

5 Disability awareness in the promotion of Gaelic Games

The GAA Code of Behaviour states that we will respect our players regardless of ability, ethnic origin, cultural background or religion. Integrating children and young people with any form of disability into our Games and other activities is a key component of this principle. All clubs and teams should be aware that there are many ways in which the integration and greater involvement of disabled young persons in our Games and other activities can be promoted and achieved by purposeful planning and by a willingness on our behalf to be inclusive.

It is advisable that when the opportunity presents itself that GAA personnel, particularly in decision making capacities and in a coaching role, avail of Disability Awareness Training as it will provide us with an understanding of disability and will ultimately impact positively on the quality of life for disabled people and other marginalised groups in the GAA.

Advanced coaching resources and materials are constantly being developed to enable us focus on the inclusion of people with a disability in sport. While it may prove challenging for some to adapt and at times modify our activities so as to include people with a disability the following tips may be of assistance to us in achieving this aim:

- Treat people with disabilities who participate in sport as athletes.
- Work in partnership with the child, with parents/guardians and with others in your club so as to identify the safest and most meaningful ways of inclusion.
- Ensure that inclusion is possible before you invite and encourage a young person to join your activity. A risk assessment procedure may be necessary to ensure the safety of all.
- Whether a disability is acquired from birth or later in life it may have an impact on a person's basic skill level.
- Focus on what the athlete can do and has the potential to do. A lack of skill does not necessarily indicate the lack of potential ability.
- Examine the possibilities of adapting your coaching styles to promote active participation from every person.
- Use the athlete as a resource of information on themselves, and ask them what they can do and how specific tasks may be modified to suit their skill level.
- Including people with disabilities is simply good coaching.
- Gather some information about the child's impairment but remember you're working with a child and not a condition.
- Some disability specific training may be useful or required – e.g. on autism or epilepsy.
- Higher coach to player ratios may be required if a child has additional needs or behavioural problems.
- Be open in explaining your policy of inclusion to all children/young people.
- Be aware of any instances of bullying and use existing anti-bullying procedures to deal with such instances.
- Help parents /guardians of non disabled children to understand our commitment to inclusion.
- Be aware that some children with a disability may be more at risk to abuse and plan your activities so as to protect them from such occurrences.