



Physical Activities Youth

(Adapted from article by Angelo Montagnino)

This booklet provides suggestions and ideas to promote skill competency and enhancement. For youth that have been involved in sports, some of these modifications may be rudimentary. However, many children and youth who are blind or partially sighted have had limited exposure to physical activity and so may need to begin with simple concepts and movements.

As such, these activities may be suitable for youth in elementary and secondary school years, depending on the youth's physical activity experience and skills. Involve the youth in building a physical activity plan that meets their needs and skill level.

A few tips before you start:

Use Descriptive Verbal Instructions

Since the main avenue of learning for many youth with low vision is through hearing, verbal instructions should be given when demonstrating a skill. Give clear, concise and consistent directions. Say what it is you are actually doing in body-oriented language. For example, when teaching someone to hop, say, "Stand on your left foot, raise your right foot, and jump in the air on your left foot." Cite large landmarks in the playing area and elsewhere to guide a youth with low vision: "Walk to the exit door, turn toward the window." Using terms like "quarter turn," "half turn," or "full turn" may be helpful to the totally blind person. Use tactual, hands-on demonstrations with verbal instruction. Describe where things are by using the face of a clock for orientation, with the youth at six o'clock: for example, "The water fountain is at seven o'clock, about 12 feet away."

Explore Movement

Encourage movement exploration. Focus on how the body moves by bending, stretching, turning, swinging, and curling the body, by itself, as well as in relationships to objects and other people. Help the youth to become aware of his/her body and the ways it can move. A good movement vocabulary will help the youth learn new skills more efficiently.



Safety

Ensure youth are able to **jump**, **land**, and **roll** while standing in place, while moving, and while jumping off equipment. This is a good safety skill, and they will become more confident knowing that they can handle themselves on a spill.

Activities:

Body-Centered or Individual Sports and Activities

These activities are most valuable for the youth with vision loss and require very little change. Give explicit body oriented instructions such as "to your left", or "Pull elbow into sides" or "reach forward and then up."

Provide a change in floor texture. For example, place a rubber carpet runner or tumbling mats next to the wall so that the youth knows when he steps onto the changed surface that he is stepping out of bounds. The change in surface is also a warning signal to him that a wall or object is coming up so he needs to put on the brakes. The youth will move much more freely if he knows that hazardous objects are not on the playing area.

Dancing

Rhythms can provide great fun for youth with vision loss.

- Line dances—one line, everyone holding hands.
- Novelty dances—all doing same movements in own self-space.
- Partner dances—keep in body or voice contact.
- Modern or jazz—give youth a specific boundary area free of obstacles.
- Aerobic dance—step aerobics and basic movements are great.

Where needed provide extra verbal instructions, "up close" or hands on demonstration.



Gymnastics

- Vaulting—start with hands on vault or use a one-step approach.
- Beam—encourage bare feet or light slippers; or use a long strip of carpet the same size as the beam on the floor.
- Tumbling—provide an area free of objects; have a buffer area around the exercise mat to give a warning of upcoming obstacles. The mat should be of the best color contrast, a verbal cue could help keep the youth going straight and signal a totally blind tumbler when he approaches the end of the mat.

Archery

Provide a tactual floor cue (long board or sidewalk) perpendicular to the target. Have youth stand sideward to tactual floor cue. Provide a sound cue below or in front of target. Help youth site target by telling him to move bow to the left, right, up, or down. Use large traffic cones about 1/3 distance to help a youth locate the target.

Bowling

Use a handrail with the free hand to guide bowler in a straight path toward pins. Align the youth up with pins. Give immediate feedback as to how many pins are knocked down.

Golf

Align the youth up with ball and target. Help the youth get the side of his body facing the target. A sound or visual cue can be used. He/she should wait for an "all clear" signal before swinging.

Running

Partners can provide safe assistance in running (See Module 1 Sighted Guide Techniques). They may hold hands or use brush contact (lightly touch back of hand to back of hand or arm to arm). Youth who are blind or partially sighted and guide runner can each hold the end or loop of a flexible piece of material (loop can go over one wrist of each runner). A runner with vision loss may be able to run to a "caller" for a short run. The youth can also run by himself by holding onto a rope stretched out between two points. Provide a



warning signal about 8 feet from each end. If tape is wrapped around the rope, the youth can quickly turn at that point and continue a shuttle run.

Swimming

When the youth is swimming the front crawl along the side of the pool, watch that he doesn't bump his head against the wall. Teach him to use a delayed arm stroke as he anticipates the upcoming wall. Use tappers (person tapping swimmer with a pole with a soft end) to signal the end of the pool. A racing lane should be about 3 feet wide in order to give immediate feedback to him about the direction of his stroke in relation to a straight line. When diving, have the youth request an "all clear" signal before taking his dive.

Athletics

- Run tandem with a sighted guide (see Sighted Guide Techniques in Module 1).
- In high jumping use a one-step approach; some youth who are blind or partially sighted may be able to take more than one step and be successful at clearing the bar.
- The triple jump and the long jump can be attempted from a standing start. Provide a sound source from the direction you want the youth to move in (refer to Appendix C of It's A Fit Guide).
- The discus and shot-put require the use of a sound clue (clap, beeper, or counting) from the direction you want the object to go in.

Some youth may not need any modification; some may need a visual cue to see the jump board or the bar.

Wrestling

Use a hand touch start. Whenever body contact is lost, start again in the stance position with the hand touch.



Popular Team Sports

Although the actual game of most team sports can be quite difficult for total involvement of a youth with vision loss, most of the fundamental skills of each sport can easily be taught to him/her and then modified games can be played. The game should not be changed so much that it no longer resembles the intended game. More focus on the basic skills of the sport not only benefits the youth with vision loss but also helps improve the sighted child's skills. Try to find the best position for the youth with vision loss to play or the part of the game to become involved in.

Basketball

Focus on dribbling skills. People with vision loss can become very skilled at dribbling a ball in different directions. Another player can dribble alongside to provide a sound cue.

- Make up short ball-handling and dribbling routines.
- During free throws, help position the youth at free throw line and give a clapping sound clue while standing directly under the basket. With some exploration or trial and error, the youth will learn at what angle he must release the ball in order to make a basket. If needed, tap the rim with the ball once or twice. If needed, protect him from a rebound.
- A beeper could be placed at the back rim of the basket and the youth could locate the sound source to shoot his basket.
- A small carpet square could be stuck to the free throw line and the youth could dribble around the court. When he gets to the carpet square, he would then turn to the sound source and shoot.
- When playing with a partner or group, be sure to warn the youth with a vision loss of an upcoming pass. For example, "Hey, Todd" (get attention), (pause) yell "Catch," (then pass the ball).
- When passing the ball, the use of a bounce pass gives additional warning.
- Youth with vision loss can be the designated foul shooter.
- Before throwing the ball, give the receiver a sound clue. A bounce pass will be easier to receive than a direct pass.

Utilize a large, heavy balloon as a ball to slow down the speed of the action. The use of yarn balls, fluff balls and nerf balls lessen the impact of a direct hit to the body. These should be used when playing the popular game of dodge ball. When throwing at a target, provide a sound reinforcement (e.g. bells) behind the target. Beepers can be used or just have someone strike the target first.

Baseball/Softball

- Practice hitting a ball off a tee or from a suspended rope. First use the hand and then practice with a bat.
- Playing in the field requires specific skill development. A youth may be able to play the field, especially with a good buddy.
- A good choice is to be a designated hitter for both teams. Use of foam balls or whiffle balls and a rubber or plastic bat can provide a much safer environment and the game could also be played indoors. Bat off tee if needed, run to the foul side of first if needed. Run with a partner. The partner is on the inside. Get behind the partner or buddy if on third.
- To practice striking skills, place a lightweight ball with a bell in it or attached to it on a tee or suspend it from the ceiling. If you want the ball to be knocked off the rope when it is whacked, attach it with Velcro. (Place one part of the Velcro on the end of the rope and the matching Velcro onto the ball.) In this way, the youth will learn about the projection of the ball as well as learning how to control his hit in determining the power and direction in which the ball will go. The youth vision loss may also use a slow motion ball or large whiffle ball and oversize plastic bat. A ball can be rolled on a table or the floor. A large bell or several small bells placed inside a large whiffle ball will make an excellent rolling target.

Kickball

- Run bases with a sighted guide, rather than having someone else run for the youth who is blind or partially sighted. He needs the running activity.



- Kick at a stationary ball if needed. Be a designated kicker for both teams.
- The youth with vision loss can learn to deliver the ball in a good underhand pitch while the catcher gives him a sound clue. Have a defensive player to the side and several feet closer than a pitcher who is blind or partially sighted.

Soccer

- A youth with vision loss may be able to play defence by himself or with a partner side by side, put the ball into play for both teams, corner kick or take penalty kicks.
- If needed a beep soccer ball is available. For kicking practice, use a box about 1-foot square as a soccer ball. The youth can hear where the box is sliding to; when the sound stops, so has the movement of the box. The youth can easily locate the box and kick it again.
- A milk carton with bells in it is also a fun item to kick and track. Keep away games can easily be made up with a partner or small group teams.
- A tin can with pebbles in it can be used when playing outside on an asphalt or concrete surface.

Hockey

Make use of the same hitting items as in soccer.

- Allow the youth to use the goalie's wider and flatter stick (greater surface area will aid the student in finding the puck or ball).

Volleyball

Practice lead-up skills of volleying with a large, heavy balloon or beach ball.

- The slower speed of the balloon gives the partially sighted youth a better chance to track the motion. This activity could provide more success for sighted youth also.

- Modified games can be played with a sponge ball, nerf ball, beach ball, or large balloon. Players can stay up close to the net or may be able to do everything under ideal or good conditions. The player with vision loss can be a designated server. The team gets their regular serves in addition to the designated serve. A youth who is totally blind should be given a chance to learn all the striking fundamentals with a good toss and a strike command.

For more information, see Sport Modifications Guide in Module 2 of the API TOOLKIT.



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