

Able with Athletics - Come and Try Days

Inclusive Coaching Guide

This guide has been developed to provide coaches with practical, inclusive strategies for engaging children and young people with a disability in athletics. Drawing on resources and best practices from Special Olympics Australia, Sport Inclusion Australia, and Disability Sports Australia, the tips, adaptations, and guidance here have been compiled to make each activity fun, safe and accessible. Coaches will find specific recommendations for modifying the fundamental run, jump and throw activities with particular focus on engaging participants with autism, ADHD, and other disabilities.

Introduction

Inclusive coaching is all about welcoming and embracing participants of all abilities and recognizing that each child may have a different experience with each activity, especially kids with intellectual disabilities and autism who are predominantly engaged in solitary play over social activities. The purpose of the Able with Athletics Come and Try day is to create a non-judgement environment where every child feels safe to express, participate and try out a range of participation options that athletics has to offer at their own pace.

General Tips on Inclusive and Adaptable Coaching

- Provide clear, simple, step-by-step instructions, paired with visual cues where possible. Repeat instructions calmly and patiently.
- Demonstrate activities where possible to show each activity first before asking participants to try.
- Allow participants to engage and complete at their own pace by breaking down activities into smaller, manageable steps.
- Offer alternate ways to participate in each activity, encouraging flexibility and allowing participants to choose what feels comfortable.

Activity Specific Modifications

Next Athletics Warm Up Session

1. *Flip It*

Adaptations: Provide larger, lighter, or more tactile items (e.g., soft bean bags, foam blocks) to flip, ensuring ease of use for children with limited dexterity.

Inclusion Tips: If children prefer, they can flip items in pairs, one child directing and the other flipping, which builds teamwork and comfort.

2. *Tag Games (Frozen Tag)*

Adaptations: Provide participants with an option to play tag by touching hands or using a baton instead of direct tagging where possible.

Inclusion Tips: For children with mobility issues, designate safe zones where they can remain frozen while still participating. Use non-verbal signals or gestures for children who prefer minimal verbal instruction.

3. *Making Groups*

Modifications: Use visual or color-coded markers to signify different groups, allowing children with visual or cognitive needs to identify their group easily.

Inclusion Tips: Set up clear boundaries and a designated “group helper” or engage parents where needed to assist children who might feel unsure or overwhelmed.

Activity 1: Little Athletics – Throwing

1. *Throw, Throw, Throw (Modified)*

Modifications: Provide a range of throwing implements (e.g., foam balls, soft bean bags, rubber discs) that can be adjusted for each child’s ability.

Inclusion Tips: Position participants at different distances from the target, allowing them to choose where they feel most comfortable. Reinforce that the goal is participation, not distance.

2. *Shot Put*

Modifications- Use lightweight, soft balls instead of traditional shot puts to accommodate different strength levels.

Inclusion Tips- Allow seated throwing for participants using wheelchairs. Use consistent cues like “Ready, Set, Go!” and encourage each participant regardless of the distance they throw.

3. *Javelin*

Adaptations: Use foam javelins or pool noodles to ensure safety and make the activity accessible for participants with limited grip strength.

Inclusion Tips: Create an accessible throwing lane and allow participants to throw at their own pace. Use visual markers to show throwing direction and reinforce the idea that each throw is a personal achievement.

Activity 2: Little Athletics – Jumping

1. *Frogs & Lily Pads*

Modifications: Set up “lily pads” in closer proximity for participants with mobility challenges. Use textured or colorful mats as lily pads for visual guidance.

Inclusion Tips: Allow participants to hop, walk, or roll (for wheelchair users) to the lily pads, adapting the activity to their abilities. For children with autism, provide visual aids to show the sequence of jumps, which helps reduce anxiety.

2. *Long Jump*

Modifications- Shorten the jump distance or provide a soft-landing area for children who may have physical limitations.

Inclusion Tips- Encourage everyone to try the jump in their own way; hopping, jumping with both feet, or stepping are all options. Praise each child for participation, focusing on their effort rather than distance jumped.

Activity 3: Little Athletics – Running

1. *Rob the Nest*

Adaptations: Shorten the running distance and allow participants to walk, skip, or roll to the nest. Provide a “helper” or allow parents to engage if needed.

Inclusion Tips: Use simple visuals or color-coding to show participants where they should run. Emphasize that the activity is about fun and encourage cooperative play by pairing children who may have different abilities.

2. *Sprints*

Adaptations: For wheelchair racers and frame runners, create a parallel sprint lane. Use a clear start and finish line, and avoid sudden loud noises (e.g., starting pistol) which may be distressing for some participants.

Inclusion Tips: For children with ADHD, provide a visual end goal and offer a staggered start to allow everyone to run at their own pace. Celebrate all participants as they cross the finish line.

Accessibility and Sensory Considerations

- Sensory space

A designated sensory space will be set up with noise-reduction headphones, fidget toys, and a comfortable space where participants can step away from the action, relax and decompress if needed.

- Possible visual Aids

Where possible, use visual schedules or picture cards for activities to support general instructions. This is especially helpful for participants with autism or cognitive difficulties.

- Auditory and visual cues

Use hand signals, countdowns, or touch-based cues in addition to verbal instructions. Provide noise-canceling options for children sensitive to loud sounds.

- Flexible rules and adjustments

Allow modifications in rules, distances, and equipment for each activity. Feel free to make on-the-spot adjustments based on the needs of every child.

Focus on fun, engagement & positive reinforcement!

Encourage each child to enjoy the activities and celebrate all efforts, whether big or small.

Encourage personal bests and remind participants that every attempt is a success. Respect individuality and avoid comparing performance among children.

Patience and empathy will go a long way - take time to listen to each participant's preferences and challenges. Adapt as needed to ensure everyone feels included.

Positive reinforcement is key. Allow yourself to regularly praise children for their participation and effort. Reinforce their presence and willingness to try out different activities!



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Additional Resources

1. [SOA – Quick Reference Coaching Guide](#)
2. [PA – Coaching Athletes with an intellectual impairment](#)
3. [PA – Coaching Athletes with cerebral palsy](#)
4. [PA – Coaching Athletes with a vision impairment](#)
5. [Little Athletics Australia – Communication Essentials](#)
6. [SOA – Athletics Communication Cards](#)
7. [ASAPD - Adapt and Modify Worksheet](#)