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PARENTAL PUSH

7 Essential Steps for Active Lifestyles for Kids with Disabilities

Compiled by Daniel R. Humphreys, Program Development Manager, BlazeSports America

1) Attitude *The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.* – William James

As parents search for ways to help create an active lifestyle for their child with a disability, there's no better starting point than a positive attitude.

Positive, supportive and dynamic attitudes toward a child's involvement in sport – and to their overall potential – are key to your child's success. They must be contagious as well, to be absorbed by the child, his or her friends, peers and family. When everyone adopts a positive attitude, limits are rolled over and potential for success skyrockets.

When creating an environment where your child can flourish always remember that he or she, regardless of ability, is worthy of all the same opportunities offered to children without disabilities. Your child can have a happy and active lifestyle that meets his or her individual needs and interests.

2) Communication *The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.* – Peter Drucker

Putting the plan for a healthy, active lifestyle into action calls for communication between parent and child. While there may be times when a child needs to be gently encouraged to try a new activity, it is imperative to define his or her interests and to seek out opportunities accordingly.

After establishing the physical activity interests of your child, explore whether your child aspires to participate recreationally or competitively. Does he or she lean toward individual or team endeavors? What about goals, if any, for his or her fitness and how you can help him or her achieve

them? And be mindful of the fact that sometimes the most important part of communication is what isn't being said.

3) Choices *Happiness is not achieved by the conscious pursuit of happiness; it is generally the by-product of other activities.* – Aldous Huxley

Choose activities that are FUN! Any activity chosen for your child, either by you, your child, or as a group, should offer varying degrees of fun. Kids participate in sports for fun; they quit when they're not fun.

Community-based programs that offer activities for children with disabilities can provide suggestions to help both you and your child select the most appropriate activities for your child's interests and goals. BlazeSports America, a national organization with clubs across the U.S. can help you find a local program that will fit your needs. Additionally, NCPAD has a list of physical activity-related programs throughout the nation that offer opportunities for people with disabilities (www.ncpad.org).

4) Goal Setting *In absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.* – Unknown

Goal setting can be done before and after selecting appropriate activities. Before selecting a new pursuit, goals to consider include: making new friends, developing specific motor skills, learning independence, participating individually or on a team, increasing aerobic or anaerobic activity and inclusion with peers who may or may not have a disability.

After selecting an activity, decide on goals that are measurable and achievable. Write them down and put them up on the refrigerator or a bedroom door. Once a goal is achieved, set a new one.

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For example, let's say that recreational basketball was chosen for your child who is somewhat active, enjoys basketball, but has never played it. Here are some typical, and measurable, goals for this activity: learn the rules of the game, make two new friends, record what was enjoyed most at practice, lose 5 pounds by being more active, score a basket.

5) Healthy Diet *Water is the most neglected nutrient in our diet but one of the most vital.*

– Kelly Barton

A healthy lifestyle includes a healthy diet. By teaching your child the basics of balanced eating, and putting those basics into practice, you'll help him or her create a healthy eating lifestyle that can last a lifetime.

Be a role model for your children. Your actions speak louder than words. Use this opportunity to change your own eating habits and create a healthier you along with your child.

A good start to healthy eating is learning the basics of the Food Guide Pyramid. An electronic copy of the pyramid can be downloaded from NCPAD at www.ncpad.org/nutrition/fact_sheet.php?sheet=93. By using the Food Guide Pyramid, you can help your child learn about the nutrients a body needs to be healthy – carbohydrates, protein, fat (lipids), vitamins, minerals and water.

For information specific to age, gender and physical activity level, go to www.mypyramid.gov/ to obtain a personalized Food Guide Pyramid.

6) Independence *Great ability develops and reveals itself increasingly with every new assignment.*

– Baltasar Gracian

Attitude, communication, selecting appropriate activities, goal setting and a healthy diet will help you help your child to become as independent and self-sufficient as possible. There are however, several other factors to consider as your

child strives toward a heightened level of independence and self-sufficiency.

FAILURE is a necessary component of growth. Mistakes are opportunities to learn, and failure is an opportunity to try again. Don't be afraid to let your child fail. Dealing with it constructively is a stepping stone to growth and independence.

While allowing your child to fail every now and then, you must also be there to SUPPORT his or her ability to find a way to succeed. Be positive and supportive and don't set limits on his or her potential. Children have an uncanny ability to live up to expectations, no matter how high or low. Convey your realistic expectations in a supportive manner, and watch your child achieve great success and independence.

Be PERSISTENT when initially involving your child in a physical activity. If you have communicated well with your child and know his or her interests, fear not. Be persistent in providing him or her with opportunities to be active, even if your child is not enthusiastic initially.

Do your best to make your home, your child's school environment, and places your child frequents, as barrier-free as possible. Often times the disabling factor is not a person's ability, but the inadequate ENVIRONMENT in which he or she must function. The less restrictions that your child faces at home and in public, the more independent and self-sufficient he or she will become. These changes include not just eliminating physical barriers, but mental barriers as well.

7) Finding and Adaptive Sports Program

Many resources exist for a parent in search of an adapted sports program for their child. To find a local program, contact the YMCA, park district, adapted P.E. teachers in the school district, local, provincial or national Parks and

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PARASPORT ONTARIO MISSION: *Providing support to all members of the disability community – regardless of age or stage in life – to find, connect with, and participate in competitive and recreational sport programs and activities of their choice to enhance physical function and quality of life.*