

VIP – Coaching Players with Disabilities

Most coaches in AYSO will at some time in their coaching careers have players with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities on their teams. Because of these players' unique needs, the average coach may feel ill-equipped to coach them. This workshop and its support material are designed to help coaches understand the needs of players with disabilities and give coaches practical ideas and strategies for working with them.

1. Understanding players with special needs

Begin with the similarities! How are they like all other players?

- They need love, acceptance, and encouragement
- They need to have a positive self-image
- They benefit from physical activity
- They need meaningful activities to occupy their leisure time
- They enjoy having fun!
- Other: _____

Differences the coach may encounter in players with disabilities

Physical

- Small stature
- Fragile
- Mobility challenges
- Hearing
- Vision
- Spatial awareness: how their body moves in space; relationship to others around him/her

Mental

- Slower comprehension
- Difficulties understanding/processing language
- Speech impairments (this can also be physical)
- Very concrete: difficulty with abstract concepts

Emotional / Social

- Severely withdrawn
- Hyperactive
- Demonstrate inappropriate behaviors for their age or for the situation

General

- They may need a slower pace.
- They perform better with consistency and established routines.

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2. Recognizing situations or conditions requiring special attention

You know you need help when

- A player has a medical condition you are not equipped to handle safely.
- A player's behavior threatens the safety and/or enjoyment of the other team members.
- A player's behavior requires a disproportionate amount of your time and effort, reducing the quality of coaching for the rest of the team.

3. Strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviors

1. Prepare in advance as much as possible during your pre-season parent meeting.
 - Obtain additional information about any player requiring extra help, such as what triggers outbursts, is she/he violent, what parents do to curb behaviors, etc)
 - Ask parents for help in creating a specific action plan that will be used with their child, if necessary, detailing behaviors to watch out for, steps that will be taken by the coach *and* parents, and positive reinforcers the coach will use to encourage appropriate behavior.
2. Structure practices around a routine, and stick to it.
3. Make your rules and expectations clear to the players.
4. Focus on the behavior you are observing. When inappropriate behavior occurs, you need to know how to handle it, not whether the player is autistic or has Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHA). It *is* helpful to have some background knowledge, but you are not expected, nor do you need to be, an expert on disabilities.
5. Create a standard action plan for ALL misbehavior. Suggested actions are
 - Verbal warning
 - Time out
 - Talk to the parents
 - Meet with the RC or RCA and parents
 - Require parent or designee to be present at all times OR
 - Assign an older player or adult helper to the player as a "buddy."

4. Not all abnormal behaviors require intervention

Ask yourself

- Is the player's behavior a potential danger to himself/herself or others?
- Is the player's behavior unduly distracting the other players from the purpose of the activity (drill, demonstration, game, etc)?
- Is the player reducing the enjoyment of the experience for others?

