

Quick Reference Coaching Guide: Ideas to improve learning



This is a basic guide to coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities. It focuses on some behaviours often associated with ID. The tips below have been developed by coaches. They will help you to improve athlete learning and give them a more enjoyable Special Olympics sport experience.

Remember, our athletes are all unique. Each athlete has their own likes, dislikes and interest. They will all express themselves differently. Where you can, talk with the important people in your athletes' lives. Parents, Caregivers, Teachers or other coaches can tell you more about your athlete. They can share ideas to help you work better with your athlete. Be flexible. Be open to new ideas and insights. This will help everyone to have a great and rewarding time.

Characteristic	Ideas to Improve Learning
<i>Athlete learns more slowly</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Use the same structure each training session 2) Train more often 3) Review learned skills often 4) Break skills down into smaller parts 5) Allow athletes chances to practice and review 6) Move on to more difficult skills when earlier skills are mastered 7) Teach at the level of each individual athlete 8) Reduce support as athlete gets better at each skill 9) Use a volunteer/asst. coach as a partner. They can provide 1:1 support as the athlete learns 10) Always: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Explain the skill b) Demonstrate the skill (you can also use pictures or videos) c) Allow athletes the chance to practice the skills
<i>Athlete has a short attention span</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Use short training sessions 2) Do many different activities learning the same skill 3) Allow athletes lots of practice time. 4) Give some 1:1 coaching 5) Ensure your athlete is paying attention before explaining anything. (Be sure they are making eye contact or show they are listening to you.) 6) Use stations/circuits. You can practice many activities at once. You can include previously learned and new skills.
<i>Athlete is resistant to change</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Use the same routine for each training session 2) Tell your athlete when a change in activity will happen (e.g. 5 minutes before the change) 3) Prepare your athlete for big changes over time (such as a new coach) 4) Learn what motivates your athlete most. It might be a game or activity – save this activity for the end of practice. This will encourage your athlete to stay involved in the practice.
<i>Athlete acts out or has</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Agree clear rules and expectations of behaviour

<i>mood swings</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Be consistent in applying these rules and codes of behaviour 3) Work with athlete and caregivers to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identify the function of the negative behaviour (all behaviour has a function) b) identify alternative, positive behaviours that have the same function c) Reward positive behaviour and absence of bad behaviour 4) Watch out for bad behaviours that may re-appear after an absence
<i>Athlete has difficulty communicating</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Be patient. Give your athlete time to say what they want to say. Do not finish their sentence for them. 2) You can use picture boards, sign language or other tools 3) Ask your athletes caregivers for information about how they communicate. 4) Ask your athlete to demonstrate what they want to say.
<i>Athlete finds it hard to understand verbal instructions</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) When you provide a demons 2) Use as few verbal instructions as possible 3) Use key words, signals, signs or pictures to communicate with your athlete
<i>Athlete has poor muscle tone</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Give your athlete exercises to strengthen their muscles. 2) You can include exercises for the athlete to do at home. Talk to parents and siblings to include them in this. 3) When stretching, teach athletes to STOP when they feel pain. 4) Make sure your athletes are wearing correct footwear 5) Make sure the playing surface is safe and clear of danger
<i>Athlete has a low pain threshold/ is sensitive to touch</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Use softer/adaptive equipment 2) If physical content is need, ask for the athlete's permission and explain what you will do.
<i>Athlete finds it hard to make social bonds</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Work in small groups/pairs 2) Use the same groups/pairs for a number of weeks 3) For athletes who prefer to work alone, give them chances to do this 4) Where athletes enjoy working with certain team mates, give them chances to do this 5) Introduce new coaches and volunteers gradually
<i>Athlete is easily over stimulated</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reduce the number of distractions (noises, very bright lights, objects) 2) Practice in small groups or pairs 3) Consider practicing in a smaller room or hall, with fewer people 4) Plan rest times and breaks during practice 5) Provide a quiet area where the athlete can take a time out.
<i>Athlete has poor balance or stability</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Use a partner/chair/wall/ walking frame/other support equipment to help the athlete to balance 2) Avoid working on uneven surfaces 3) Select sport roles and activities which match your athlete's needs 4) Give your athlete more time to complete tasks 5) Modify the task to meet your athlete's needs 6) Ask your athlete's caregivers for information about how you can support them

Athlete has poor coordination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Break skills down into simple steps 2) Change activities to use more simple movements 3) Make sure you still challenge your athlete 4) Give your athlete 1:1 support when you can 5) Give your athlete some activities or exercises they can do at home to improve coordination. Talk to parents and siblings to include them in these activities
Athlete has a physical impairments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Allow athletes to do as much of a skill as they can do 2) When an athlete can't perform a skill or part of a skill, allow them to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Perform a different skill that achieves the same goal b) Use support tools which help them to do the skill c) Use a partner to do this skill 3) Work on activities that improve the athlete mobility and stability 4) Talk with caregivers about how you can help the athlete perform skills better
Athlete has a visual impairment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Give clear and short verbal instructions 2) Use physical prompts or assistance if needed 3) Use sound or other devices to assist your athletes (e.g. bells, jingle balls, tether ropes, side lanes in pool) 4) Use high visibility equipment for athletes with low vision (cones, bibs, lights) 5) Give specific action oriented feedback to athletes
Athlete has a hearing impairment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Make eye contact when you are talking to the athlete 2) Use signs, pictures, sign language or other visual tools 3) Make sure cochlear implants are kept dry 4) Demonstrate the skills clearly and correctly 5) Use assistant coaches or volunteers to help ensure athletes pay attention to you.
Athlete is prone to seizures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Know warning signs of seizures for your athlete 2) Control the environment to reduced known triggers (heat, light, noise) 3) Make sure you team is prepared and knows how to respond if the athlete has a seizure 4) Have a clear first aid plan
Athlete engages in self injurious behaviour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Keep watch for any worrying behaviour (e.g. cutting skin, banging head on any surface). 2) Alert medical personnel and caregivers to any such behaviour 3) Work with caregivers to identify a support plan to manage this behaviour 4) Try to redirect the athlete to a different and less harmful behaviour 5) Identify and control possible triggers to this behaviour
Athlete engages in obsessive-compulsive behaviours (compulsive behaviours are any behaviours that become part of a ritual that and athlete feels they must perform. The athlete may	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Observe the athlete for any obsessive-compulsive behaviours and monitor. 2) Try to control the situation and stop this behaviour. Do this by trying to redirect the athlete to a different behaviour. 3) Remove/Reduce potential triggers to this behaviour (e.g. food). 4) If the athlete's behaviour relates to compulsive eating consider removing food from practices. Avoid using food as a reward 5) Work with caregivers to develop a support plan to manage this

be unable to perform other functions at this time)	behaviour
<i>Athlete may be hyperactive</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Set clear rules 2) Use the same routine for each training session 3) Give short, simple instructions 4) Ask the athlete to repeat the instructions you have given 5) Stations/Circuits may help you to give lots of variety and activity
<i>Athlete may be lethargic</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Give the athlete plenty of chances to rest 2) Introduce them to sports which can give them time to rest (Bocce, Bowling, golf) 3) Slowly increase the length of training sessions 4) Modify activities to give the athlete a chance to experience success. 5) Be aware of any medications the athlete is taking and its side effects.
<i>Athlete lacks motivation to push self</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Think about why the athlete lacks motivation. They might lack confidence or tire easily. 2) Practice in pairs or small groups. Group this athlete with highly motivated peers. 3) Highlight small improvements and reward them. 4) Use a chart to record and show athletes how much they progress. 5) Set goals with your athlete. Use incentives based on reaching specific performance goals (i.e. not medals, but times, distances, scores)