

**It's A Fit:
A Guide for Physical Education &
Instruction**





Saskatchewan Blind Sports Association 2011

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Providing Instruction for Children and Youth	6
Descriptive Language	6
Brailing	7
Hand-Body Manipulation	7
Tips and Suggestions	7
Considerations.....	9
Physical Considerations:	9
Psychological Considerations:	10
Environmental Considerations:	10
Program Considerations:	10
Safety Considerations:	11
Program Modifications	14
Equipment Modification	15
Skill Level Modification	16
Distance/Space Modification	16
Rule Modification	17
Conclusion	18
References	19
Appendices	20



Introduction

Kids need to be active. Kids who are blind or partially sighted are no different; they just might need the activity or sport to be modified in order to participate. The key to inclusion is to understand each child's needs related to being physically active and providing appropriate opportunities and supports.

Building inclusion into your physical education program is a step-by-step process that:

- includes all participants (especially the child who is blind or partially sighted)
- offers a range of activities and supports; and
- is based on the needs and interests of the children

The following information is designed to provide teachers and coaches with ideas and tools in understanding how to create and encourage an inclusive environment for children who are blind or partially sighted. To be inclusive, the gender designation (he/she, him/her) will be used interchangeably.

Planning an inclusive program is not hard but it does require coming at it with the right attitude and asking the right questions. All inclusive physical activity programs offer:

- Activities that are modified and individualized as necessary
- Expectations that are realistic but provide challenge
- Only the degree of assistance required
- Dignity of taking risks and availability of activity options

The following are some tips that will assist teachers and coaches to provide opportunities for children who are blind or partially sighted to have positive and meaningful sports experiences.

Build Positive Experiences

Have a positive approach and create opportunities for success. This will help the child to be more physically active. Start children with lower skill levels or less



confidence with simple movements/activities to allow them to be successful. This will help them gain self-confidence in their abilities.

Open and Respectful Communication

With the Child – a one-to-one talk can help you to gain an understanding of the child's feelings about their vision condition. It is important for you to know the nature of the condition and how it impacts the child in their daily life. However, the child may not want to talk about how the cause. Be sensitive to feelings.

With Peers – Open discussion can assist the child and peers to build common understanding and opportunities for positive interaction. Conversations conducted with dignity and respect provides the child with an empowering opportunity to speak for himself regarding his abilities and any assistance that might be needed. This may be a chance to talk about how peers can help by assisting the child through activity changes, become sighted running guides, retrieving equipment, etc.

Depending on the age and self-confidence of the child, the conversation may have to be led by the teacher/coach. **Again keep in mind it is OK to discuss the blindness or partial sight of the child, but the child may not want to discuss the cause of the condition.**

Experiential Activities may also increase the understanding of peers with sight as to the challenges and barriers faced by children who are blind or partially sighted (see **Appendix A** for suggested activities). An activity of this type can help peers and the child gain a strong appreciation of the abilities of the child. Remember to check in with the child who is blind or partially sighted to make sure this is within their comfort level and keep the activity positive and upbeat.



Providing Instruction for Children and Youth

Children and youth who are blind or partially sighted may need enhanced support in becoming physically active or increasing their level of skill and activity. The range of support will vary with the degree of vision and physical activity history of the child or youth. Children and youth who have partial vision may gain some benefit from using visual cues like demonstrations. However, if the child or youth is learning new concepts or movements, you may not be able to rely on demonstration of the skill that is being built and you may require others strategies. Children and youth who are blind will require the use of other strategies.

There are three main strategies that can be effective in supporting with children and youth to becoming physically active:

1. Descriptive Language
2. Brailing
3. Hand-Body Manipulation

Descriptive Language

Children and youth will find descriptive wording helpful when receiving instruction. It can provide a clear explanation of what is required. In order for it to be useful the teacher or coach must:

- Organize the information or material you are going to present. It will keep you on track and focussed on what you are doing and will help to avoid confusion.
- Provide clear instruction and direction. Name body parts. “Place your feet shoulder-width or 15 inches apart” is more descriptive than saying “your feet are too far apart”. This instruction and feedback will give the child or youth a frame of reference in the future.
- Speak clearly and use complete sentences. Keep in mind that children and youth may not be able to watch others to gain understanding of the task if instruction are missed. Be ready to repeat instructions if the child or youth you are supporting seems to be hesitating.



Brailing

This allows the child or youth to touch the person who is demonstrating the activity or movement to gain understanding of the movement being taught. If he is uncomfortable with this form of instruction, a wooden doll with articulating joints can be used to demonstrate the movement. These dolls can often be found in stores selling art supplies.

Hand-Body Manipulation

This involves actually guiding or moving the child's body (arm, leg, etc.) through the range of motion and movement. Since the child may not be able to compare her movement to those of her peer, this provides concrete instruction on how the movement is done and how it feels.

It is vital that when using this technique that it is conducted appropriately. Hand-body manipulation should always be conducted in a public setting. It is important to use the child's name and explain what you are going to do before you do it; for example, "Sam, I am going to take your arm and move it like you are throwing a ball". If the child or youth is comfortable with it, you may use this technique to have them help you demonstrate the movement or activity to the rest of the group. Also be aware that this technique may not be appropriate when working with a child or youth of the opposite sex.

Hand-body manipulation has advantages and disadvantages. The technique helps the child to "feel" and envision the movement. It gives her a frame of reference and provides concrete instruction. However, this approach requires one-to-one work with the child and depending on the level of assistance needed, it may limit the time you can spend with the rest of the group.

Tips and Suggestions

The following suggestions may help you to provide information to the child or youth in a more useful way.

1. Use tactile information with verbal instructions and feedback whenever possible
2. Use descriptive language and name the actual body parts for instruction and feedback



3. Provide a relaxed and supportive atmosphere
4. Use a firm grip for hand-body manipulation techniques
5. Show the full range of motion before breaking it down into separate movements
6. Experiment to see what approaches works best for the child and you
7. Give the child time to understand instructions and activities
8. Use alternate equipment for the activity if it will help ie: smaller playing surface, larger/smaller ball
9. Invite a peer to be “brailed”, to assist through hand-body manipulations for greater understanding of the movements
10. Have child close during demonstrations
11. Ask the youth to repeat instructions to be sure he understands
12. Provide rules and written assignments in the format best for the child (large print, Braille, etc.). The child and his resource team will know what format works best
13. Reinforce the names of body parts, positions and spatial relationships
14. Use residual vision to its outmost
15. Encourage practice at home
16. Encourage the child to move freely in all directions
17. Wear colours that provide contrast with the walls and other surroundings
18. Assign a peer helper and guide runner as needed
19. Make use of teacher assistants and others providing support to the child or youth
20. Children and youth may experience some lag in motor skills that impact of their ability to fully participate in specific activities. In these situations, some additional skill development may be required, but they should remain involved in the activities to the extent they are able
21. Ensure that you provide the child or youth with orientation to the space you are working in and try to keep changes to the area at a minimum



Considerations

There is some information you need to gather in order to develop the appropriate physical activity plan. Physical, Psychological, Environmental, Programming and Safety considerations must be taken into account in building a suitable activity plan.

Use the following list for collecting information. Collaborating with the child's resource team (child, parents, teachers, coaches, teacher assistants, etc.) may be helpful in gathering the information.

Physical Considerations:

- **Degree of Vision** – Ask the child about her vision. Ask how it affects her ability to be physically active and what things work best for her (standing in or out of the light, the best colour for contrast, etc.). Ask the child what she can see.
- **Current Skill Level** – Some of the information you will get by observing the child while they are involved in an activity. You may also want to gather a more formal assessment of the child's skills. (see **Appendix B**, Basic Skills Checklist)

Many movement patterns like crawling, walking and running are learned through imitating visual cues. Some children who are blind or partially sighted may experience some delays in spatial and gross motor skill development. In these instances teachers and coaches can encourage and assist the child to learn appropriate skills through physical activity.

- **Orientation and Mobility Development** – Understanding the child's stage of development in these areas will help you to assess how much orientation and on-going support you may need to provide. This information can be discovered by the Checklist and Assessment tools.
- **Medical History** – You will need to understand the child's medical history as it relates to physical activity. Some conditions (ie: where retinal detachment is a possibility) may limit the ability to participate in more strenuous activities, like diving or contact sports. **The child's**



ophthalmologist may be able to provide relevant information. The doctor may also be able to provide a checklist of appropriate activities.

Psychological Considerations:

- **Fear or Inhibitions** – The child may have some fears or inhibitions regarding some types of physical activity. Building trust and providing positive support and reassurance will assist the child in working through any fears or inhibitions.
- **Child/Peer Interactions** – Every child has a need to belong to a peer group. Observe how the child interacts with peers and encourage opportunities for interaction. Peer helpers can be a way of encouraging less dependence on the teacher/coach and allow peer bonds and friendships to form.

Environmental Considerations:

- **Child and Family Recreation attitudes** – How the child and his/her family views physical activity will have a direct impact on how involved the child becomes in physical activity. Children who have had the opportunity to practice being active may feel more comfortable getting involved in activities than those with limited experience.
- **Opportunities to Become Involved in the Community** – Encouraging participation in community activities will help to strengthen skills.

Program Considerations:

- **Successful Instructional Strategies** – Talk with the child's support team to find out what instructional strategies have been successful in the past and begin there. As you get to know the child, you can start to try new ideas.



- **Curricular Areas Needing Modifications** - Determine areas where you know the student will experience success and start there. As the child's skill-base increases, you will be able to introduce other activities. This will also give you a chance to arrange for any modifications later on like equipment, environment, assistance, etc. (See **Appendix C** for Sport Modifications).
- **Problematic Activity Settings** - Be aware that certain environmental conditions can provide barriers for the child to participate. Sun glare during outside demonstrations or noisy fans when instructions are being given can impact on the child's ability to receive all pertinent information. Be sure to talk and work with the child to ensure fewest distractions possible.

Safety Considerations:

All physical activity or sports require some safety precautions for children. While there are some extra safety precautions to be aware of when working with a child who is blind or partially sighted, the biggest caution is against being over cautious. Take reasonable steps to maintain the safety of the activity for the child, but allow them to experience and participate in the activity as fully as possible. Occasionally, this might mean a few bruises.

The main goal in maintaining safety is prevention. By following a few simple steps you can limit the risk without limiting the child's experience.

- **Proper orientation for the child** - Be specific and describe the surroundings. Using landmarks within the area will be helpful to orient the child as well ie: when you walk into the gym, the wall climber is to your left and the stage is to your right. (See **Appendix D** for an Orientation Checklist).
 - Give a guided tour of the rooms, gym, or any other areas the child will be working within. Making sure the child is comfortable with her surroundings and knows where to expect things (benches at knee-level, balls at floor level, etc.) will also help the child to safely navigate her surroundings. Let the child feel the



markers or landmarks to memorize the locations and orient herself to the room.

- Encourage the child to take a peer or teacher on a tour of the area, to assist in the memorization. Make note of any areas that may need re-orientation or may require reorientation on a regular basis. Keep in mind that the child may require reorientation with each activity change. This is an opportunity to invite peer helpers to assist.
- The child should always have a means of orientation to his/her surroundings. Ensure there is some sort of marker (wall, benches, etc.) that can be used for orientation to environment to lessen the child's chance of becoming disoriented.
- **Identify potential dangers** - Scan the environment for potentially dangerous equipment or areas and design an appropriate safety strategy relating to him. Ensuring balls, ropes and other small equipment are kept neatly in the assigned areas will help to prevent the child from tripping on things he cannot see.
- **Consistency** - Ensure that equipment, supplies, apparatus are located in the same place on a consistent basis. This will empower the child to move more freely in their environment and lessen the need for support.
- **Know the child** – Getting to know the child and understanding his strengths, challenges, vision and the extent to which it may impact his level of physical activity and his current physical skill level and any limitations to activities will assist you in keeping the child within a safe range of activities. It will allow you to plan appropriate activities for present abilities as well as opportunities for skill development in areas needing improvement.
- **Supervision** - Having a clear understanding of the child's vision will assist you in determining when a child requires supervision and how much is needed to provide safety within the activity.
- **Environmental Empowerment**
 - **Lighting** - For the child who is partially sighted or can see some light, it is important to remember that lighting may either assist them in optimizing their vision or can become a barrier to full



participation. In the case of outdoor activities, be aware that bright days may impact on vision and give the child adequate time to adjust to the lighting change.

- **Colour Contrast** – markings on stairs, hallways or monotone amphitheatres may act as guides for the child to orientate himself.
- **Explanation** - An important safety component is to provide clear and descriptive instructions to the child regarding the activity. You may want to give the child an opportunity to explain the activity back to you to ensure a good understanding. Depending on the type of activity, you may also want to include parents in the explanation, not only so they understand the risks, but so they can reinforce the instructions to the child.

When you have gathered all the pertinent information you can build a successful plan for the child. We have provided you with a template for gathering information (see **Appendix E** for the Sight Checklist for Physical Education).



Program Modifications

Children who are blind or partially sighted can participate in a variety of physical activities. Depending on the child, the vision involved and the current physical ability, modifications may be required and can be made. When viewed as a continuum, modifications can be viewed as:

- **Minimal**

These modifications have little impact on the other participants or the integrity of the activity.

Examples include:

- **Colour contrasts** – Work with the child to determine whether colour contrasts can assist him in participating (different coloured balls, pinnies, bases, etc.).
- **Boundary markings** – natural boundaries and different surfaces can be used to mark boundaries and assist the child in orienting herself (concrete/grass/mats, etc.).
- **Lighting conditions** – as previously stated, lighting can assist the child to more fully participate in activities.
- **Sounds** – by adding sound cues like clapping, beepers, calling can be simple modifications that will allow participation. This can also involve limiting extraneous noise during the activity.
- **Guides** – safety ropes, guard rails, foot placement guides or sighted guides can often be used with minimal modifications to the activity.

- **Moderate**

These type of modifications usually only effect the child who is blind or partially sighted.

Examples include:

- **Special active role within the activity** – the child participates in the activity with some slight adjustments (colour of ball, different equipment, rule modification, etc.). A sighted buddy may also be able to assist the process.



- **Special active role with parallel activity** – the child participates in the same setting but may only concentrate on one or two of the skill components (dribbling the basketball, etc.). A peer helper or buddy can also assist the process.
 - **Special passive role** – this approach has limited benefit as the child's participation in the activity is very restricted. In this instance a child may keep score (providing points are called out). This can still be an important social outlet.
- **Considerable**
These modifications affect the integrity of the activity and are usually not recommended.

Changing the activity significantly for the entire class or team is usually of little benefit for the group or for the child who is blind or partially sighted. In many instances, team games (such as volleyball, basketball, softball, etc.) may not be conducive for a child with partial sight or blindness to play. Instead, the child could work on a parallel activity with a partner or participate in an alternate group oriented physical activity like bowling, wrestling, etc.

Modifications can be made in relation to Equipment, Skills, Distance/Space and Rules. These modifications have various effects:

Equipment Modification

Description	Effect
Lighter, softer, larger ball	Slows game and allows more time to prepare for and execute skill
Shorter, lighter, striking implement	Allows greater control for weaker and less skilled player
Larger striking implement, larger goal or target area	Reduces the number of misses and increases opportunity for success



Lighter, softer, smaller balls	More easily caught and retained
Bean bags substituted for balls	Not as hard to hold as balls and may be easier to throw for students with poor hand functions
Partially deflated balls for dribbling and kicking	Slows movement of the ball and allows more time to prepare and execute the skill activities

Skill Level Modification

Description	Effect
Tasks simplified	Increases success and opportunity to be involved in class activity
Props used to enhance skills	Increases level of success and motivation for participation

Distance/Space Modification

Description	Effect
Smaller playing area used	Increases opportunities to application of skill and participation in flow of game
Target lowered or moved closer	Reduces number of misses and increases opportunity for success
Start or finish line moved; for example, next runner in relay starts when child reaches half way point	Increases level of success and opportunity to be involved in game play
Designated position/function assigned to reduce area to be traveled; for example, designated pitcher, goalie or foul shooter	Increases successful participation in the game



Rule Modification

Description	Effect
No direct challenge when ball comes within 2 metres of player	More time to prepare for and execute skill
Differential scoring system allowing points for specific behaviours; for example, passing, touching ball	Recognizes effort, learning and success
Only essential rules used	Reduces game complexity
Complete end line used as goal	Allows more frequent scoring opportunities and use of multiple goalkeepers
Unlimited number of contacts with ball before crossing net or centre line	Increases opportunity to make contact with ball
Unequal numbers in team groupings	Matches teams
Number of trials increased; for example, unlimited number of attempts to strike ball	Increases level of success and opportunity to practice emerging skills



Conclusion

Providing children who are blind or partially sighted with opportunities to become physically active is very doable. It requires some thought, information gathering, teamwork using all resources available and some trial and error. Most importantly, it requires the teacher or coach to understand the importance of the inclusion of children who are blind or partially sighted into physical activity programs and the openness to try.

This manual provides some guidelines and markers to use in building and implementing an inclusive program for children who are blind or partially sighted. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of activities or approaches, but in fact a starting point. The manual includes a list of other resources that may assist you in providing a meaningful and enriching program for the child or youth you are working with.



References

“Active Living Through Physical Education: Maximizing Opportunities for Students Who Are Visually Impaired”, Moving to Inclusion Series, Canadian Council of the Blind, 1993, et all

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“Discover Together, A Disability Awareness Resource”, Human Resources Development Canada & Man in Motions World Tour Society

“Integrating the Visually Impaired Student into Physical Education: A Teacher’s Resource Manual”, Activity Integration Program, Canadian Blind Sports Association, 1988

“Wilderness Inquiry’s Seven Steps of Social Inclusion”, Wilderness Inquiry, Minneapolis, MN



Appendices

Appendix A: Experiential Activities & Resources

Appendix B: Basic Skills Checklist

Appendix C: Activity Modifications

Appendix D: Orientation Checklist

Appendix E: Sight Checklist for Physical Activity