practical skill-building sessions can be organized within the educational settings. These sessions provide hands-on experience with adaptive sports equipment, such as lighter or softer balls for children with coordination difficulties, and modified games to ensure that every child can participate. For example, participants might learn how to modify a football game to be played with a balloon and baskets so that children with mobility problems can participate more fully.

Community and Parental Involvement

Building partnerships with parents could include regular, structured meetings with parents to discuss their child's progress, preferences and any dietary restrictions. Schools organize various trainings about dietary topic. For instance, a monthly newsletter could be produced highlighting what the children have learned in their physical activity and nutrition programme and providing tips for parents on how to reinforce these lessons at home.

By involving the wider community, such as local gyms or sports clubs willing to host inclusive sports days, or nutritionists who could run healthy eating workshops for children with special dietary needs. Examples include an annual 'Inclusive Sports Day', where children of all abilities take part in adapted sports, or a 'Healthy Eating Fair', where local chefs demonstrate how to prepare simple, nutritious meals that suit different dietary needs, including gluten-free, casein-free or pureed foods for those with swallowing difficulties.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Setting measurable objectives could involve setting specific, achievable goals for each child, such as "John will learn to follow two-step instructions in a sports environment by the end of term", and using these as benchmarks for progress. While setting the objectives, teachers and trainers should keep in mind about children's level and type of disability.

Based on feedback, the programme can be adapted and continuously improved to better meet the needs of the children. For instance, if several children find a particular physical activity too challenging, it could be adapted to make it more accessible or replaced with an alternative that provides a similar level of physical activity.



IMPLEMENTING MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

Implementing motivational strategies and nutritional guidelines in educational settings, especially for children with intellectual disabilities, requires a thoughtful, inclusive and multi-dimensional approach. Here's how this can be achieved;

01

Personalised goals

Set individual, achievable goals for each child based on their abilities and interests. Celebrate milestones, no matter how small, to encourage a sense of accomplishment. For example, if a child learns to participate in a new group activity or tries a new healthy food, recognise their efforts with a certificate or special mention.

02

Interactive and Fun Learning

Make learning about nutrition and exercise fun and engaging through games, interactive activities and storytelling. For children with intellectual disabilities, the use of visual aids, sensory bins and hands-on activities can be particularly effective in maintaining interest and motivation.

03

Role Models and Peer Support

Involve peers, educators and volunteers as role models who demonstrate healthy eating and active participation in sport. Create buddy systems where children can support and motivate each other, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

04

Inclusive Environment

Ensure that all activities and learning materials are accessible and adaptable to meet the diverse needs of children with intellectual disabilities. Use adaptive sports equipment and modify games so that every child can participate and succeed.

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HANDBOOK FOR PROMOTION OF HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, SPORT ACTIVITIES AND NUTRITION



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