

II. INCLUSION

This section will discuss:

- What is inclusion?
- Why is it important?
- What interferes with inclusion occurring?
- MTI Online as a strategy to facilitate inclusion.

WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Simply put, inclusion means being involved and feeling like you are part of a group or an activity. A more formal definition of inclusion and the one utilized by the ALACD in the Moving to Inclusion series of resources is:

Inclusion is meaningful participation in an environment where every participant belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his/her peers and members of that environment in the course of having one's needs [for participation] met (ALACD; modified from Stainback and Stainback, 1990).

Key aspects of this definition suggest that:

- Inclusion means being a member of the group, not an occasional visitor or an observer.
- Inclusion is about how we make people feel – and the important impact that has on individuals, as well as their families and communities.
- Inclusion recognizes that everyone has the right to feel proud, trusted, capable and valued.
- Inclusion leads to feelings of success for everyone.

Almost any type of physical activity or game can be adapted or modified to meet the needs of individuals with varying levels of ability. Adapting an activity to promote inclusion only requires an open mind, creativity, flexibility, and collaboration with those participating.



Principles of Inclusion

Inclusion is based on a number of basic principles that, if recognized and accepted, should result in the inclusion of all individuals in the program or activity you lead. These principles are:

- Every person is entitled to a quality, self-fulfilling life. Active living is an important component in one's quality of life.
- Everyone should have equal opportunities for participation in all aspects of life and full participation in their community.
- Inclusion is person-centred. It often involves making individualized accommodations and doing so is a shared responsibility between with the participant and the activity leader.
- Dignity of risk (that is, being allowed to try and fail, and learn from that process) and freedom of choice are fundamental to quality of life.
- Inclusion promotes independence, self-empowerment and persons assuming responsibility.
- Barrier removal and thoughtful planning are central to the inclusion process.



LEARNING EXERCISE: Imagine two physical activity situations. One represents an inclusive situation and the other does not. Visualize these two situations and then jot down your responses to the questions below.

QUESTIONS: What would each of these situations look like? Think about what you might see in the situation that represents an inclusive physical activity scenario versus what you might see in the non-inclusive scenario that you imagined. What makes them different? What would be occurring in the second scenario that makes it a less inclusive situation?

See [link to module 2 answer key on the table of contents](#).

WHY IS INCLUSION IMPORTANT?

Inclusion is important for many reasons. Some of them are listed below but this is by no means an exhaustive list of why we should strive to be inclusive in designing physical activity programs.

Inclusion provides individuals with disabilities the opportunity to develop motor skills and the confidence to perform them. In other words, participants develop 'physical literacy'. Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities of life (International Physical Literacy Association, May 2014).

The goals and learning outcomes of a

balanced physical activity program are no different for participants with disabilities than for their peers. All will benefit from a well-planned physical activity program that addresses motor skill development, fitness and social skills, and leads to increased knowledge of the benefits of an active lifestyle.

Participants will learn appropriate social skills in a stimulating and motivating environment. Friendships and positive attitudes grow out of meaningful interactions, teamwork and cooperation.

Participants learn how to win and lose with grace and integrity.

Participants can learn about the talents and abilities of their peers with disabilities. They learn to appreciate that individual differences exist between people, and they learn that participating in an activity in a different way does not lessen its value.

Through such methods as role modelling, observation, discussion, and volunteerism - all by-products of inclusion - contact and friendships with individuals with a disability can be an enriching experience.

Inclusion leads to greater awareness for everyone involved.



More specifically, inclusion benefits both people with and without disabilities, in both similar and different ways.

Benefits for persons with disabilities:

- Promotes increased sense of self-worth and belonging.
- Learn and practice skills in the presence of able-bodied peers to gain confidence in using those skills.
- Individuals have access to positive role models.
- Provides opportunities for social skills development and training.
- Have opportunities to make social connections that may lead to the development of friendships and relationships with non-disabled peers.
- Provides more opportunities to relate to and learn from a variety of people, including coaches, teachers and recreational professionals who typically lead physical activity situations for able-bodied participants.
- Have increased opportunities to contribute to school, community and the workplace.
- Promotes understanding and acceptance of human difference.



Benefits for persons without disabilities:

- Increases awareness, understanding and acceptance of human difference.
- Promotes the development of enlightened attitudes based on real experiences.
- Provides parents of disabled and non-disabled students with opportunities to meet, interact, and learn from each other.
- Promotes emotional and social development (e.g. feeling useful, self-worth) and develops positive self-image.
- Activity leaders learn to utilize a broader range of instructional strategies and techniques to address the needs of a range of participants with varying abilities.
- Individuals become more conscious of what a barrier-free environment entails.
- Activity leaders and other participants learn about assistive devices (e.g. prosthetics, wheelchairs, etc.), assistive technology (e.g. communication boards, braille, etc.) and acquire new skills (e.g. sign language, how to act as guide for a person who is blind, how to orient a person to his/her environment, etc.)
- Activity leaders and other participants learn new activities (e.g. goal ball, sledge hockey, wheelchair basketball, sit volleyball, etc.)
- Provides preparation for future education, employment, volunteering, etc.
- In general, individuals become more inclusive in the way they think about everything and begin to recognize a broader range of use or new ways of doing things in everyday situations.

WHAT INTERFERES WITH INCLUSION OCCURRING?

When something interferes with achieving full participation in one's community, this is referred to as a 'barrier'. Barriers are challenges or obstacles, real or perceived, that prevent or interfere with the opportunities persons with disability have to access services and/or participate in events or programs available within their community. In the context of physical activity situations, barriers are challenges or obstacles, intentional or not, that prevent inclusion from occurring in the physical activity environment.

Some barriers are obvious; others less so. For example, it is readily apparent if there is no ramp to access a facility but it is less obvious if that same facility does not provide training for their staff or provide materials in alternate formats.

Removing barriers creates an environment that encourages interaction between persons with differing abilities, provides opportunities for all to be active in their community, and makes people feel welcome.

Barriers are categorized in a number of ways. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that there are a number of Environmental as well as Personal factors that may interfere with one's involvement in daily life activities. The WHO groups environmental factors fit into five main categories: Attitudes; Products and Technology; Natural Environment and Human-Made Changes to the Environment; Support and Relationships; and Services, Systems and Policies (WHO, 2001).



For this discussion, we are going to think of barriers under three broad categories – Physical, Personal and Program.

Physical Barriers

Physical barriers are conditions in the built or natural environment that restrict or complicate access to facilities and the spaces where programs and services are located.

Examples of physical barriers include: changes in level without a ramp or elevator; doors without automatic openers; spaces that are too confined to navigate easily such as a crowded aisle or narrow walkway; ramps or staircases that do not have a railing; customer service counters that are too high for a person in a seated position.

Addressing barriers in the physical environment may not fall within your area of responsibility and sometimes they are costly to overcome. However, as a front-line program leader, you are in a position to provide input to your supervisor about things you notice within the environment where your program is held. Offering feedback and making suggestions for improvement could result in small changes that can ultimately enhance the accessibility of the physical space within which your program operates. A few simple examples of this are:

In an exercise space, the equipment is so close together that navigation around the space is difficult (or perhaps impossible) for someone who uses a wheelchair, a walker, crutches, or a service animal. Providing wider pathways between the equipment is a simple way to remove this barrier.

In an exercise space, there is lots of clutter with medicine balls, hand weights, stretching mats and stability balls blocking the pathways between machines and the various areas of the exercise room. Similarly, a pool deck cluttered with lifejackets, flutter boards, pool toys, and lane ropes can also limit one's ability to safely navigate the perimeter of the pool. Ensuring that routes remain clear of clutter can be achieved by a good storage system and appropriate signage that directs all users to put equipment in its proper place after use.

The surface of a sports field or playground is uneven and is not well-maintained. Ensuring a proper maintenance schedule of grass-cutting, filling potholes, clearing loose impediments, etc. will ensure that the space is safe for all users.

A multi-purpose room has a carpet on the floor, making it a trip hazard for people with various forms of mobility impairment. Replacing the carpet with a tiled or hard-wood floor will eliminate this barrier.

Personal Barriers

Personal barriers are feelings, reasons or excuses that persons or their significant others might offer as to why they can't be involved in physical activity.

Examples of personal barriers include: low self-confidence; lack of time; insufficient finances to pay for a program; no one with whom to participate; no prior experience or an unpleasant prior experience.

Some personal barriers reside in the individual and will require the individual to seek ways to overcome them. Organizations, programs and program leaders, however, can play a role in reducing personal barriers by the way they do business and lead their programs. Offering inclusive opportunities and being welcoming to persons of all abilities can lead to a reduction in personal barriers because people may learn about your positive programs and want to attend them. They would in turn, improve their skill and fitness levels, make social connections and may make new friends. The 'All Abilities Welcome' Tool Kit available through the ALACD provides organizations with a series of ideas on how to make their organization and programs more welcoming to everyone.

Program Barriers

Program barriers are obstacles that limit access to or restrict participation in the programs and services offered by an organization.

Some examples of program barriers include: poor attitudes of others; preconceived ideas/low expectations; lack of available programs and services; promotional materials that don't include images of persons with disabilities or use inappropriate language; fear of legal responsibilities.

This is an area where you, as an activity program leader, can have the greatest impact. These are more likely the things that you can control and therefore, that you can help to reduce or eliminate.



LEARNING EXERCISE: Can you think of things that might be a barrier to inclusion in physical activity programs or settings?

See [link to module 2 answer key on the table of contents](#)

HOW CAN MTI SERVE AS A STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE INCLUSION?

Some of the barriers to inclusion are rooted in the simple fact that people don't realize they are being exclusive in the usual way that they go about doing things. In other cases it is a matter of not knowing what to do, how to act, or what to say to a person with a disability and thus, they avoid the situation. Most of the time, people do not deliberately put a barrier in place.



Some barriers are more difficult and more expensive to remove than others. However there are many barriers, especially those that fall under the Program category, that can be easily overcome or avoided through education and awareness. That is where the Moving to Inclusion Online course comes in. Completing this course will help you to avoid the trap of barriers and become more confident in planning physical activity programs that are inclusive.

MTI Online Learning Tool and the MTI Online Course serve as training and educational tools that will help avoid barriers and assist you in planning inclusive programs by:

- increasing your awareness and improving your understanding
- improving your ability to recognize barriers and think of ways to remove them
- providing practical strategies to implement
- providing a step-by-step, systematic planning process to follow
- supplying lots of practical ideas on how to modify or adapt activities
- encouraging a new way of thinking
- promoting and encouraging creativity and flexible thinking
- providing resources and links for future use



CONCLUDING COMMENTS FOR SECTION

In this section you have learned about inclusion: what it is, why it is important, what interferes with it, and how the MTI Online Learning Tool can assist in achieving it. We have attempted to lay the foundation that will get you thinking in terms of inclusion and prompting you to reflect upon what this means in your physical activity setting. An important 'take away' message is that inclusion is a way of thinking and a way of doing things.

We identified some of the barriers to inclusion that exist – some real, some perceived. Addressing barriers one at a time is important so that you don't become overwhelmed by the sheer number of barriers that might be present. It also takes courage and creativity to take down barriers, especially those that are longstanding and entrenched. MTI is one way to start breaking down some barriers.



As you start to think more and more in the context of 'looking through an inclusivity lens' you will find that including persons of varying abilities in your physical activity program starts to become your usual way of doing things. Barriers will seem less significant and setting up your activity so that barriers are minimized or non-existent will soon become second nature.

In fact, you will probably find that many of the methods and strategies utilized are not all that different than how you approach including beginners or planning for a range of abilities in your activities now!

