

Teaching & Coaching Swimmers with a Disability

INTRODUCTION

Swim teaching and coaching is about finding out what abilities a swimmer has and creating the best learning/training environment for that swimmer to progress. Any approach must be swimmer centred with the needs of the swimmer being put first. All swimmers deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Teaching and coaching swimmers who have a disability is no different to teaching and coaching non disabled swimmers.

Qualified teachers and coaches will easily adapt their swimming knowledge to individualise the learning and training process based on the abilities of swimmers with a disability. The basic principles of B.L.A.B.T still apply and it is merely a case of adjusting and adapting according to the individual swimmers.

From a health and safety point of view it is important to acknowledge what the specific impairment factors are. This is achieved through quality communication and an assessment process where the principles are no different to assessing the abilities of any swimmer new to a programme or club.

INCLUDING DISABLED SWIMMERS

It is important to assess the swimmer's ability *in the water*, in order to determine which group would be appropriate and which sessions would be of best benefit. Swimmers with a disability may have very different movement abilities in the water to what they have on land.

All swimmers should receive appropriate levels of coaching, water time and land conditioning related to the level at which they are performing and their trainability. It is important not to underestimate the ability of the swimmer. Experience and history has shown us that swimmers exceed expectations in terms of skills achieved and the volume of work that can be performed once impairment factors are overcome or adapted.

Remember we all rise to a challenge!

Where land training is provided, consideration must be given to the access requirements of disabled swimmers and the support needs of those who are providing the training.

CLASSIFICATION

If you are dealing with Learn to Swim and early swimmer development then classification is not relevant but as swimmers move up the competitive ladder they will need to be classified.

Classification is based on an individual swimmers functional ability to swim a particular stroke. It is important to note that swimmers who are said to have the same disability have many individual differences. Their abilities and impairment factors will vary making it impossible to pigeon hole swimmers and create guidelines of a one size fits all criteria.

This is very evident in classifications where swimmers with the same disability can be classified into different classification groups.

COMMUNICATION

Teaching and coaching relies on good communication. In all sports it is necessary for the teacher or coach to adapt their communication style to the athletes they work with. Disability swimming is no different and the swimmers will very quickly help to identify how they best communicate. There are some obvious modifications for different impairment groups, for example visually impaired swimmers will require good verbal instruction and discover by feel while deaf swimmers will require good visual demonstrations.

All the regular communication guidelines such as clear and simple instructions, offering feedback, two way communication all apply the same as in any sport or life environment.

WHO ELSE CAN HELP?

Some Counties have Disability Liaison Officers in place and by 2009 it is anticipated that all Counties will have someone in post. These liaison officers are a valuable contact, they will have access to knowledge about competition opportunities, and be a source of help to local clubs. If you want to know if your County has a Disability Liaison Officer, please contact your ASA Regional Office.

There are many good examples around England of swimmers with a disability that are included in regular learn to swim and club training programmes. There are very few disabilities that would not allow a swimmer to be included in these programmes.

***“Focus on swimming
Focus on the ability
Coach the individual”***