

## Suggestions from Teachers in the Field

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THE SUGGESTIONS BELOW WERE PROVIDED BY THE MANY TEACHERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE YOUNG ATHLETES EVALUATION STUDY. THESE ARE SOME OF THEIR IDEAS THAT MADE THE YOUNG ATHLETES CURRICULUM WORK MORE SMOOTHLY IN THEIR CLASS AND MORE ENJOYABLE FOR ALL CHILDREN.

### ORGANIZING YOUNG ATHLETES

#### Think about the Space

- Not Too Big; Not Too Small. Too much space may result in children not being able to attend to a task. Too little space may result in conflict between children who are positioned too close to one another. So, before beginning, take the time to look at each activity and make sure the space matches the needs of the activity and the number of children in the group.
  
- Indoor versus Outdoor: YA is suited well for both indoor and outdoor space. However, if using YA outdoors, ensure that the area is not too large or too small for the activity or group size, to avoid issues described above. Also, for safety reasons, the outdoor space should be fenced or have defined borders.
  
- One Space, Two Spaces: Many teachers ran YA by breaking their class into two groups and using their classroom and hallways to run two smaller groups at a time. This sometimes required them to move furniture or thread the activities around classroom furniture.

#### Think about the Structure and Child/Adult Ratio

- Run YA with the whole group for all activities with adults interspersed among children to provide support and guidance as one adult leads the group.
  
- Lead the beginning and ending songs as whole group then, divide class into groups with each group having an adult who assists children through the activities that you lead.
  - Use a bell, drum, whistle or some signal to switch groups. Select the signal carefully, as some children with disabilities are sensitive to loud or unusual sounds.
  - If you divide the large group into smaller groups, think about the motor functioning level of the children in the group. If children are grouped with multiple levels of functioning, this allows some children to serve as models for other and allows for children to have a partner who assists them. If children of the same functioning level are grouped together, this enables the

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- teacher to go at a pace that is a match for all (either slower pace or faster pace). However, if all children have lower motor functioned levels, multiple adults or peer assistants may be needed to provide individual guidance.
- If you divide the large group into smaller groups, it is more likely that you will be able to teach or guide motor skill to individual children who need more time spent learning a skill.
- Some teachers set up multiple activities (2-3) at once with adults stationed at each activity. In this structure, children went to each station and did a different activity, until they had completed all of the different activities. Children seem to adapt to this structure easily, if they were in a class that had centers and they were used to the movement from one center to the other.
  - When transitioning from one activity to another, children can use other modes of movement to strengthen their muscles, learn a new motor skill or position, and learn to partner with a friend, or have fun. Suggestions include: using a partner to do wheelbarrow, crab walking, walking on tip toes like a mouse, bunny-hops.
  - When using peer models to assist, this is an ideal way for children who are lower functioning or younger to benefit from YA by seeing other students model the activity. Moreover, it is an ideal activity for children with and without disabilities to do together, fostering friendships, social, motor and communication skills.
  - When using family members and neighbors to assist, it enables them to see the full program and increases the likelihood that others will be able to use YA at home or in their community. So, invite parents, siblings, neighbors to assist or lead YA.
  - When using multiple assistants or multiple leaders to assist, they all should
    - read the lesson ahead of time
    - know how to use equipment
    - know level of each child
    - know the mode of communication used with each child
  - Creative Use of Wait Time. It is important to think about the amount of “wait time” children will have (e.g. children waiting their turn for an activity) that occurs during YA when providing individual attention to a child or a group of children. Many indicated that YA activities need to be structured to minimize wait time but also stated that having a small amount of wait time was useful in teaching children turn taking. Some suggestions for creative use of wait time were:

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- Extra Equipment. Having extra scarves, balls, bean bags, hurdles available for children who are waiting to roll the ball to each other, play the scarf game, toss bean bags, and jump hurdles. This is best managed with an adult to supervise the group the following: Roll Balls, Bean Bag Toss through Hoop, Hurdle Jumps.
- Cheering Squad. A popular strategy during wait time was to teach children how to cheer for their classmates. Children enjoyed this and learned many new word and phrases to motivate their peers (e.g. Way to Go! Go Sammy Go! All the Way!) Cheering squads could also be provided with child-friendly pompoms or musical instruments (tambourines, drums, etc.). Much to parent's delight, their children learned many new phrases for cheering each other on.
- Related Services. Some teachers found that YA activities were an ideal for incorporating motor goals. They invited the occupational therapist or physical therapist or personal aides to assist during YA and, depending on the child's motor goal, some of the activities were found to be useful in addressing individual gross and fine motor goals.

## Think About Additional Materials

- Team T shirts. Some teachers used oversized shirts (in two colors) that enabled children to learn the concept of "colors", "team" and enabled them to learn adaptive skills (e.g., dressing, undressing) as they put shirts on and off, over their clothing. One teacher incorporated making team shirts by having their children make their shirts; painting white shirts with the color of the week (e.g., yellow) and the next week repeating the task with a new color (e.g., green). They loved making team shirts!
- Olympic Flame Leaders Use different colored construction paper and paper towel roll, tape to create an Olympic Flame for your class or group. This could be used to start the YA activity, while a leader carries the flame and other participants follow them to the area where YA will take place. The Olympic Flame could also be used at celebration ceremonies as well.
- Cheering Squad. Some teachers created cheering squads from the children waiting their turn. They added materials such as musical instruments (tambourines, bells) or pompoms and used these with cheers for their peers.
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). If a participant is using an alternative communication system (e.g. PECS), the equipment can be incorporated into their communication board and/or stations where the activities are set up.

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### YOUNG ATHLETE ACTIVITIES

#### Songs Signal Transition

Many young children and children with developmental delays need a signal to let them know that the activity will soon be over.

- o Beginning Song. Explain that the beginning song is a time to get their body warmed up and ready for YA. Some ideas from teachers were
  - “Let’s get our engines going!”
  - “Who is ready for YA? OK! Muscles Up”
  - After repeating these a few times, allow children to take on leadership role, to select motor movements (swim, basketball moves, etc.) that are relevant to their culture or community, important and fun for them.
  
- o Closing Song. Explain that it is now time to cool down, stretch, and slow down. During the closing song, some teachers found it helpful to summarize or review the activity or skills learned in that day during in the closing song. Others allowed children to suggest activities. Still others reviewed concepts (over, under, blue team, red team, etc.) in the words and actions they used during the closing song. Some ideas used by teachers were:
  - Stretch and water break
  - Lay down and be a “Do Nothing Doll”
  - Lead “Yoga Moves”
  - Lead “Deep Breathing” stretches
  - Lead with a soft voice and add additional music for cool down

#### Bridges/Tunnels

This is an excellent activity for building upper body strength, gradually increasing the duration in which a child can maintain their bridge or tunnel position. A bridge or tunnel can be done by

- o Individual children, counting to see how long they can hold the position.
- o Pairs of children (on floor, standing) who take turns be the bridge or tunnel, while the partner goes under.
- o Whole class (On wall, on floor) making one long bridge or tunnel. When this is done, it may require temporary closing of the bridge/tunnel, to allow children to go down, take a break and then open the bridge up again for others to crawl through.

Push Ups were used by some teachers to prepare their children for doing bridges and tunnels. They did these pushups on the wall or on the floor from a kneeling position; which was an excellent way to teach children to kneel.

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For children who do not have sufficient strength to hold up a bridge/tunnel or to have difficulty crawling under others, use a car or ball to go under them instead of a child. It adds more fun to this activity and takes less time to roll a toy under, which makes it easier. For children who are not mobile (e.g. seated in a wheelchair), they can participate by making the bridge on wall and have children walk through or send a rolling toy (ball, car) through the bridge.

### Beam

Teachers had many great ideas to help children understand the concept of walking on a beam and ways to adapt the beam activities so that all children were successful.

- Beam Themes: *Alligators in the Pond*. Some teachers pretended that the beam was a tiny little bridge that children needed to walk across without stepping off because, below or around the beam was a pond full of alligators. Themes could be developed according to culture or setting.
- Tape the beam-1 foot increments taped to the floor. Because the YA beam is very light and soft, some teachers found it helpful to tape it to the floor so it would be more stationary (not move) when children stepped on it.
- In order to get ready for the beam, teachers had children Walk *Next to Beam*, *Straddle Beam*, *Step On Beam*
- The beam can be used for children to learn to line up and, learn to balance (with hands on hips or hands out to side).
- The beam is used to walk forward (Feet close together but not touching), backward and side stepping (using a stationary object to focus (e.g., clock on wall)).
- The beam is also used for stepping on/off, jumping off, jumping over.
- Sometimes children need to be reminded that the beams are for designed to be used while walking, not running.
- If using the beam activity outside, a line drawn with chalk or tape could be used for the beam. Using different color chalk, duck tape, masking tape work well for this activity. If you use several beams (with chalk or tape), putting in angles will add challenge to this activity. Each time the angle in the beam changes use a different color to signal to the change in direction.

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### Floor Markers

The floor markers (poly-dots and stars) are great tools for indicating position of children with YA activities and other activities as well.

- Place floor markers in circle during the beginning and ending song or in a group lead activity to show children where to stand. Remember to space markers out so children are not touching each other when their hands are outstretched.
- Tip Toe: Stepping on floor markers when on tippy toes encourages balance. Remember, the floor markers need to be close together for young children as their stride is very small.
- Use floor markers for different kinds of movements: walking forward, walking backwards, jumping with two feet, hopping on one foot, side stepping.
- Use floor markers for foot placement for throwing a ball as it facilitates trunk rotation.
- Use floor markers on either side of the hurdles, to help children see how far to stand from the hurdle before jumping over it.

### Throwing Balls

- Teach *overhand* throw versus *underhand* throw with a demonstration, hand over hand assistance, stressing the difference in the two terms.
- When first teaching underhand throw, place a hoop in cone, positioned on the floor to encourage children to use an *underhand* throw to get the ball into the hoop
- When first teaching overhand throw, place the same hoop and cone, on a raised surface (table or shelf) to encourage children to use an *overhand* throw to get the ball into the hoop.
- Changing the target (hoop and cone) height enables children to better visualize the difference between the two throws.
- Trunk Rotation: Use the floor markers to enable children to position feet correctly for trunk rotation.
- A variety of objects could be used as targets including boxes, laundry baskets, buckets, etc.

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- Symbols from seasonal or various cultural holidays (pumpkins, hearts, and snowman) could be placed on the wall and used as targets for throwing practice. Numbers could be added to these to earn points.
- For short distances children could throw bean bags onto star or floor markers.

## Big Ball

A word about ball inflation

- A slightly deflated
  - Is easier to catch (more graspable)
  - Travels less when kicked
  - Graduated from catching many graspable things (bean bags, pillows, underinflated balls, balls)
- A fully Inflated ball
  - Is more Challenging to Catch
  - Travels further when kicked
  - Balls of different sizes (graduated from large to small)

A word about ball texture

- Some children may have sensory issues with balls that have different textures. It is important to know this prior to doing YA to ensure that all equipment is tolerated by all children. The Occupational Therapist would be an excellent resource in either determining if this is an issue for a child; something that could be addressed as part of YA activity or; providing suggestions for alternative balls.
- For some children, balls with texture are easier to catch/grasp than balls that are slick in texture.

## Jumping

- Vary the height and distance for jumping to increase the challenge.
- Children can jump while standing on the ground, standing on the beam, on one block, two blocks, etc.
- If using the blocks for jumping, Velcro can be placed on blocks to prevent the blocks from sliding. Or, use the blocks on a non-skid surface.

## Hurdles

- Use graduated heights to increase challenge

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- Use hurdles to teach concepts: *Over, Under*. Children can step over and crawl under or they could toss a ball over and roll a ball under.
- The blocks (used with hurdles) can be used for children to step on and jump off. However, before trying this with children it is important that you try it out, to ensure that the surface you are on is not slippery when jumping off of the blocks. The blocks can slide when a child is jumping off of them unless they are used on a non-skids surface (e.g., sand, carpet) or unless Velcro is used to secure them in place.

### Striking

- Create a larger striking surface on the stick by taping on a paper towel roll.
- Hit ball that have been positioned on a cone using the paddle. If the cone on the floor is not high enough, place the cone on the blocks or on a small stool.
- For younger children or those who have greater difficulty striking, use a balloon tied to a string for striking as it will allow for more success.
- Assign points for hitting the ball certain distances.
- Give everyone at least three chances, like in softball
- Hit the ball to the wall - call it "Wall Ball"
- Provide hand over hand assistance and demonstration for those who need it.

### Kicking and Trapping

- Have children divided up in two groups: the kickers and the goalies. Use the floor marker or tape on the floor to show the kickers and goalies where to stand.
- Practice with goalies, a ready position: squat position with arms extended, ready to catch the ball.
- Use the cones to show where the goal is located.

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- Line children up as goalies and kickers, allowing each pair to try to kick/trap the ball. Make sure everyone has a chance at least twice, and then switch roles.
- For older children, if teams are being stressed, assign points and create cheering squads for each team.

## Rolling the Ball

- There are 3 ways to roll the ball: while seated on bottom, while kneeling, while standing. Use all three to ensure that children understand the difference between sit, kneel, and stand. Using a “Simon Says” game with the three positions is a great way to teach these positional words.
- When *sitting*, make a “V” with your legs, facing another child, who is doing the same. Children should be facing each other, legs in “V” position, feet touching.
- When *kneeling*, legs can be close together, make sure child is kneeling without leaning back to use heels of feet for support. This is an excellent task for supporting balance from a kneeling position.
- When *standing*, make a “V” with legs and roll the ball through your legs while standing. This can be done with or without partners. Roll a ball through a bridge or tunnel that one or more children make.
- All children make 1 big tunnel and the teacher (or the child who has just crawled through the tunnel) rolls ball through the tunnel to the next child in line.

## Obstacle Course

- The obstacle course is meant to have multiple YA activities set up (jumping on floor markers, walking on a long beam, jumping over a hurdle, throwing a ball through the hoop, running to a finish line). The children go through the obstacle course demonstrating a variety of skills in the activities that have been previously used, so they are already familiar with each activity.
- Some teachers find it helpful to have adults at different stations in the obstacle course, depending on the skill level of the children and the skills needed for individual activities.

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- Use entire classroom as a circular track, run around circle completing different stations.
- Some divide the class in half and half the class is the cheering squad, while the other half of the class completes the obstacle course.

### Run & Carry

- Run and Carry is designed to encourage a child to run quickly, stop to pick up an object (bean bag, small ball, empty tennis ball can, small scarf, and empty plastic water bottle) and reverse directions, running back with the object.
- It can be set up as a relay race whereby each child runs and hands off the object to the next child who is stationed at the start on a floor marker.

### **MOST OF ALL - HAVE FUN!**

**Adapt the activities to the children and culture in your setting. Encourage leadership skills, social and communication skills, cheering for all participants.**

### **PASS IT OWN!**

**Share your fun and enthusiasm with other classes; invite other adults from your school or community, include family members!**