

# Barriers to Sport Participation of Athletes with Disabilities

By acknowledging the barriers that youth with disabilities face in accessing the sports space, coaches, sport administrators, and program leaders can address them and create an environment inclusive of all kids. Below is a list of some common barriers and strategies you can use to address them.

## Physical Access

A space lacking proper accommodations can limit the ability of an athlete with disabilities to participate comfortably in the sport. Address this barrier by:

- Thinking about how an athlete will access a sport venue/facility. Have them do a walk-through of the space with you to ensure access. Think about...
  - Facility surfaces
  - Distances to venues
  - Doorways (easy to open, width of doorway)
  - Lighting (consider sensory disabilities and vision impairments)
  - Locker rooms/restrooms
  - Ramps
  - Ability to use front entrance, not a back/side entrance to a building
  - Noise level

## Attitude

A lack of disability awareness or understanding amongst a program or coaching staff - even a fear of unknown and concern about accidentally hurting an athlete with a disability. Address this barrier by:

- Seeking resources and guidance from other coaches, teachers, adapted sport leaders, and other disabled athletes.
- Checking out online videos, trainings, webinars.
- Following disabled influencers and athletes on social media.
- Rather than being fearful, be impressed with their ability to navigate life, sport, etc. Many of these kids have already experienced so much based on their disability – you may be surprised at how resilient they are.

## Institutional

---

Are schools, community/rec centers ADA compliant? Are there accessible public transportation stops near the facility? Address this barrier by:

- Verifying – just because a facility is noted as being accessible, have your athlete walk through a space with you to confirm that the program space is actually accessible based on their disability.
- Advocating for accessible transportation for your athletes.

## Communication

---

Recognize that you may need to adapt how you communicate with your athletes - whether it's the language you use or the way that you convey instruction. Address this barrier by:

- Finding out how your athletes prefer to communicate
- Writing down warm-ups and drills to be shown to athletes
- Providing clear, concise, detailed instructions
- Utilizing helpful technology, apps that may be available to assist with communication

## Cost

---

Families with disabled youth may experience additional expenses based on healthcare costs, etc. Even further, adaptive equipment including sport prosthetics are incredibly expensive. These costs on their own, and especially combined, can limit sport participation. Address this barrier by:

- Thinking of ways to offset registration/program expenses to create more opportunities for participation
- Exploring equipment loan programs with local adapted sport programs and sharing them with these families
- Contacting children's hospitals to see if they loan out specialized adapted sport equipment for disabled youth
- Researching grant and scholarship opportunities that may help support equipment and financial needs