

ADAPTING SOFTBALL INSTRUCTION: INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION



Softball is a popular recreational activity enjoyed by many people. This is a reason for promoting it among students with disabilities. After receiving instruction, practice, and acquiring the skills of fielding and hitting a softball, they can take part in one more physical activity with family and friends.

The activity can be adapted for individuals with various skill levels. With instructional emphasis on personal skill development and a classroom environment that encourages

everyBODY to participate to the best of their ability, each student can benefit and inclusion can succeed.

It is in physical education at the junior high/middle school level that the foundation of sport skills are established and then applied during intramural and community recreation programs. Whether students with disabilities go on to join a disability sports program in the community or recreate with family and friends, they need the same instruction opportunities as their classmates without disabilities.

Assessment

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

Safety Considerations

1. Present activities according to the student's physical characteristics and capabilities, as well as his/her mental age.
2. Deafness and hearing impairment: In cases where hearing loss is present, it is advisable that the student has a peer tutor with them at all times.
3. Orthopedic impairment: Make sure the playing field is free from all obstacles. Inform the student on the proper methods of falling.
4. Asthma: Activity should occur in areas that have a minimum of dust and allergic substances.
5. Know the difference between insulin shock and diabetic coma and how to administer first aid. Coordinate activity with food intake and insulin injections.
6. Visual impairment: Use bright colored equipment when students are partially sighted. Be sure to establish audio signals for beginning of the softball game.

Instructional Adaptations

The following ideas are designed to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities into general physical education during instruction in softball. Successful participation for some students requires equipment which has been adapted to their particular needs. Requests for purchases 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. Use velcro balls and mitts.
2. Use larger or smaller bats.
3. Use a batting tee.
4. Reduce the distance between bases.
5. Use Incrediballs and other softer balls.
6. Shorten the pitching distance.
7. Provide a peer to assist.

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. Establish basic hand communications.
2. Have a general outline of what will be covered in class written out in advance.
3. Speak at a normal amplitude, even speed, and always facing the student.
4. Have student wear protective ear gear during windy or cold weather.
5. Pair with a buddy to help guide the student while out on the field during defense.

Mental Retardation

1. Present instruction slowly and clearly.
2. Use demonstrations and emphasize imitation.
3. Give brief directions and repeat them slowly.
4. Use a tee for batting to help with hitting the ball.
5. Have a peer to help direct the student to where to run when base running.
6. Have a buddy assist the student while out on the field.

Visual Impairment

1. For those students with partial sight, consider batting from a tee. Also, after hitting, the baseman can make a sound to guide the runner toward the base.
2. Teammates of a runner who is visually impaired may hold a rope between bases to guide that player to the next base.
3. If there is only one student with visual limitations, the player should bat for both teams to equalize player.
4. A verbal cue such as “swing” or “ball” can also be used to help with batting.
5. Playing a game known as “beep baseball” can be played which is designed especially for those who have visual impairments.
6. Using an audible ball that emits a continuous sound can be used for successfully fielding the ball during defense.

Psychomotor Disabilities

Orthopedic Impairment

One Arm Involvement

1. Those with one arm can either use a tee to hit off of or if they are able to they can have the ball pitched to them depending on level of coordination.
2. If the student has a prosthesis, the glove may be strapped to the arm to help with catching.
3. Those who do not have a prosthesis can put the glove on the one hand to catch the ball and then remove the glove to throw the ball.

Two Arm Involvement

1. If the student is comfortable, he/she can have another student assist in batting or throwing the ball.
2. As for defense, if the student has a prosthesis, a glove can be strapped to the arm to have them field the ball.

One Leg Involvement

1. The student can prop self with the crutches to hit the ball off the tee or have the pitcher pitch to them depending on coordination level. After the ball has been hit a designated runner can run.
2. For playing on the field the student can play the position that he/she feels the most comfortable at or where there is limited coverage.

Two Leg Involvement

1. The student can either hit from a tee or have the pitcher pitch to them depending on coordination level.
2. If the student is able to wheel the chair, then he/she may go around the base or have a student assist.

3. If the student is unable to go around the bases then they may have a substitute run for them.
4. As for defense, the student can play anywhere that he/she feels comfortable where they won't get hurt or another player won't get injured by the wheelchair.

Other Health Impairment

Asthma

1. The game of softball should be played where there isn't a lot of dust and avoid grass areas that have been recently mowed. It is better to play inside if possible to avoid a reaction.
2. Avoid or reduce exposure to cold.

Cardiovascular Condition

1. Have the student bat and then have another student run around the bases.
2. Do not rush the student during the activity.
3. Have a buddy retrieve any ball that goes a great distance past them.

Diabetes

1. Make sure student is not running too much and avoid putting them in the outfield where he/she will have to do a lot of running.

Barriers for participation in softball and other sports by individuals with disabilities are decreasing. More than ever, physical education teachers must endeavor to read professional journals, attend conferences and workshops, and join professional organizations to avail themselves of information on how to teach specific sports to their students of varying skill levels. Being an informed professional is half the battle in allowing students with disabilities to gain access to lifetime sports like softball.

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.

This information was developed by Cortney Jones,
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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.