IV.   PLANNING AN INCLUSIVE PROGRAM

Objectives of section:
- Introduce a step-by-step process for inclusion.
- Identify what information, sources of information and the individuals who might be able to support the inclusion of a participant with a disability.
- Raise awareness of safety considerations.

When physical activity leaders are initially presented with the challenge and opportunity of planning their activities for participants with a disability, feelings of uncertainty often surface. These feelings are natural and are to be expected. They may stem from a lack of information and experience with persons with a disability and initial insecurities related to working outside one's comfort zone. Experience has shown that this typically changes as one becomes more familiar with the participant.

The Moving to Inclusion (MTI) Process is a series of steps that emphasize the importance of planning so that successful inclusion can occur. While inclusion might occur naturally, it is very possible that you will have to plan for it.

The process of developing an inclusive program involves many of the same steps that would apply in the development of any successful program. Typically these include such things as gathering information about the participants, identifying appropriate resources for the program, planning and developing specific activities of the program, and evaluating the success of the program. The process for planning an inclusive program is no different.

In Moving to Inclusion, we have identified a process with nine specific steps:
- Obtain Information
- Identify Support
- Define Safety Concerns
- Assess Skill
- Set Realistic Objectives / Expectations
- Utilize an Individualized Approach
- Select Activities
- Make Necessary Modifications
- Implement and Evaluate the Program

Depending on the situation, all of these steps might not receive equal emphasis but it is likely that all or most steps will be utilized in the majority of instances. Variations in one's approach will occur from one setting to another. For example, the assessment step will be very informal in most recreational situations but considerably more formalized in an educational environment or an exercise prescription situation. Likewise, the establishment of objectives will be considerably more important in a competitive coaching or physical education setting than in a recreational or summer camp environment.

We are going to look at these steps in more detail. Steps 1 and 2 go hand-in-hand so we will discuss them together. Both of these steps are part of the information gathering portion of this process.

STEP 1: OBTAIN INFORMATION: Obtain Pertinent Information; Identify What Information You Need

This step involves gathering all the pertinent information about the participant who is joining or attending your program so that he or she can be included and can participate with a high level of success and enjoyment.

Step 2: IDENTIFY SUPPORT: Identify Persons Who Currently Support and/or Those Who Can Provide Support in the Future

A successful, inclusive physical activity program is based, in part, on teamwork. In addition to the activity leader, a positive physical activity experience is enhanced by the support of others, including parents/guardians, friends, other leaders, and administrators (e.g. principal, camp director, program supervisor, etc.)

Fundamental to this information gathering phase, is the focus on the individual. Every participant – regardless of whether or not he/she has a disability – has different abilities and skills, different background experiences, and different reasons for participating. A leader who is accustomed to planning successful programs will automatically take these factors into consideration for all the participants so gathering information about a participant with a disability is just an extension of this process.

Focusing on the individual will make it immediately apparent that persons with the same disability, while participating in the same activity, have different needs. It is important to recognize and appreciate this fact, and not get caught up in the mindset that all individuals with a given disability will be able to be included in the same way. Each individual, even those with the same disability, will have different needs depending upon their abilities, skill levels, past experiences, and attitudes toward physical activity.

LEARNING EXERCISE: Think about what information would help you ensure the individual is included in your activity. Make a quick list in response to each of these questions.

- What information might you require? Think about what would be most helpful to you as you plan a program to include a particular individual.
- From whom might you gather this information?

See link to module 4 answer key on the table of contents

Additional information that you might need to gather pertains to the activity and the particulars that relate to including a specific participant in that activity. This might include:
- Specifics about the activity itself
- Requirements of the activity (e.g. equipment, protective gear, etc.)
- Accessibility of the venue or environment in which the activity will take place (e.g. school, community, gymnasium, playground, waterfront, etc.)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: How might the information you gather and who you get it from differ by the type of program that you are running; for example, a coaching situation versus a summer camp situation or a physical education class versus a community recreation program?

We won't answer this question right now however, you can refer to the appendices where you will find a number of case studies that apply the MTI Process to a variety of scenarios. If you read these various case studies you will be able to see how the information you gather and the people you get it from might vary from one situation to another.

STEP 3: DEFINE SAFETY CONCERNS

The next step in the process is the identification of factors that might affect the safety of the participant in the physical activity setting. Safety is of paramount importance when planning and leading a physical activity program.

LEARNING EXERCISE: What are some things that immediately come to mind when you think about ensuring an activity is safe for all participants?

See link to module 4 answer key on the table of contents

A comprehensive way to look at safety is to consider it in relation to four key aspects of the activity. These are:

Participants   **Environment**   **Equipment**   **Instruction**

LEARNING EXERCISE: Using the categories represented above, think of some possible questions you should ask about each of these aspects. These are not the only questions you might ask but they will serve to get you thinking about ways to ensure the activity is a safe one. Once you have noted some questions for each category, see the next page to compare your answers.

Participants

Is the activity appropriate for the age and developmental level of the participant?

A fundamental consideration is the appropriateness of the activity for the age and developmental level of the participant. A participant may come to your program with motor skills that are less developed than his or her peers. Modifications may have to be made to the activity to ensure that the participant is not at risk.

Are there special precautions that might be necessary?

For example, do you need to keep some doors locked or keep particular pieces of equipment out of sight so they are not tempting to an individual who struggles with attention or focus? Do you need a physical barrier in place so a person who is blind can't wander past the 'safe zone' of the activity area (e.g. at a waterfront)? Do you need to establish a 'stop' signal that all participants understand?

Are there restrictions to participation that apply to the participant with a disability?

For the most part, the precautions necessary to ensure safety in a physical activity program are the same for everyone. There may, however, be restrictions to participation that apply to the participant with a disability. It is advisable to familiarize yourself with the participant's medical records that note such restrictions. This should occur as part of Step 1: Obtaining Information. Some examples include:

• A participant with Down syndrome may be prone to atlanto-axial instability (lax ligaments in the neck) and should avoid forward rolls and other activities that place stress on the neck if the condition is present.

• Some participants with spinal cord injuries or multiple sclerosis (MS) may have difficulty regulating their body temperature. Most people have automatic cooling systems that will kick in to help cool the body during intense physical activity. For some participants with spinal cord injuries or MS, this process is impaired and they can overheat very quickly. You need to make sure that you constantly monitor these participants for signs of heat exhaustion during physical activity and provide plenty of rest periods and water breaks.

• In some instances, fatigue can increase the likelihood of the onset of seizures for a participant with a seizure disorder. You will need to monitor the participant's fatigue level and provide opportunities for rest as needed.

Some participants may be taking medications that have an impact on participation in physical activity. Knowing if and how medications affect the individual during exercise is an important piece of information to obtain.

Environment

What are the specific safety needs of the participants in the activity environment?

Survey the playing environment for safety concerns. For example, check the evenness of the playing field to prevent a wheelchair from tipping; orient a participant with a visual impairment to obstacles, stairs, and exits; ensure the existence of visual signals or alarms to alert a person who is deaf to an emergency situation.

Are there, and are you aware of the emergency procedures specific to your physical activity environment?

Establish emergency action plans and discuss safety and accident policies with your supervisors. Ensure all activity leaders are aware of their roles in an emergency situation and let the participants know what is expected of them.

Is there appropriate signage – directional and otherwise – to supply appropriate information to the participants?

For example, is there signage that will assist the participants in getting to where they need to go? Is there signage that gives clear directions about what they need to do in an activity or to provide information such as correct position for a weight lifting move?

Is the environment safe in terms of attitudes?

Just as important as the physical safety of the environment is the emotional safety - staff need to be trained to create a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for all participants.

Does the environment or facility match the age, skill and fitness level of the participant?

For example, for younger or less skilled participants, choosing smaller sized surfaces allows for more rewarding experiences, less frustrations and it increases skill development.

Equipment

Is the equipment safe? Is the equipment in working order?

The equipment utilized in a physical activity setting must be well maintained, correctly assembled and properly fitted. Be particularly cautious if standard equipment has been modified. Protective equipment such as a hockey helmet must meet certified safety standards as dictated by the sport.

The equipment that the participant brings to the activity setting should also be in good repair. For example, brakes on wheelchairs should be adjusted correctly; wheelchair inserts should be properly secured; tires should be properly inflated; and walkers should be correctly fitted.

Does the equipment match the age, skill and fitness level of the participant?

Instruction

Are the participants being actively supervised for the inherent risk involved?
The uniqueness of the participant must be considered. For example, a participant with an intellectual disability may require one-on-one adult supervision during a canoeing unit. A participant with a visual impairment may not be able to clearly see a demonstration and may require additional verbal instructions. A participant who is hard of hearing may not have heard your instructions that outline the ready position for a motor skill and may require further demonstration.

Have you reviewed safety rules with the participants?
It may be necessary to periodically remind participants of the rules of the activity setting. Make sure you communicate safety rules to the participants in a way they understand. A participant with an intellectual disability or a participant with autism may not fully understand the concept of danger and cause and effect. Consider a buddy system to assist you to monitor a safe learning environment.

Ensuring the safety of all participants should be a fundamental consideration of every person – leaders and participants – in any physical activity setting. Participants must learn to take their and others' safety into consideration and exercise that awareness in their actions. Leaders are responsible for designing the environment, equipment and their instructional methods to ensure safety concerns are addressed.

To summarize the key points of this section, it is important that you:
- Know your participants and what precautions are required to ensure the safe participation of all individuals.
- Know where dangers exist and take the necessary measures to reduce or eliminate those risks.
- Develop a culture of awareness and responsibility. Teach your participants about safety.
- Establish emergency procedures and communicate roles and responsibilities to everyone.

STEP 4: ASSESS SKILL

Setting appropriate expectations for the participant will require an assessment of his or her current skill level. This can be a formal or an informal process. Informal assessment includes such methods as anecdotal notes, observation, discussion, checklists, and so on. Formal assessment includes formal tests, standardized tests, exercise protocols, etc.

There are many assessment tools on the market and assessment tools designed for many purposes. The goal of this section is not to go into detail on how to conduct assessments or what measurement tool is the best one to use. Rather, the intent is to draw your attention to the need for assessing what one can or can't do in the particular situation where you are working with an individual. As noted earlier, often this will be an informal process utilizing readily available information and the gathering of information through observation, screening, first-day, quick skill assessments, etc. However, if the scenario dictates a formal assessment, then you should conduct one, using the appropriate tools for the situation. For example, a fitness testing situation will involve specific fitness tests and equipment; an educational testing environment might involve a curriculum-based assessment tool; a coaching situation might involve a technical skills inventory or performance-based skill testing.

Knowing what the participant can do in the physical activity setting will help you to set appropriate expectations for participation and set realistic goals and objectives, the next step in the MTI Process.

STEP 5: SET REALISTIC OBJECTIVES / EXPECTATIONS

Realistic objectives and expectations will lead to success more often than no objectives, or objectives that don't match the individual. As with assessment, the formality of the objective-setting process will vary depending on the situation, with recreational situations requiring considerably less-formal objectives than a competitive coaching, personalized fitness or educational environment.

In an educational environment, there may be several formal objectives that have been articulated on the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a written outline describing the learning expectations, indicators and strategies required to support a participant's learning. Most other environments won't use a document as formalized as an IEP but that doesn't mean objectives are not being set. In a competitive coaching situation, annual or seasonal goals are common-place for each athlete.

Best practices would suggest that setting objectives – regardless of how formal or informal that process is – will result in a more positive outcome. Objectives assist in ensuring that the expectations and goals are set at a challenging yet appropriate level that match the participant's skills and abilities. The most effective objectives are SMART objectives.

SMART Objectives

SMART is a common acronym that is utilized in objective and goal-setting exercises. It refers to the qualities that make an objective an effective one.

Specific: Think of this as the 'what' of the objective. What is it that you want the participant to accomplish? A SMART objective will articulate exactly what the desired outcome is that you want to see.

Measurable: Think of this as the 'how' of the objective. This is the quantitative criterion that allows one to determine if the objective has been achieved. It tells you how the individual will demonstrate that they have accomplished the stated goal (the outcome), in a tangible versus subjective way. This outcome should be observable so that it is easily identified and clearly discernible from one observer to the next. In other words, it means that anyone observing the student should reach the same conclusion. There should be no guesswork or interpretation required to determine whether or not the objective was met. It should be readily apparent if the individual met the objective or did not meet it because the measurement aspect of the objective was clearly defined from the outset.

Attainable: An effective objective will include a goal that is attainable for the specific individual within the time frame identified. For example, if someone has never played football before, expecting them to be the starting quarterback is probably not a very attainable goal in their first season of play.

Realistic: A realistic goal is one that can be reached. Is there a reasonable chance that the outcome can be accomplished by the participant, in the situation presented, with the resources available? For example, expecting a participant with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy to wheel without stopping around the track in his manual wheelchair chair might be unrealistic since he will likely have limited upper body strength and be unable to wheel that distance, let alone do it continuously.

Timely: This aspect of the objective identifies a specific period of time in which to complete the goal/objective. As indicated above, this is directly related to the attributes of attainable and realistic. Is it reasonable to expect that the objective can be accomplished in the time frame identified? The time frame for an objective might be dictated by the length of the sport season, the time between report cards, or the duration of a Red Cross swimming program. It could also be any subset of this longer time period and objectives could be defined for the session, the day, the week, the unit, and so on.

STEP 6: UTILIZE AN INDIVIDUALIZED APPROACH

The next step in the inclusive planning process is to utilize an individualized approach in program implementation. This is directly related to the person-first approach that is central to inclusion. This step involves using the information gathered to implement your objectives in a manner that is appropriate for the individual and will maximize the level of participation for that individual. The goal to be achieved is not only that the person is an important and active participant in the activity (versus just an onlooker) but also that there is planned learning, acquisition of skills and set outcomes that can be measured after the implementation of the program.

An individualized approach will allow you to identify the intended adaptations or accommodations to ensure the successful inclusion of this individual. Focusing on the individual should enable you to determine the most suitable instructional or coaching method, the level of assistance needed, what modifications might be effective, how the environment should be structured, and so on.

STEP 7: SELECT ACTIVITIES

The next step in the process is the selection of activities. This occurs at two levels. At one level, and in some but not all situations, this involves the initial selection of the activity or program to be pursued. What activity is of interest to the individual? What does he or she want to play, learn, accomplish? Do his/her interests lean towards softball or soccer, a structured activity or a pick-up game, an individual sport or a team sport, skiing or skating, etc.? In some cases, the activity selection will be dictated by the situation, for example, in a physical education class. However, when there is the opportunity for choice on the part of the participant and for direction by an activity leader, it is important to identify activities appropriate for the interests, age, and capabilities of the individual.

The other level where the selection of activities applies is **within** the actual physical activity program. It is important to be aware of this aspect because this is typically where the activity leader will have the most input and responsibility. This is where most decisions around the specific activities to be conducted and where judgments related to modifications (the next step) will occur. Examples of this level of activity selection are provided below.

- In a coaching environment this might include which drills are selected.
- In a physical education class this might include the specific tasks that will be utilized to teach a new skill or activity. It is also the actual activities that the teacher chooses to introduce to his or her class in order to meet curriculum goals.
- In a recreational fitness class, this might include what exercises the leader includes in the exercises routine.
- In a swimming lesson, this might include substituting one stroke for another.
In a summer camp environment, this might include choosing a canoe over a kayak.

STEP 8: MAKE NECESSARY MODIFICATIONS

Making modifications is an important aspect of planning inclusive programs. Almost any sport, game or activity can be modified or adapted in some manner to fit the needs and capabilities of a specific participant. Making modifications is all about including the individual in the activity so that he/she experiences success and enjoyment. It involves using your creativity and flexibility to ensure the successful participation of each individual in the activity.

Due to the importance of this step in the MTI process, the next section is devoted entirely to this step.

STEP 9: IMPLEMENT AND EVALUATE THE PROGRAM / ACTIVITY

The last step in the inclusive process is implementation, In other words, actually carrying out the program or doing the activity – followed by evaluation. The evaluation component is important because it allows the leader and the participant to determine the success of the activity, the effectiveness of modifications, the appropriateness of goals and objectives, etc. Evaluation provides the opportunity for review, feedback, self-assessment and reflection.

There are a number of situations where evaluation will be a very informal aspect of your program. It will often be continuous throughout the activity or program with ongoing adjustments being made based on information gained during the activity (in other words, through an informal ongoing assessment.) In some cases evaluation is merely a reflection on whether a particular rule change worked for the activity; whether an instructional strategy was effective; or whether the change in equipment had the desired effect on the game.

In other situations, the evaluation component will be much more structured and formal. An example of this is a Physical Education class, where the evaluation serves as a basis for a formal evaluative measure such as a grade in the course or a progress report for an IEP. This type of formal evaluation might also occur at the end of a competitive season, after a series of aquatics lessons, or periodically during a personal fitness program.

A good monitoring and evaluation system will assist in developing new goals and aid in the review of the overall plan for the participant. It should involve the participant as well as the leader, inviting both (if age-appropriate to do so) to revisit how things went and make changes for the next time.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS FOR SECTION

In this section, you have been introduced to a step-by-step process for inclusion. This process is intended to provide a framework to follow so that including a participant with a disability in your activity is not as scary a proposition as you might first have thought. In fact, it's not scary at all. It is fun, it is empowering, and it is rewarding.

The beauty of the step-by-step process is that it is adaptable. It can be as formal or as informal as required to match your physical activity situation. You don't need to spend a lot of time on every step. In fact, in many cases, it won't be relevant to do so. But it provides you with a guide to follow and a process to work through for each situation you encounter. It is a cumulative process with one step building on information or actions taken in the preceding steps. It is not a magic, one-size-fits-all solution. It is not a recipe. Each situation and solution will be unique because each individual is unique.

In the next section, you will explore Step 8: Make Necessary Modifications of the process in more detail. You will have the opportunity to complete some exercises that will help to illustrate what aspects of physical activities can be modified and the impact those modifications can have on the activity and the participant's involvement.

What do I need to know?

Please see link to Module 4 End of Section Quiz

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