



Down Syndrome
Australia

Inclusion and sporting clubs

This resource has been developed to help sporting clubs and coaches understand and support inclusion for people with Down syndrome in sporting activities. The majority of people with Down syndrome participate in some type of organised sport. Many sporting clubs want to be inclusive but aren't sure how to take the next steps. Here are some important, yet simple, tips you can use to reduce the barriers and help people with Down syndrome and their families to be involved and included in your club.

“Be positive. Be patient. Be supportive. Embrace difference. Create a culture of inclusion and support. This works for everyone, not just the person with Down syndrome. Be quick with praise and give it often.”

Parent of a child with Down syndrome

Things you should know about Down syndrome

Down syndrome is the most common genetic disability. Approximately 13,000 people in Australia have Down syndrome. It is a disability that impacts intellectual development, some physical characteristics and aspects of a person's physical health. Because no two people are alike, this will vary from one person to another.



Principles of inclusion

Every person, regardless of disability or other difference, has a right to choose and participate in community sporting activities. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* makes it unlawful to exclude someone based on having a disability.

Being inclusive is about providing a range of opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to participate, learn, contribute and belong by supporting them to take part in the most appropriate manner possible for each individual. Inclusion can mean different things in different settings but the goal is to ensure fair participation for people with and without a disability.

It's important to see each person as an individual. Get to know the person and work with them and their family to understand their abilities and develop strategies to support the person in the activity.

Communication

Communication is key. Clear, open, positive, respectful communication with the person with Down syndrome is a really important part of supporting participation. A more detailed guide to communication and Down syndrome can be found at www.communityinclusion.com.au

Some helpful suggestions are:

- Talk directly to the person with Down syndrome. Build rapport and trust with them. Listen to them as they explain their needs.
- Some people may not use speech to communicate, or may use little speech.
- Keep directions simple, brief and to the point. Use descriptive verbal cues such as “jump like a frog”.
- Consider using visual cues to help people understand the activity; this could be gestures and demonstrating how to do the activity while you explain it to them.
- Ask questions one at a time and encourage the person to ask questions back. Check back with the person if they have understood what has been said by using open-ended questions. Otherwise the person may just indicate they’ve understood because they feel unsure or embarrassed and don’t want to be negative.
- Work with the person’s family and friends if the person with Down syndrome wants them involved. Families are often proactive, supportive and willing to share information and strategies to help the person.
- Talk about disability and inclusion across the club. Normalising disability and discussing disability with all levels of the club, from committees to players, can help reduce stigma and discrimination. This could include articles in the club newsletter, ebulletin or social media. However, it is important to gain permission from the person with Down syndrome if you wish to mention them or their disability specifically.

Making adaptations to the activities

The information below has been developed by the Australian Sports Commission (www.ausport.gov.au) to provide assistance to the Australian public and sporting community.

The **TREE** model is a practical tool designed to help coaches modify activities or programs¹. There are four essential elements of an activity that can be modified to make it more inclusive.

¹ The Tree Model - play-by-the-rules.s3.amazonaws.com/Resources/RI30_Adapting_Modifying_1.pdf

Teaching style

Rules

Equipment

Environments

Teaching style

Teaching style refers to the way the sport or activity is communicated to the participants. The way an activity is delivered can have a significant impact on how inclusive it is. Adjustments or modifications can also be phased out over time as confidence increases.

Strategies you may use include:

- Be aware of all the participants in your group.
- Ensure participants are correctly positioned (for example, within visual range).
- Use appropriate language for the group.
- Use visual aids and demonstrations.
- Use appropriate physical assistance — guide a participant’s body parts through a movement, with their permission.
- Keep instructions short and to the point.
- Check for understanding.

Rules

Rules may be simplified or changed and then reintroduced as skill levels increase. Strategies you may use include:

- Allow for more bounces in a game such as tennis or table tennis.
- Allow for multiple hits in a sport such as volleyball.
- Have a greater number of players on a team to reduce the amount of activity required by each player.
- Reduce the number of players to allow greater freedom of movement.
- Regularly substitute players.
- Allow substitute runners in sports such as softball and cricket or shortening the distance the hitter needs to run to be safe.
- Reduce or extend the time to perform actions.
- Allow different point scoring systems.
- Vary passing styles: try bouncing, rolling or underarm toss, instead of overarm throw.
- Reduce competitive elements initially, but don’t assume that the person with Down syndrome won’t be able to compete.

Equipment

Strategies you may use include:

- Use lighter bats or racquets and/or shorter handles.
- Use lighter, bigger and/or slower bouncing balls, or balls with bells inside.
- Use equipment that contrasts with the playing area — white markers on grass, fluorescent balls.

Environments

Strategies you may use include:

- Reduce the size of the court or playing area.
- Use a smooth or indoor surface rather than grass.
- Lower net heights in sports such as volleyball or tennis.
- Use zones within the playing area.
- Minimise distractions in the surrounding area.

Most importantly, ask the person with Down syndrome if there is anything you can do that would make them feel more included or make it easier for them to participate!

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Supporting participation

- Engage individuals in modifying the activities when appropriate, as they will be your best source of solutions.
- It may not be necessary to modify the game's rules or equipment for everybody just to include one person, it may only require a change for that one person. However, if the rules are modified for one participant only ensure the team and associated members understand the motive behind this decision (i.e. to enable active participation).
- There are situations where including everybody all the time may not be possible. Safety considerations are always a priority for each individual and the entire group. Use your common sense.
- Always maintain the integrity of the game — do not modify a game so much that it no longer resembles the game you were playing at the outset.
- Be flexible.
- Following a similar routine at training or at games may help. The family may be able to assist preparing the person with Down syndrome before training with explaining what will happen. It might be also worthwhile putting together a draft timetable for training with visual images included to support understanding.

- Use repetition to assist the learning process.
- Volunteers can help, particularly with younger age brackets. A roster for volunteer family or friends for each training session or game can help everyone! This shouldn't be seen as a support person for the person with Down syndrome, but rather an extra set of hands to help everyone!
- Buddy systems. Buddying people up can be a great way to learn, build friendships and have someone to turn to help. It is important however, that this is not just to provide a support for the person with Down syndrome. It is also an opportunity for the person with Down syndrome to be a buddy to others as well.
- Remind everyone who is participating to drink water regularly.
- Think about other roles that support participation. There are many aspects and activities involved in being a part of a sporting club that a person with Down syndrome may be interested in volunteering for. Therefore, even if full participation in the sporting game is not possible, a role within the club could be another way to support participation, e.g. setting up for games, running the water or assisting at training.

Where to go for more information

Down syndrome association contact details

There is a Down syndrome association in each state and territory. You can contact these associations for support and advice. We are here to help you. Our associations are made up of a wide range of parents, professionals and people with Down syndrome who work or volunteer with us. Please visit our website at www.downsyndrome.org.au or call 1300 881 935 to be automatically connected to your closest association.

Helpful Resources

www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/disability-rights-sport-and-recreation-page

Australian Sports Commission - www.ausport.com.au

Play by the rules - www.playbytherules.net.au

This fact sheet has been developed in consultation with people with Down syndrome and their families and information has been utilised from play-by-the-rules.s3.amazonaws.com/Resources/R131_Adapting_Modifying_2.pdf