

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS

Ensuring Inclusion of Children and Youth with Disabilities



Impact of 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic on the Movement Behaviours of Children and Youth with Disabilities

Public health restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have had a dramatic impact on the movement behaviours – physical activity, recreational screen time and sleep – of children and youth. However, there is increased concern from families and clinicians on the specific impact of the pandemic on the movement behaviours of children and youth with disabilities (CYD).

CYD are a marginalized group, where engaging in physical activity especially has been further impacted due to the unique barriers CYD face. These unique barriers include: lack of equipment, inaccessible indoor and outdoor activity spaces, a limited number of professionals trained to adequately support the physical activity of children and youth with different abilities, and high program and equipment costs.

Results from surveys and interviews conducted with parents and CYD in the Spring and Fall of 2020 highlight concerning physical activity and sedentary behaviour movement profiles of CYD. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, CYD were engaging in even less physical activity and more recreational screen time. Furthermore, CYD experienced a decline in their mental (e.g., anxiety) and physical (e.g., joint and muscle pain) health. The physical activity and health of CYD was already poorer than in the general population of Canadian children and youth. COVID-19 has made it worse.

During the interviews, families of CYD often highlighted that living within a community that supported accessible physical activity allowed their family to remain active while families who did not have this type of support struggled to maintain physical activity during the pandemic. Such *community affordances* (i.e., what the community can offer to support participation) and families' built and social environments influenced the themes of: shifting of routines, reduced parental capacity, more unoccupied and unprogrammed time, and reduced physiotherapy opportunities.

IDENTIFIED THEMES IMPACTING FAMILIES OF CYD DURING COVID-19



Recommendations for Sport and Physical Activity Programmers and Administrators

As sport and physical activity organizations continue or begin to reopen their doors for programming, it is important that CYD are not left out. CYD are an equity-deserving group. Organizations should therefore strive to ensure accessible, inclusive and quality programming for *all* children and youth, including CYD.

The following considerations can help to better support CYD and their families:



Quality Programming

Programs that are offered to CYD must be created with an *intentional* focus on quality programming. Quality participation is achieved when persons with a disability view their involvement in sport or physical activity as satisfying and enjoyable, and experience outcomes that they consider important. Applying an intentional focus on program quality includes considering the physical, social and program environmental supports for program members as well as strategies for fostering a quality participation experience through the building blocks of autonomy, belonging, challenge, engagement, mastery, and meaning. View this [video](#) for further tips on how to create quality sport and physical activity experiences.



Capacity Building

Program coaches and instructors play a critical role in fostering children and youth's quality experiences in sports and physical activity programs. It is for this reason that all sport and physical activity programs being offered to children and youth have coaches and instructors that are trained to support the development of CYD. Administrators should make available opportunities for their coaches and instructors to be trained to support CYD in their physical literacy journey.

Consider partnering with other organizations within your community that work with CYD to enhance training for staff. Some examples of national disability organizations that your organization may consider reaching out to include Special Olympics Canada, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and Canucks Autism Network.



Infrastructure and Policies

It is important that the setting in which sport and physical activity takes place has infrastructure and policies that are accessible and welcoming to all children and youth (including CYD). This includes the physical features of facilities, parks and playgrounds, and neighbourhoods where programming is offered. Programmers and administrators should consider not only whether CYD and their families can access the activity space, but also the accessibility of the surrounding environment (e.g., availability of accessible parking, wide and barrier-free entry points, ramps and uniform surfaces) and the appropriateness of equipment for CYD. Furthermore, organizational policies should ensure that CYD are given their full right to participate with dignity.



Family Approach

Consider how programming and policies affect families of CYD. For example, to avoid the community spread of COVID-19, many sport and physical activity programs have started to implement a one-child per parent policy. However, if a parent has multiple children this policy may not make it possible for their child to participate. If capacity allows, consider offering programming for CYD and their siblings. Taking a family centered approach may make it easier for all families to engage in activities.

Consider how to reduce the burden of programming on parents – are parents necessary to facilitate programming? For example, while virtual programming may help to reduce health safety concerns, parents may be required to support and facilitate programming for CYD.

Resources to Support Recommendations for Sport and Physical Activity Programs



Quality Programming

- [Accessibility, Inclusion, Quality Participation](#)
- [Quality Participation Quick Guide – Step 1](#)
- [Quality Participation Quick Guide – Step 2](#)
- [Blueprint for Building Quality Participation for Children, Youth and Adults with a Disability](#)
- [Knowledge Translation Bulletin: Fostering Quality Participation for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [Blueprint for Building Quality Participation for Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [Blueprint for Building Quality Participation for Children and Youth with Intellectual Disabilities](#)



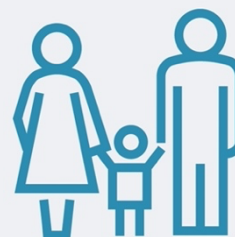
Capacity Building

- [Coaching Kids of All Abilities](#)
- [Online Learning Tool: Moving to Inclusion](#)
- [Coaching Tips – Making Sport Inclusive for All](#)
- [Becoming Para Ready](#)



Infrastructure and Policies

- [Inclusive Playgrounds Resource](#)
- [Accessibility Legislation: Accessibility Services Canada](#)
- [All Abilities Welcome](#)
- [Adapted Equipment Ideas](#)



Family Approach

- [F-Words in Childhood Disability](#)
 - [Ability Toolkit](#)
 - [Curatio: Plan to Move Your Kids](#)
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ENDNOTES

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<https://cdpp.ca/contact>

Website

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