

ADAPTING FLAG FOOTBALL INSTRUCTION: INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION



Football is a very strenuous game. Participation requires physical fitness and skill in the use of the body. However, the skills of football (catching, throwing, kicking) can be learned and enjoyed for the benefit by most people.

The activity can be adapted for students with disabling conditions. Everyone can participate to develop personal skills and encourage those to participate to the best of their ability. Each student can be successful and benefit from inclusion.

In physical education, the skills can begin with a foundation at the middle school level. These skills can then be used to be successful in intramurals and recreational programs. If students choose to join a disability sport program in their community or play with family and friends, they need to have the same instructional opportunities as their classmates without disabilities.

Assessment

Evaluate each student's present level of flag football skill for probability of success. Assess previous experience, fitness level, motor functioning, attitude toward his/her disability, and willingness to participate.

Safety Considerations

1. Do not wear any equipment with sharp or projecting surfaces that may injure classmates. This includes rings, belt buckles, and watches.
2. Use rules that prevent leaving the feet to execute a block.
3. Declare the ball dead on all fumbles.
4. See that the playing area is smooth and free from holes and projecting objects that may prove a hazard.
5. Monitor student officials to make sure rules are enforced and rough play is not tolerated.
6. Be sure adequate treatment is available for players in case of injury during play.
7. Players who wear glasses should wear a headband or eye guard.

Instructional Adaptations

The following ideas are designed to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities into general physical education during instruction in flag football. Successful participation for some students requires equipment and facilities which had been adapted to their particular needs. Requests for purchasing or construction of equipment can be facilitated through the Individualized Education Program (IEP). If special equipment is necessary to help a student progress in physical education, then it should be identified at the Case Conference and included on the IEP form.

General adaptations can include:

1. Reduce the size of the playing area or increase the number of players.
2. The game surface can be changed to a hard flat surface.

Specific adaptations for associated disabling conditions are listed below. The adaptations are provided in categories by disability in order to facilitate easy access to the information. However, each student with a disability is unique and capable and should not be limited within a category.

Cognitive and Sensory Disabilities

Deaf/Hearing Impairment

1. These students can play any position with minimal modification of teaching concepts.
2. Develop visual system for starting and stopping play (cue cards, waving a towel, hand signals).
3. Have student watch the ball to know when to move.
4. Always speak facing the student when the play is called or during instruction.
5. Have student wear protective ear protection in cold weather.

Mental Retardation

1. Present instruction slowly and clearly when teaching.
2. Repeat plays and instructions.
3. Concentrate on teaching game concepts (off sides, line of scrimmage, offense, defense, first downs).
4. Make sure to use some means of designating team players in demonstrations. Uses X's and O's or colored coins to show offense and defense.
5. Stationary drills and leadup activities might be helpful (stationary passing and relays the length of the field).
6. Reduce the size of the playing area and the number of players per team.

Visual Impairment

1. Have the student play a line position such as the guard, center, or tackle.
2. A student with partial sight can play back or end positions.

3. Consider a “double pass” system in which students who are visually impaired are required to pass the ball to a sighted teammate before the defensive rush could occur. The sighted player would be considered the second quarterback, who must continue play.

Affective Disabilities

Emotional Disturbance

1. Place students in situations where they will experience success and the least amount of stress.
2. Notice if student is having a good or bad day when interacting with other students.
3. When doing individual practice put the student with a classmate he/she will be most comfortable with.

Psychomotor Disabilities

Orthopedic Impairment

1. For a student who uses a wheelchair, the game needs to be played on the gymnasium floor or a parking lot.
2. Consider using foam or rubber footballs.
3. For students with functional upper body skills, no modifications would be needed for throwing and catching.
4. A forward pass will be complete if the football strikes any part of the wheelchair above the waist area (chair arms or seat back).
5. Students using crutches, canes, and/or walkers could be positioned as defensive linemen and taught to raise their assistive devices to block forward passes. Quarterbacks would not be allowed to move when throwing against this defense.

One/Two Arm Involvement

1. Student can be a kicker, punter, place holder, or play center.

Other Health impairment

Asthma

1. Have the student play a position where there is limited running involved, such as on the line.
2. Notice if the student needs a rest break from activity and make sure he/she is ready to go back into the game.
3. Have the student’s inhaler nearby and ready to be used.

There are some limitations to playing flag football. If teaching a unit in flag football, make sure that it is appropriate for your class of students. However, reading professional journals and educating yourself on disabilities and adaptations is the best way to ensure success for your students. This will help you be able to teach students with different skill levels and abilities.

Resources

Dunn, J. M., & Leitschuh, C. A. (2006). *Special physical education* (8th ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Schmottlach, N., & McManama, J. L. (2006). *The physical education activities handbook* (11th ed.). San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings.

Ohtake, Y. (2004). Meaningful inclusion of all students in team sports. *Teaching exceptional children*, 37(2), 22-27.

This information was developed by Danny Ciccarello,
Adapted Physical Education student at Manchester College, Spring 2008.
The adaptations and teaching strategies contained in this document are only suggestions. Each student must be considered individually, and in many cases, a physician's written consent must be obtained.