

Inclusive Coaching



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Introduction

In coaching terms, an 'inclusive coach' has the ability to positively and effectively coach a group of athletes who may have very different needs. This is not specific to coaches working with disabled children, players and athletes – good coaches will always be working inclusively because they want everyone in their session to improve.

In a session of non-disabled people, there will be different needs within a group, but with disabled athletes, the differences may be highlighted (eg the use of totally different equipment or the length of time a swimmer can stay in the water without getting cold).

An inclusive coaching session cannot be planned without knowledge of the individuals that make up the group. Some strategies that support one person may further exclude another (eg one individual may feel self-conscious when performing individually while another finds group tasks too challenging). Sessions can be made inclusive during their delivery, though, by working with the athletes and discussing with them what is working (or not working) for them.

Some disabled people need little, if any, change to the coaching process and can easily articulate and communicate their needs with the coach. In an individual coaching session, coaches can comfortably discover the best coaching techniques and experiment with adapted equipment and coaching styles, working with the athlete to achieve maximum results.

In a group coaching session, there may be additional issues as athletes may have very different needs and there is not as much time to devote to individuals. There is no magic formula for inclusive coaching, and some athletes have combined and complex needs. The key is to keep communicating with those who are being coached.



The Inclusion Spectrum

There have been many attempts to produce a model to help coaches open up their sessions and ensure disabled people can be involved in ways that suit them as individuals. The most effective, and widely used, is Stevenson and Black's (2007) Inclusion Spectrum, which is an activity-based model that can help coaches understand what inclusion is and how to include disabled athletes in their sports sessions. The focus is on what athletes can do rather than what they can't.

The Inclusion Spectrum consists of five approaches to the delivery of physical activity programmes, ranging from fully open activities to totally segregated participation.

Each approach aims to encourage and empower disabled and non-disabled people in order to enhance the quality of their involvement. The type of delivery should suit the needs of everyone in the session, and all the approaches covered are valuable ways of delivering high quality and meaningful opportunity in sport. It may be that a coach uses more than one delivery strategy within any one session, or it may be that the club/coaching sessions are set up with a particular delivery mode in mind.

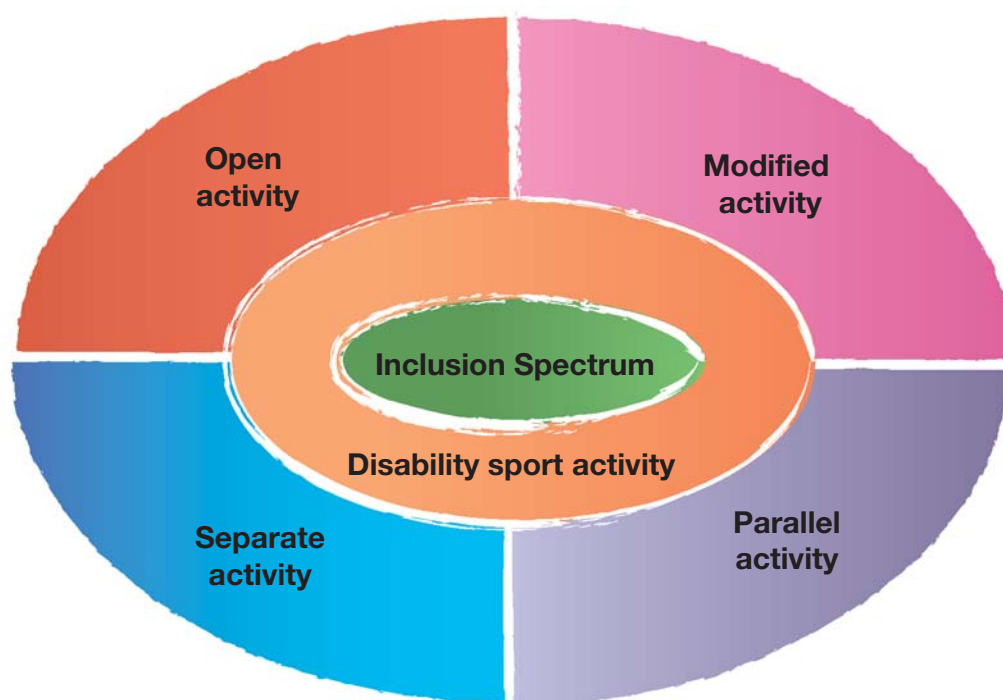


Figure 1: The Inclusion Spectrum
© Stevenson and Black (adapted from Stevenson, 2007¹)

¹Stevenson, P. (2007) *Including Young Disabled People and SEN Pupils in FUNdamentals and Multi-skill Opportunities*. Loughborough: Youth Sport Trust (unpublished draft document).

Open activity – A simple activity based on what the entire group can do, with little or no modification.

In an open activity, everyone does the same thing, without adaptation or modification, regardless of impairment (eg deaf athletes doing exactly the same training schedule as hearing athletes during a track or field session).

Modified activity – Everyone does the same activity with adaptations to challenge the more able and support the inclusion of everyone.

In a modified activity, everyone does the same task but with changes to rules, areas or equipment (eg in tennis, allowing people with mobility difficulties an extra bounce before having to return the ball).

Parallel activity – Participants are grouped according to ability, each doing the same activity but at appropriate levels.

In a parallel activity, everyone participates in the same type of activity, but different groups participate in different ways and at different levels. Participants can be grouped according to skill, fitness or the way in which they play the game (eg a group of participants can be split into three smaller groups for a ball passing game such as netball). The rules, equipment and playing area can be different in all three groups to suit the requirements of the group that is playing.

Separate activity – An individual or group do a purposefully planned different activity.

In a separate activity, disabled participants play separately, either as individuals or in teams (eg when a group of disabled players practise together as a team preparing for a volleyball or tennis competition that has adapted rules to suit the needs and abilities of the individuals playing).

Disability sport activity – Aspects of physical activity based on disability sport programmes can be included in all approaches.

In a disability sport activity, a group of non-disabled participants take part in an activity that has a disability sport focus. This is reverse integration (eg non-disabled players playing a game of basketball that has been adapted and modified to meet the needs and abilities of the disabled players in the group).



STEPS

The STEPS formula provides a framework for coaches to make changes to their coaching, in the areas of space, task, equipment, people and speed. The changes can be made for the whole group (eg athletes continually change partners when working with each other and so have to continually adapt the way they interact) or just for an individual who accesses the session with different equipment and a different coaching plan (eg an athlete who uses a wheelchair in an archery club).

Not all athletes with physical, learning, social or sensory impairments need the same adaptations or interventions, but there are some general pointers. Every athlete's functional abilities are different. If you take a group of people and ask them to sit on the floor and reach forward to touch their toes, all will get to different distances (some will only be able to reach their knees and some will be able to touch the soles of their feet). This will be for many different reasons, and could impact on what they can do within your coaching session, and what you decide to work on with them to help them improve.

The following tables divide considerations into those that may be applicable where an athlete has a primary impairment that is physical, learning, social or sensory (hearing or visual).

Considerations where primary impairment is PHYSICAL

S pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore different positions to access activities (eg some throwers achieve better results throwing backwards over their shoulder).• Increase size and height of goals, targets or playing areas.
T ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time or distance band athletes so they compete with others of a similar ability.• Modify rules to increase aspects of participation (eg all players must pass after three seconds in team games).• Increase scoring options in all games (eg more runs/points in fielding and striking games).
E quipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use bigger and lighter balls, and shorter and lighter rackets and strapping to assist the grip.• Provide ramps to assist with the rolling of the ball, or 'sending', and explore a range of adapted athletic events (eg club throw).
P eople	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use creative competitions, where winners are sometimes random and not always based on skill levels.• Create activities where all players are involved, avoiding individual athletes being observed.
S peed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be prepared to slow down an activity if the athlete is not as flexible, or can't move as quickly, as other athletes (eg increase the time the ball can be held in netball to allow a wheelchair user to get into position to shoot or pass).

Considerations where primary impairment is LEARNING	
S pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zones can assist in matching players with similar ability and imposing specific rules.
T ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give small amounts of information at a time and repeat demonstrations.
E quipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tactile markers can assist comprehension of floor patterns for skills and drills.
P eople	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small-sided games may assist inclusion of people with learning disabilities. Give people time to observe others performing a task before they attempt it.
S peed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may need to slow down an activity, but this is not always the case. Be prepared to repeat a session drill a few times if necessary.

Considerations where primary impairment is SOCIAL (eg autistic spectrum conditions [ASC])	
S pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a large amount of personal space around athletes and clearly mark out any boundaries of the area.
T ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual signs and pictures can assist some people with ASC to access mainstream environments. Use clear, concrete and concise language with minimal words to convey tasks.
E quipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing a piece of equipment for the athlete to hold while waiting in line can sometimes help alleviate anxiety.
P eople	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the negative effect of physical contact, 'hustle bustle' and partner changes.
S peed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work at a speed where the athletes are happy to contribute and play. Ensure the speed of the play or activity going on around athletes is comfortable for them.

Considerations where primary impairment is HEARING

S pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure your position allows the hearing impaired (HI) person to lip-read if applicable.
T ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide printed copies of complex drills and/or the coaching plans.
E quipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replace the whistle with visual cues (eg use a flag in team sports).
P eople	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the whole group are aware of the HI person's different needs, in terms of basic communication.
S peed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The speed of the activity should not be affected, but be aware of delays in response times if the athlete has not seen a signal to stop play or finish the drill.

Considerations where primary impairment is VISUAL

S pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting the coaching space out in the same way for each session can assist orientation.
T ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give clear oral explanations and/or provide copies of complex drills in large print/Braille/electronically (so that a screen reader can be used).
E quipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use auditory balls.• Use a guiding rope in athletics.• Indicate the pool end to blind swimmers using poles with a ball on the end.
P eople	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In partner drills, rotate partners frequently, providing the blind or partially sighted athlete with specialist equipment if necessary. In some sports, for example swimming and athletics, explore using a sighted training partner.
S peed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow the play or practice down to ensure the skill is practised effectively by the visually impaired athlete.

Inclusive coaching considerations

Here are some quick tips to help you create an inclusive coaching environment. It is of paramount importance that the following factors are addressed to ensure disabled athletes have a positive first experience of mainstream sport, and continue to participate in an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Initial contact

- **Welcome**
If a new or different athlete feels welcomed, a positive experience is much more likely.
- **Content of first session**
Gearing the first session around a new athlete will cement the welcome.
- **Gelling with the group**
You may need to do a little work with the rest of the group in a sensitive way if the new athlete has specific needs.
- **Ignoring versus highlighting impairment**
When a disabled athlete has specific needs, you need to find a balance between ignoring the differences completely and highlighting them in an appropriate way.

Practical considerations

- **Equipment**
Sometimes, getting the whole group to explore new and different equipment before an individual uses it can help demystify it, and can add additional ways of challenging existing skills.
- **Individual preferences**
You may need to balance allowing individuals to have personal choice and the need for them to conform to what the group is doing.
- **Safety**
You may need to check medical considerations for new athletes, but common sense is the most useful tool. Common sense and background knowledge can help people with different impairments work safely together – communicate with the athlete rather than making isolated judgements about what might create 'safety'.
- **Venue**
There may be additional considerations to your choice of venue. Consider what wet weather and winter training venues are appropriate, based on accessibility, facilities, environment and conditions.

Content of session

- **Style of delivery - Inclusion Spectrum**
The Inclusion Spectrum can give you options to deliver in different ways, thus balancing the different needs of the group.
- **Flexible delivery - STEPS**
Adapting and modifying all aspects of the session can help you include athletes of all abilities.
- **'Bag of activities' to assess needs**
Building up a menu of simple activities that athletes with different levels of skill can take part in can assist you in assessing the needs of new athletes.
- **Ensure challenge**
Disabled athletes need to be challenged in the same way as anyone else. Don't assume that disabled people need to have things made easier in order for the challenge to be appropriate. Many disabled athletes will be as skilled as their non-disabled teammates.

Signposting

- **Pathways available**

Some disabled athletes may need a high level of support in finding the appropriate 'next step' on their player pathway.

- **Other opportunities**

Certain disabled athletes will not have an obvious 'next step' in their chosen sport, and it may be appropriate to consider a change of sport.

Evaluations

- **Coach**

A review of, and reflection on, the session by you is essential to provide continued high quality inclusive coaching.

- **Disabled athletes**

Disabled athletes may be a very useful source of information and feedback.

- **Experts**

Governing bodies of sport or other coaches can provide useful support and feedback.

Where can you go for further information?

sports coach UK workshops will enable you to learn more about inclusive coaching and also share ideas and experiences with other coaches. It is also wholly appropriate that you access some form of disability equality training prior to working with disabled people, to get the best out of all your athletes and create a positive working environment for everyone.

The two workshops sports coach UK currently offers are:

- 'How to Coach Disabled People in Sport'
- 'Coaching Disabled Performers'.

Visit the sports coach UK website for further information on dates and locations of the workshops:

www.sportcoachuk.org

The 'UK DIT' course has been developed as a joint effort between the Home Nation Disability Sports Organisations (HNDSOs). For further information, contact your relevant HNDSO:

- English Federation of Disability Sport (see UK DIT or 'Typhoo' course): www.efds.co.uk
- Scottish Disability Sport: www.scottishdisabilitysport.com
- Disability Sport Wales: www.disability-sport-wales.org
- Disability Sports Northern Ireland: www.dsni.co.uk