ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Physical Education is very important for the health and well being of people of all ages. It is enjoyable, builds self-confidence and improves one's health and fitness. Specific sports skills are developed in individual as well as team sports. Students experience a variety of lifetime and recreational activities. Students who are blind or visually impaired also need to experience physical activity. The visually impaired student with additional disabilities should experience a program designed to improve their fitness levels by participating in various games, activities and exercises. Some students may have developed poor circulation, limited lung capacity, poor muscle tone, poor posture, and a tendency to become overweight. A regular physical activity program will improve fitness and give the student confidence to move through space without instructions. It can also develop motor skills needed for daily living and mobility.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired lists specific strategies for students with visual impairments in physical education programs:

- Review the student's Functional Vision Evaluation or meet with the TVI to determine the student's degree of visual impairment and the amount of residual vision available.
- Ask students what they are able to see and which objects and conditions present problems and at what distance the object is visible.
- Allow students to position themselves where they are able to see the best.
- Ensure indoor areas are well lit (check with students - dim light may be preferred).
- Use dark coloured equipment if good contrast is required. Be aware of contrast in gyms with light coloured walls and fluorescent lighting. Some students may require equipment that is yellow and orange. A ball can be taped with bright yellow tape to contrast with the floor and walls.
- Get students to help you determine the best colour of balls, birdies etc.
- Allow a student with a visual impairment to explore the entire physical education area so he or she can become familiar with the area.
- Keep the instructional areas as uncluttered as possible. If major changes are made in the environment, the impaired students should be told and allowed to explore the new area.
- Modify activities and equipment where necessary. Use audible bells, guide ropes for running, larger equipment and for the buddy system.
- Stand near the impaired student so that instructions can be seen and heard.
- Provide arm support, if needed, on jumping activities.
- Use touch to demonstrate body movements.
OTHER CONDITIONS:
It is helpful to use your student's name before giving instructions.
• Use descriptive verbal instruction. Say what it is you are actually doing in body oriented language. (Example: When teaching to hop, say "Stand on your left foot, raise your right foot, and jump in the air on your left foot.")
• Use directional words and landmarks in the playing area to direct a low vision student. (Example "Walk to the door, turn toward the window using a quarter turn.")
• Use movement as a mode of learning. Guide, but do not over protect, the student.
• Vision plays an important part of maintaining balance. A lack of vision affects movement and coordination of a visually impaired student.
• Encourage students to work as independently as possible so not over-reliant on assistance.
• Break skills into small steps.
• Standard equipment can be adapted to meet the needs of visually impaired students.
• Consider visually impaired students special needs in all planning.
• Seek support from TVIs and organizations for the blind.

ADAPTIONS: DEVELOPMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND GAMES
• Go from less difficult to more difficult skills and breakdown skills into there component parts. (Example: Catching a ball: Bounce the student the ball a short distance away. Gradually increase the distance, but eliminate the bounce. Then increase the distance again.)
• Limit playing space-this allows for greater involvement for the impaired child without greatly changing the experience for the sighted participants.
• Slow the action - use a balloon instead of a ball.
• Use larger or smaller playing objects. They can be seen better by the student. Also, targets can moved closer or made larger.
• Use coloured pinnies/vests so students can correctly identify team members.
• Tag games-use bells on the person who is "It".
• Boundaries-Change the floors texture. Example: Use of a rug or rubber polydot on the floor to mark space where exercises are done. Place a rubber carpet runner next to the wall so that child knows when he steps onto the changed surface that he has stepped out of bounds. The change in surface signals a warning to the student that a wall or object is coming up so he needs to slow down and stop.
Coloured tape can be used to mark the playing areas on the floor or walls.

- Throwing and catching—Give the receiver a sound clue. Bounce the ball instead of throwing it directly. Use different types of balls, such as nerf, fluff and even balloons to lessen the impact when hit with the ball. When throwing at a target, provide a sound behind the target (e.g. clapping, beeper.)
- Striking and Hitting—Use ball on a tee, a large whiffle ball and an oversized bat. Ball can be rolled on a table or the floor. Bells can be put inside the ball to be heard when rolled.
- Running—Partner assists by holding hands, use brush contact (keep touching hand fore arm, wrist or any part of the arm), a loop of a flexible piece of material can be held by guide runner and the student with vision loss. Run to caller's voice for a short run. Student can run by self-holding onto a rope stretched between two points. Put tape on the rope at the end so the student can turn and return to the starting point in a shuttle run.
- Modify the environment—Use colored balls, mats, cones and goals. SAFETY is FIRST!
- Familiarize a visually impaired or blind student with any hazards. Show student the safest routes to and from the various areas.
- Always keep verbal contact with the visually impaired/blind student.
- Ensure safety rules are known and followed by all students.
- Ensure lighting conditions match the needs of the visually impaired student.
- In unfamiliar surroundings, student may be disoriented and lack confidence. The teacher may need to establish an understanding of the activity and the safety precautions needed.
- Where necessary provide one-to-one or small group support.
- Alert student to the location of any obstacle—such as goal-posts—in open areas, on floor, and at head height. Can also add coloured tape on these areas for visual cues.
- Bright sunlight or dark days may alter the student's visual functioning.

In conclusion, well-planned physical activities that utilize appropriate equipment maximize a person's abilities and minimize any special challenges they may face. Adapting a game or activity increases the opportunity for fun, skill development and self-confidence. Learning a new sport or recreational activity improves the quality of a person's life that has a visual impairment and creates a general sense of well being and competence.

Adapted by Irene Kovats from: ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED By Kathy Letcher