



Parent Handout: The importance of sport and physical activity for all kids

There are many myths surrounding children with disabilities participating in sport and physical activity. These myths can mean kids can miss out on the important opportunities and benefits of playing sport and being active. Here are some common myths and facts about sport and physical activity for kids with disabilities.

Myth: Kids play sport in order to win and my child cannot compete equally.

Fact: While many children enjoy success in sport, for most children, the benefits and reasons for playing are much wider. Most children are not going to become world-class sportspeople but their interest in sport or activities links them to other people in the community and can help them develop important life skills. Children who engage in regular exercise are healthier, less likely to become obese, sleep better and can even concentrate better on school work. They can spend time with others and have an opportunity to develop friendships with peers who have similar interests. The routine of sports training and recreational lessons and the presence of a supervising adult can give a supportive framework for children who find it difficult to socialise. Sport and recreation activities can help children to learn to set their own goals and develop a different side of their identity. Achieving these small personal goals can be as important as winning in helping self-esteem.

Myth: My child's disability means they will not be fit enough to participate.

Fact: There are some sports that may be difficult for children with some physical conditions. However, for most activities, there is a level of participation that is possible. With help from the child and their carers, a treating doctor can examine a child's cardiovascular fitness, motor strength and co-ordination, and devise a plan that outlines what is safe. For some children, the plan will need to be worked out to suit their condition, e.g. for children in wheelchairs or for those children with neck instability. Difficulties in co-ordination might mean some children work harder to achieve a result and need shorter times of practise. Medication and plans will need to be available for children with asthma or severe allergies. Practise at home improves skills and has physical benefits. The ultimate aim is to promote safe physical activity to maintain a child's fitness and strength, which could otherwise deteriorate over time. The AllPlay Footy website contains an AllPlay Medical Summary that doctors can complete to help kids participate to their full ability.



Myth: My child does not understand how to join in sports or activities.

Fact: Most children go through a steep “learning curve” when they start a new activity and continue to learn skills as they progress. For some children, this learning will take place more slowly, and may require more specific help. It is important to find the right way for coaches, other parents and children to communicate with a child. For some children, this means using shorter instructions, giving visual prompts such as signs and pictures, or repeating instructions. Simpler communication is also likely to help other children in the team or group, so parents should not feel awkward about asking. Some parents practise the language and routines of the sport or activity at home, so their child is better prepared to listen to a coach’s instructions or understand the sporting terms. A buddy or coach can help children to make decisions during an activity where they may find this difficult. The AllPlay Footy website contains evidenced based strategies to help kids participate.

Myth: My child is more of an indoor than outdoor person.

Fact: Mobility issues, ill-health and difficulties with social understanding sometimes ‘trap’ children in their homes. They can forget how it feels to be outdoors and to be engaging with others. Creating a specific plan will help to overcome this hurdle. Participation may need to start slowly to help a child overcome their anxiety about moving out of comfortable routines. Choice of an activity is also important: some children find it much more rewarding to challenge themselves than be part of a group. Recreation activities that are individually based, such as running, dancing or swimming, may suit these children.

Myth: My child will be teased or bullied.

Fact: A positive attitude from the coach or teacher, good policies about bullying and the support of other parents and children can come a long way to prevent this from occurring. Young children often get pleasure out of seeing their peers do their best, and can be very encouraging of differently-abled peers.

Myth: Sport and physical activity is not for everyone

Fact: Everyone can play! Girls can, should and do play. Sport can provide many important benefits for girls such as improving physical health and functioning, opportunities for teamwork and leadership experience, enhancing social networks, and increasing independence and self-confidence. Children from different cultures may enjoy the opportunity to participate in a group activity that does not depend on being able to speak English well. Sport helps bridge the gap for us all.

There are many benefits of sport and exercise for children with disability All children have the right to this opportunity.



For further information visit allplayfooty.org.au to find inclusive footy resources for clubs, coaches, parents, kids and health professionals.