

TOP 10 TIPS FOR CLUBS WORKING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE



1. Think about what “disability” really means

The so-called “Medical Model” of disability is straightforward. It focuses on the fact that the person has some problem with their body and/or their mind; and that makes them disabled. However, in the “Social Model” of disability, it’s often seen to be society itself which causes the disability, by thoughtlessly putting up barriers, or making judgements about the person.

This model actually gives us a lot of power. We may not be able to cure someone’s blindness or their inability to walk. But there are a million and one things we can do to remove barriers to participation, and create a more inclusive club environment.

2. Take care with how you ask new club members to declare a disability

If you simply ask new curlers (or their parents) to say whether they have a disability or not on your membership form, many people will NOT self-identify as disabled. This is especially true if they are not officially registered as disabled; or if the condition is temporary. You may be better off using more open-ended wording such as asking something like: Do you have any special or additional needs which we can support you with?

3. Get as much information as you can before the person’s first session

The disabled person is the number one expert on what works (and doesn’t work) for them, followed closely by parents or carers if the disabled person is dependent on them for care. An individual’s disability is often complex, and it can take time for you (and they) to understand the best way to support the person in your sport.

Talk to the person (and their carer(s)) if appropriate) and ask them what they know about their disability, and really listen to what they say. It can often be useful to look at what’s worked for them in other situations and activities, and see how this can be applied in your own sport.

4. Be informed about the person’s medical needs

Some people with disabilities have additional health needs as a result, which you need to know about in your coaching. For example, they might have reduced skin sensitivity, which could lead to a greater risk of injury to their skin or soft tissue.

5. Reassuring the person that you’re not fazed by their additional needs can be a wonderful gift to them

People with disabilities are often used to others being uncomfortable or even scared around them. They may also have had negative experiences when trying to participate in sport.

Even if you’re feeling nervous yourself, try to communicate a strong sense that you are happy to have this individual in your club; and that you are optimistic and confident that you and they will find a way to make their participation successful.

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6. Actions speak louder than words

A club can easily say that it has an “open door policy” and welcomes disabled people. But this doesn’t actually mean anything in itself, unless it is backed up by action. You need to show your commitment by making your club inclusive to the best of your ability, within what’s reasonable and achievable.

This may include needing to challenging discriminatory language or behaviour from your other curlers, even if they mean the things they say as a joke. There is also a need to strike a balance, so that your other curlers don’t feel neglected or cheated by the amount of time and attention you give to your disabled curler(s).

7. Don’t accept lower standards of behaviour in class

This applies particularly when people have learning disabilities, or conditions such as autism or ADHD. Obviously there may be cases where the person is genuinely unable to meet your club’s standards of behaviour; but you should be very wary of making allowances just because you feel sorry for the person, or have low expectations, or see them as “childlike” in some way.

8. Check the practicalities

Make sure you’ve assessed the person’s needs, and taken account of them in your emergency evacuation procedures. For example, a deaf person may not hear a fire alarm. A person with a visual impairment or learning disability may well need assistance to leave the building in an emergency.

You may also need to revisit or even step up your general risk assessment practices to ensure that there are no hidden hazards for the person.

9. Check out funding sources

If you’re thinking of running some special, targeted activity for people with disabilities, it’s often worth trying your local council or volunteer centre, as there can be pockets of money for such projects.

10. Be creative and have fun

Look at how many creative ways there are to make your coaching accessible to disabled people. Good coaches always differentiate their coaching to include people of all abilities anyway.