



# **Introductory Adaptive Lacrosse Guidelines**

## INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, lacrosse has been one of the fastest-growing team sports in the country. Based on the annual US Lacrosse Participation Survey in 2014, over 750,000 players participated in lacrosse on organized teams, an increase of nearly 25,000 players from the year before. Every segment of the game is showing continued growth patterns.

With the explosive growth of the sport, it's of no surprise that the rise in adaptive lacrosse programs has similarly followed suit. With the evolution of adaptive sports at the international and national level, many communities are now adding adaptive lacrosse programs to their extracurricular athletic offerings.

Adaptive lacrosse is an offering of the sport provided for people with physical or intellectual impairments. Athletes with disabilities benefit from the same strength training and conditioning protocols as athletes without disabilities and, generally, the same program used for athletes without disabilities can be used for their peers with a disability, with few considerations and modifications.

This document is intended to provide guidance for schools and programs in order to make the sport accessible for all participants and to create adaptive lacrosse programs for students with physical and mental disabilities. Our goal is to familiarize readers with how individuals with disabilities can participate through integrated training models in order to use lacrosse as a tool to promote healthy lifestyles and positive play experiences for all participants.



## WHY ARE ADAPTIVE SPORTS IMPORTANT?

- According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, one in five people have a disability. Approximately 56.7 million people living in the United States had some kind of disability in 2010.
- Students with disabilities do not receive the same amount of physical activity and athletic opportunity as students without disabilities.
- The lack of opportunity to participate in athletics has been linked to higher prevalence of obesity and obesity-related secondary conditions in youth with disabilities, compared to youth without disabilities.
- Research shows that as many as 56% of individuals with disabilities do not participate in any physical activity.
- Children with disabilities have three times as many days spent ill in bed and three times as many school absences as other children.
- Children with physical disabilities are often not encouraged to lead active lives and tend to lead sedentary lives with greater health problems and have more physical activity barriers.<sup>1</sup>

***The goal of any adaptive lacrosse program is to give athletes with physical and intellectual disabilities an enjoyable lacrosse experience that is active, exciting and most of all, FUN.***



<sup>1</sup> Wheelchair Basketball “About Athletics for All” Adapted Sports for Students page. 2  
<http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/> February 22, 2015

## GLOSSARY

### *Disability Related Definitions<sup>2</sup>*

**Integrated:** Individuals with disabilities participate in sport along able-bodied participants (mainstream/inclusive).

**Adaptive:** Disability specific sports (ie -wheelchair lacrosse, adaptive hockey).

**Classification:** System used to determine ability and mobility in order to create equitable play.

**Impairment:** Refers to physical or intellectual loss, abnormality or injury that causes a limitation in one or more major life functions.

**Disability:** Refers to a physical or intellectual condition that may limit an individual in the areas of physical, intellectual, or social abilities.

**Accessible:** Easy to approach, enter operate, participate in, and or use safely by a person with disability (ie - site, facility work environment).

**Assistive/Adaptive Equipment:** Devices that assist in activities or mobility, including wheelchairs, prostheses, ramps, changes in furniture heights and work place equipment or sports equipment.

**Able-bodied (also known as: "AB"):** Refers to a person who does not have a disability. The term implies that all people with disabilities lack "able bodies" or the ability to use their bodies well. The term "non-disabled" or the phrase "does not have a disability" is the most neutral.

**Modification:** Stick equipment and/or rules modifications are standard and often used to help participants achieve success despite their ability level. The field of play, time limits and equipment can be modified to accommodate students of varying abilities.

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<sup>2</sup> Guide to Adaptive Rowing Pages 12-14

[http://www.usrowing.org/Libraries/Adaptive\\_Documents/2015\\_Guide\\_to\\_Adaptive\\_Rowing\\_FINAL\\_1.sflb.ash](http://www.usrowing.org/Libraries/Adaptive_Documents/2015_Guide_to_Adaptive_Rowing_FINAL_1.sflb.ash)



## ADAPTIVE PARTICIPATION LEVELS

### Recreational

*An athlete who demonstrates the following:*

- Utilizes program equipment to participate.
- Learning basic rules and sport technique.
- Emphasis is on skill development and sport education.
- Participating at entry level.

### Developmental

*An athlete who demonstrate the following:*

- Understands basic rules and techniques of the sport.
- Is pursuing purchase of or has his or her own equipment, if equipment is applicable.
- Is participating in structured ongoing training program.
- Is competing at a basic level or higher.

### Emerging

*An athlete who demonstrates the following:*

- Is becoming more focused on specific sport.
- Is competing at local, regional and/or national level.
- Performance is result-oriented.
- Meets/exceeds designate emerging standard for lacrosse.
- Is participating in a structured ongoing training program.
- May compete in additional events or tournaments.<sup>3</sup>



*Breaking Barriers Lacrosse*

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<sup>3</sup>Introduction to Adapted Sports “Levels of Sport” Adapted Sports for Students page 19  
<http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/> February 20, 2015

## CURRENT ADAPTIVE LACROSSE PARTICIPATION MODELS

Adaptive lacrosse in schools and local organizations can be organized as an inclusive sport that offers the ability for students with disabilities to participate. Whether an adaptive athlete is participating for recreation or is on the emerging-athlete pathway, the integration of adaptive athletes into existing lacrosse programs benefits everyone involved.

Adaptive lacrosse can be offered in a variety of models so that each program or district may be able to select a participation model that is flexible and works best with their resources and population. The models presented here are suggested ways to create participation classes for athletes with disabilities, based on level of ability, classification and need.

### SOFT STICK LACROSSE MODEL (Recreation Model)

Whether you are new to the sport of lacrosse or already familiar with the sport, soft-stick lacrosse is a great way to introduce lacrosse to your students and community. The soft lacrosse sticks and soft balls are gender-neutral, designed for use with soft-lacrosse equipment in a safe, non-contact version of the game. If you use the US Lacrosse Curriculum Guide to teach the sport with appropriate modifications as needed, there is no additional equipment or protection needed to play.



The teacher-friendly, easy-to-use curriculum provides age specific unit plans, lesson plans, drills, games, educational handouts, cross-curricular activities and more. It aligns with national standards and was developed in partnership with the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).

The US Lacrosse Soft Stick Grant provides a set of soft lacrosse equipment to schools, after-school programs and community-based youth organizations.

A set of soft lacrosse equipment includes:

- 30 soft lacrosse sticks
- 30 soft lacrosse balls
- [one copy of the US Lacrosse PE Curriculum Guide and Reproducible packet](#)
- [one copy of the Teaching Soft-Stick Lacrosse DVD](#)

## ADAPTIVE LACROSSE (Recreation or Developmental Model)

Similar to the soft stick model, this level of play helps to level the playing field and engages more students with physical and mental disabilities. It can be enjoyed by all students without the added stress of competition and standard equipment. This baseline training is relevant for all lacrosse participants, regardless of experience or ability, and provides the opportunity for participants to learn rules, basic individual skills, and basic team concepts for beginning players of all ages.

As a proposed model for a non-competitive youth program or school setting, this approach allows a group with a limited number of students or a group with both stand-up and wheelchair participants to offer a team sport that all can enjoy. This type of participation opportunity is most often employed at the community level and focuses on sportsmanship, teamwork and fun. Most participation opportunities come in the form of team camps, clinics and practices with a higher level of hands-on instruction.

**Training and Equipment:** Based on the ability level of your participants, the required equipment for recreational adaptive lacrosse may vary. Some adaptive lacrosse programs at the recreational level use the soft stick lacrosse equipment to ensure the safety of their participants. Other programs may opt to dress participants in full traditional men's or women's lacrosse equipment while still promoting non-contact activity. Soft balls like tennis or whiffle balls may be used instead of lacrosse balls, especially if some participants prefer not to wear equipment. Adaptive groups may adhere to USL rules and regulations, but focus more on participants learning the game and being active in an enjoyable environment.

If your adaptive lacrosse program is playing by [US Lacrosse Men's Rules](#), the following equipment is required for each participant.

- helmet
- men's lacrosse stick
- gloves
- mouth guard
- shoulder pads
- chest protector
- arm pads

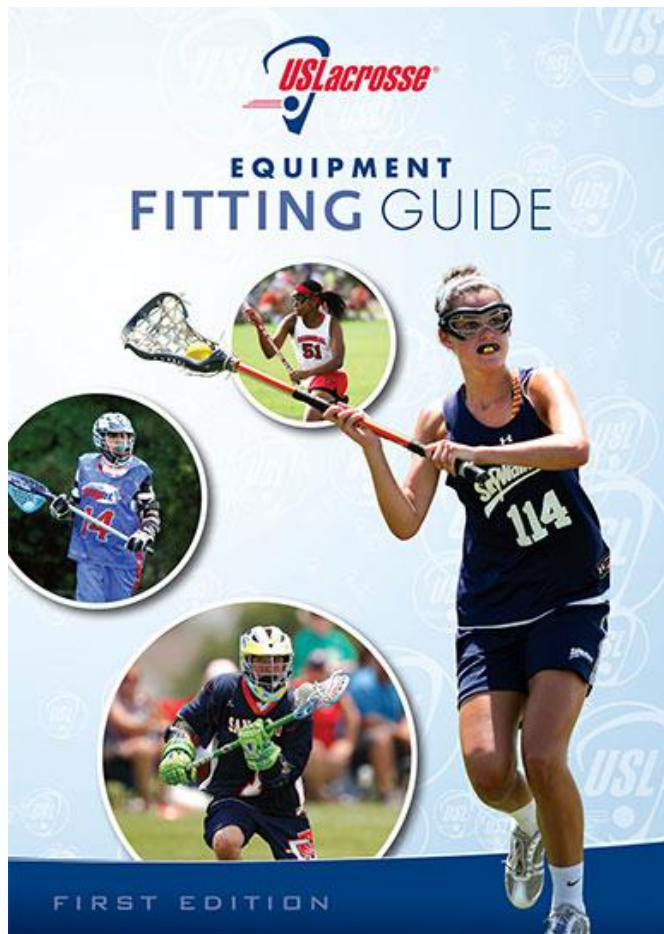
*\*Goalies are also required to wear a throat guard and chest protector*

If your adaptive lacrosse program is playing by [US Lacrosse Women's Rules](#), the following equipment is required for each participant.

- mouth guard
- goggles
- women's lacrosse stick

Women's lacrosse goalies must also wear:

- helmet
- goalie gloves
- throat guard
- mouth guard
- chest protector
- shin guards



Access the [US Lacrosse Equipment Guide](#) for more information.

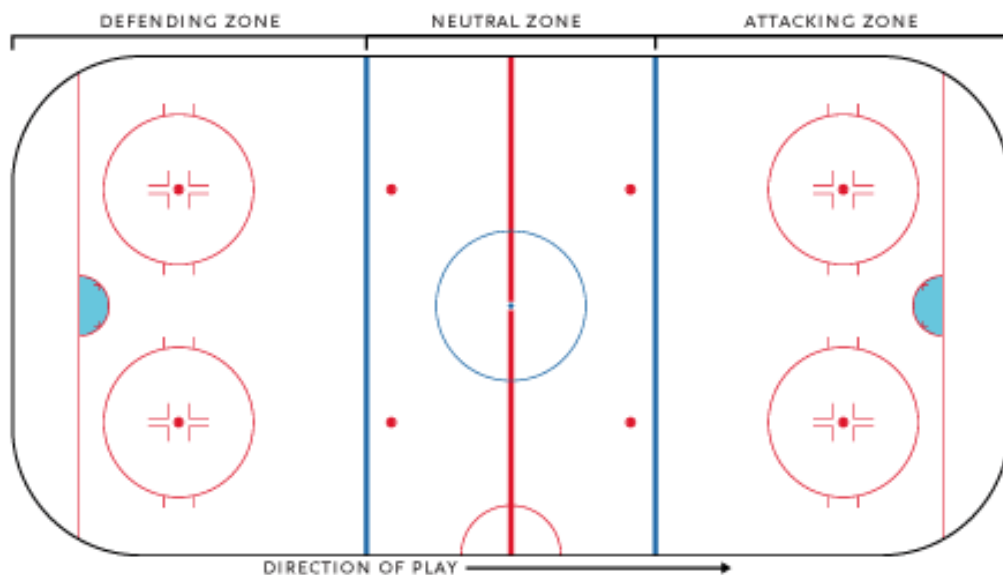


## WHEELCHAIR LACROSSE (Emerging Model)

Wheelchair lacrosse is an organized adaptive version of traditional men's lacrosse. It is an inclusive participation opportunity that offers the ability for students, adults and veterans with disabilities to participate in the country's 'fastest growing sport'. It has become increasingly popular at the adult level with wounded veterans and former abled-bodied participants as it is an ideal sport for those who have weakness, or limited or no use of their lower limbs.

**Rules:** Two teams play 7 vs. 7 with two defensemen, two middies, two attackmen and one goalie per side. The game duration is four 15-minute quarters. Teams are co-ed and grouped by classification rules to ensure an equal level of ability. Schools and communities that offer adaptive lacrosse at a competitive level will want to adhere to standardized rules so teams can compete on a state-wide level in regular and post-season play.

Dimensions for the field of play are the same as an indoor roller hockey rink.



**Training and Equipment:** Because wheelchair lacrosse is full-contact, standard men's lacrosse sticks and balls are used and protective gear is to be worn at all times, including helmets, gloves, mouth guard, shoulder pads, arm pads and shin guards and/or thigh pads. Players are not required to, but may also wear a pad over the tops of their knees to protect them from any checking by an opponent.

More information is available online at [Wheelchair Lacrosse USA](http://WheelchairLacrosseUSA.org).

## ADAPTIVE LACROSSE (Emerging Model)

Adaptive lacrosse (emerging model) is strategically and practically focused. Participants will receive detailed instruction on building the tactical elements of their team based on overarching principles of skill development and competition. Player development is geared toward participants who have an understanding of the basic skills and objectives of the game. Expectations for drills and skill development are comparable to able-bodied practices with necessary modifications based on physical ability of participants.

Often times with this model, in order to achieve an appropriate number of participants, adaptive lacrosse teams are comprised of students from across a school district or town that have a qualifying physical ability. If applicable, you may choose to create a more competitive or separate travel team for select participants who have a higher level of interest and skill and would benefit from formalized games or competition throughout the year.



**Training and Equipment:** Standard men's or women's lacrosse sticks and balls are used for adaptive lacrosse (emerging competition model) and protective gear is to be worn at all times.

**Note:** It is the position of US Lacrosse that consistent with applicable laws, participation in the game of women's lacrosse should be limited to females and participation in the game of men's lacrosse should be limited to males. US Lacrosse therefore supports separate teams for males and females, and encourages and supports development of separate programs for both genders at youth, scholastic, non-scholastic, collegiate and post collegiate levels. However, the issue of gender classifications in men's lacrosse and women's lacrosse is largely determined on a state by state basis, and the particular facts and circumstances of each situation will largely determine the outcome. As a result, it is not possible for US Lacrosse to provide definitive guidance on this issue to local youth lacrosse organizations and often times in adaptive lacrosse co-ed participation opportunities provide the best and/or only model of play for all parties.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Q. I want to start an adaptive lacrosse program in my community. Where do I start and who do I get in contact with?**

It's important to consult a resource person who can share their experiences and share what was effective and what was not. Each experience and each program is different. In order to provide more support and guidance for new and/or existing adaptive lacrosse programs, US Lacrosse has assembled an Adaptive Lacrosse Mentors Group of experienced coaches and program administrators to help support new and developing adaptive programs.

Contact US Lacrosse at [diversityprograms@uslacrosse.org](mailto:diversityprograms@uslacrosse.org) for mentor information.

The following organizations may also be potential partners or outreach sources when promoting your adaptive lacrosse program or events:

- Schools
- Orthotics & Prosthetics Offices
- Rehabilitation Hospitals, Physical Therapists, and other Medical Services
- Military Support Organizations (USO, Team Semper Fi, etc.)
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- YMCAs
- Youth Sports Leagues
- Community Centers
- State disability services departments (i.e. - Maryland Dept. of Disabilities)

### **Q. How do I find players?**

Outreach to your local schools is a good place to start. Parents are eager to find activity outlets for their children and word of mouth is powerful in the disabled community. Post flyers and contact information in local schools, after-school programs and organizations to generate interest. You can also reach out to local or regional disabled chapters and organizations to help solicit potential participants or to spread the word. If you are social media savvy, try creating a Facebook and/or Twitter page for your program or organization in order to strengthen your online presence and create an open forum to communicate and share information with players, coaches and parents.

### **Q. What is an appropriate coach to participant ratio during an adaptive lacrosse practice or a clinic?**

For a first-time participant and a wheelchair participant, it is best practice to secure one-to-one support between each trained coach/volunteer and participant. As your individuals participate in subsequent years that level of mentoring is not always as critical, and more autonomy by the participant could be possible. This ratio may vary for each program depending on the ability level



and experience of your participants, but as a best practice it is advised for you to prep for a 1:1 coach/participant ratio until you have a better understanding of each of your players and their level of disability.

### **Q. What if a participant gets hurt what do I do?**

You should have each participant's emergency contact information on-field during each practice or game. If a serious injury does occur, contact the primary parent/guardian immediately and call 911 if necessary.

### **Q. Do I need a special insurance or coverage for hosting clinics and camps?**

Any sports program or organization should have General Liability and Accident Medical Insurance. Although there are plenty of options for insuring your program, your participants can also receive full-coverage insurance through [US Lacrosse membership](#). As US Lacrosse members, each participant will receive high quality insurance benefits and protection to all registered members during the term of their membership.

US Lacrosse partners with Bollinger Insurance to provide exclusive on-the-field coverage for all US Lacrosse members. In addition, US Lacrosse and Bollinger provide extensive Risk Management information that you need to protect your players and stay safe on and off the field. Bollinger also offers members a number of [additional insurance coverage options](#) to supplement the coverages provided through USL membership.



### **Q. How do I find coaches and/or volunteers?**

Recruiting parents and special education teachers is the easiest way to find eager volunteers and coaches. Some programs even require that parents assist with practice once a week as a minimum service to the program or organization. You can also reach out to local high schools which offer service hours for community participation or you can look into developing a partnership with your local college or university in order to recruit student-athletes and physical education majors as potential coaches and volunteers. You may also want to reach out to your local or regional disabled chapter to see if they can assist you in soliciting interested volunteers or coaches for your program.

Be sure to analyze your current staffing needs to understand which roles you will need volunteers or coaches to fill, how often they will be needed and what tasks they will need to perform. When recruiting, be clear about what is expected through written job descriptions which include information on the roles and level of expertise required.



*Parkville Adaptive Lacrosse*

### **Q. What is the best playing surface for my team that has some able-bodied participants and some participants who use wheelchairs?**

There are limited ways to make a grass field easily accessible and it can present problems for many children, particularly those who use wheelchairs and walkers. Synthetic turf is a popular and versatile solution for participants of all abilities and it enables students with special needs to achieve their highest learning potential and level of independence. If the local community has a turf field available for outside use that could potentially alleviate some of your accessibility barriers. Use of a basketball court or indoor skating/hockey rink can also serve as alternative playing service for your participants.



## Q. What type of training or education should I provide for my coaches and volunteers?

Proper training ensures that volunteers and coaches are qualified to assist those that you serve. It is important that the training provides the volunteer with the skills and insight needed to adequately fill their position. The nature of the position will dictate the type and amount of training that a volunteer should complete. The process should be well documented and the volunteer's successful completion should be recorded.

Up-to-date files should be kept on all regular volunteers, including:

- Completed application
- Original signed waiver - updated annually
- Copy of up-to-date background screen results
- Documentation of volunteer registration
- Copies of appropriate certificates (i.e. first-aid, PSIA, etc.)
- Disability Awareness Training/People First Language
- Documentation of all completed trainings <sup>4</sup>

There are also other trainings for adaptive coaches and volunteers like the [Certified Disability Sports Specialist Course](#). The CDSS course is designed to benefit people at all different levels of engagement in disability sport. Through their participation in the CDSS program, volunteers, coaches, and professionals can all demonstrate to employers and organizations that they are leaders in disability sport. For additional adaptive training or educational opportunities visit the [ADA Information Center](#).

For sport-specific instruction, the [US Lacrosse Coaching Education Program](#) is the surest way to access everything you need to know to be a great lacrosse coach. It is our vision that all lacrosse teams are led by US Lacrosse certified coaches for the benefit and quality of the sport.



*Breaking Barriers Lacrosse*

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<sup>4</sup> Disabled Sports USA "Program Toolkit" Program Implementation <http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/> March 1, 2015

## DISABILITY AWARENESS AND ETIQUETTE

- Always identify the athlete or sport first, then the disability.
- Act naturally and don't monitor your every word and action. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions like "See you later" to a person who is vision impaired or "I'd better run along" to someone who uses a wheelchair.
- Create a disability friendly environment. We are more alike than different.
- Avoid portraying athletes with a disability who achieve moderate or average successes as extraordinary or superhuman. Overstating the achievements of athletes with a disability inadvertently suggests the original expectations were not high. Give appropriate praise as you would to any other athlete.
- When talking to an athlete who uses a wheelchair and the conversation lasts for more than a few minutes, place yourself at eye level with them. Do not lean on a person's wheelchair.
- When talking with an athlete who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others in your group.
- Do not assume an athlete with physical disability also has a hearing disability or that their intelligence is diminished in anyway. Speak in a normal tone and do not use language that is condescending.
- Avoid using emotional wording like tragic, afflicted, victim or wheelchair bound. Emphasize the ability and not the limitation.
- Do not make decisions for them about participating in activities; always ask.
- Treat athletes with disabilities just as you would any other team member. Have the same expectations as your other athletes (ie - punctuality, attendance, etc.) unless accommodations have been requested and agreed upon.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Introduction to Adapted Sports "Disability Related Definitions" page 7 <http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/>

## SAFETY AND INJURY PREVENTION

Athletes with disabilities do not represent a higher level of liability risk or risk management concern than athletes without disabilities. With proper planning and contingencies, athletes with disabilities can integrate into any program. Individualized assessments with parents and educators should take place prior to activity to help assess or identify potential safety concerns. Ensuring athlete safety is a priority. Through education, resources and training, adaptive lacrosse program administrators and coaches can recognize, reduce and respond to misconduct in sport. Please refer to [safesport.org](http://safesport.org) as a resource for more information.

### **Recommendations for coaches and program administrators:**

- Make sure everyone has filled out required paperwork (registration forms, liability waivers, etc.) prior to participation and keep medical histories on file.
- Be sure to record the athlete's primary and secondary disability.
- Use judgment determining when athletes should not participate.
- Teach proper mechanics and slowly increase training time and intensity.
- An emergency procedure plan should be distributed, posted and discussed with staff/volunteers pre-event.
- Do not push participants, instructors or volunteers beyond their physical or mental limits. If participants become overwhelmed, find a quiet place where they can relax, but still feel included. <sup>6</sup>

### **On-Site Safety Guidance:**

- Appropriate safety measures must be proactively enforced.
- Programs should provide a true representation of the services they offer in all marketing materials. Do not state you can serve all ages or disabilities if you do not have the trained instructors or correct equipment for all.
- Volunteers and instructors must be qualified, trained and confident in their assigned duties.
- Regular equipment inspections for wear and tear should be documented.
- Take extra precautions towards the end of the day when both coaches and participants may be tired.

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<sup>6</sup> Introduction to Adapted Sports "Injury Prevention." <http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/> February 19, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Disabled Sports USA "Program Toolkit" Safety Guidance <http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/> March 2, 2015

## ATHLETE INVOLVEMENT – COACHING TIPS

Lacrosse is the ideal activity for adaptive athletes as it provides social opportunities, companionship, and competition. It is important to keep the athlete involved with his or her athletic process. Specific disabilities present specific challenges to the adaptive participant. Some special coaching considerations for adaptive lacrosse participants are listed below:

- Be sure some consideration has been involved with matching the athlete with a volunteer/coach who makes him or her comfortable.
- Check-in with the athlete during their session and encourage the athlete to assist with moving equipment whenever possible.
- For participants with hearing impairments, speak clearly so the athlete can read lips. If outdoors, stand facing the sun so face is visible when speaking.
- Provide technical instruction and be prepared to update goals when the athlete shows improvement.
- Some adaptive athletes may be unable to self-monitor for hydration, pain, or overheating, so be familiar with their condition and remind them to drink water. Allow for breaks and check with them for activity-related injuries.
- Hold the athlete accountable to improving and find ways to keep him or her motivated to move to the next level.
- Triggers, such as sudden or loud noises, physical contact, specific places or people can cause an episode of anger or frustration. Triggers cannot always be anticipated. Learning each individual's triggers and encouraging the athlete to follow an individual pace and comfort level can help prevent them.
- Adapt your style of coaching to meet the needs of the participant. The athlete is the best resource for working with the disability. Be open and ask how to help.
- For participants with cognitive and brain impairment, allow for more time and provide more direction. Teach at a slower pace, followed by review.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Guide to Adaptive Rowing Pages 56-60

[http://www.usrowing.org/Libraries/Adaptive\\_Documents/2015\\_Guide\\_to\\_Adaptive\\_Rowing\\_FINAL\\_1.sflb.ashx](http://www.usrowing.org/Libraries/Adaptive_Documents/2015_Guide_to_Adaptive_Rowing_FINAL_1.sflb.ashx)

## RESOURCES

American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP)

[www.adaptedsports.org/](http://www.adaptedsports.org/)

Disabled Sports USA (DSUSA)

[www.disabledsportsusa.org](http://www.disabledsportsusa.org)

National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability

[www.nchpad.org](http://www.nchpad.org)

United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA)

[www.usaba.org](http://www.usaba.org)

Wheelchair and Ambulatory Sports USA (WASUSA)

[wasusa.org/](http://wasusa.org/)

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

[www.nclد.org/](http://www.nclد.org/)

U.S. Paralympics

[www.teamusa.org/US-Paralympics](http://www.teamusa.org/US-Paralympics)

Special Olympics

[www.specialolympics.org/](http://www.specialolympics.org/)

Blaze Sports America

[www.blazesports.org/](http://www.blazesports.org/)