

Including All Kids: Children with Special Needs in Judo

Torrie Johal

Torrie Johal has a Master's Degree in Education, specializing in children with special needs. She is a Black Belt living in Calgary.

What's really important?

A few years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100 yard dash. At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and paused. Then they all turned around and went back, every one of them. One girl with Down syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for 10 minutes.

Author Unknown

Children with Special Needs

Learning Objectives:

- To gain an understanding of the complexity of children with special needs
- To provide insight into some common behaviours and how to deal with them
- To encourage coaches to implement strategies that will help the entire class, not just individual children

Setting Expectations

For any child to be successful at performing a task, there are numerous factors that would be involved. Therefore, coaches need to consider the following before placing expectations on students.

Age (both chronological and mental age)

Experience (has the child tried this on her own before)

Intelligence (is the child capable of understanding the request)

Aptitude (has the child developed the natural ability to learn or does the child need to be taught; is the child capable of generalizing the knowledge)

Training (if it is not natural ability, has the child received the necessary training to carry out the request; motor planning, sequencing, etc)

Needs (are the child's needs being met to set her up to successfully follow through on the request; does she have enough information)

Desire (is the child motivated to perform the task)

Maturity (does a typical child of the same age do this)

Education (does the child have the necessary components to complete the request; organizing, cause and effect)

Values (is this important to the child)

Emotions (is the child in a calm state of mind to hear and follow through with the expectation; transitions)

Health (are their health concerns impending on the information processing; too weak, sensory issues, too tired)

Taken from: Isaksen, Dr. Henry & The Parenting Resource Group. How to Get Your Kids to Clean Their Rooms and Other Impossible Tasks. (1985), Brite Music Enterprises, Inc.

Giving Instructions

Instruction: What you are asking the child to do

Instructions should be:

Clear, Simple and Direct

- Make sure your objective is clear
 - Does the child know what you are asking?
- Have one objective in mind when making a demand
 - “Put your shoes on the shelf”
 - This means put your shoes on the shelf...it does not mean side by side at the end of the 2nd shelf
 - If you want the child to put the shoes at the end of the 2nd shelf, side by side...then you need to say it clearly
- If the child is able to carry out more than one objective, make each objective clear
 - “Put your shoes side by side on the shelf”
 - This is clear and both objectives have been stated

Examples:

- “You need to line up and bow”
- “Tie your belt”
- “Bow to your partner first, and then get a drink”

Consistent

- Give the child a demand... "Put your shoes on the shelf"
- If the child does not follow through, use the same demand
 - Make sure you use the same wording to avoid confusing the child

Follow Through

- If the child does not respond to the demand, support them to complete the instruction
- This will teach the child that when an instruction is given, they are expected to follow through the 1st time
- Follow through needs to occur after the 1st time the demand is given, otherwise the child will learn that it is not important to follow through the 1st time

If the child does not react appropriately to your request, then respond in a neutral tone of voice and help the child to follow through with the instruction, using the most appropriate prompt as discussed in the section on "**Prompts**".

Remember... Instructions **SHOULD NOT** be:

Too long or complex... "Tie up your belt, get a partner, do 30 leap frogs, 20 jumping jacks and then get a drink..."

OR

Repetitive... "Come on let's go, come on hurry up, get your belt, put your belt on, hurry up, everyone is waiting for you..."

OR

Too confusing... "Get your grip on your partner, initiate an attack, wait for the counter attack, try 2 different counters, and follow through with ne-waza"

Response Time:

Some children need extra processing time... may be up to 30 seconds for the child to come up with a response.

If the child IS trying to process the instruction, then give them extra time (up to 30 seconds).

If the child IS NOT trying to process the instruction, then help them to make a decision by using the prompts in the **Prompts** section.

Choice vs. Demand

If you are giving the child a **choice**, then ask them a question... "Do you want to fight first?"

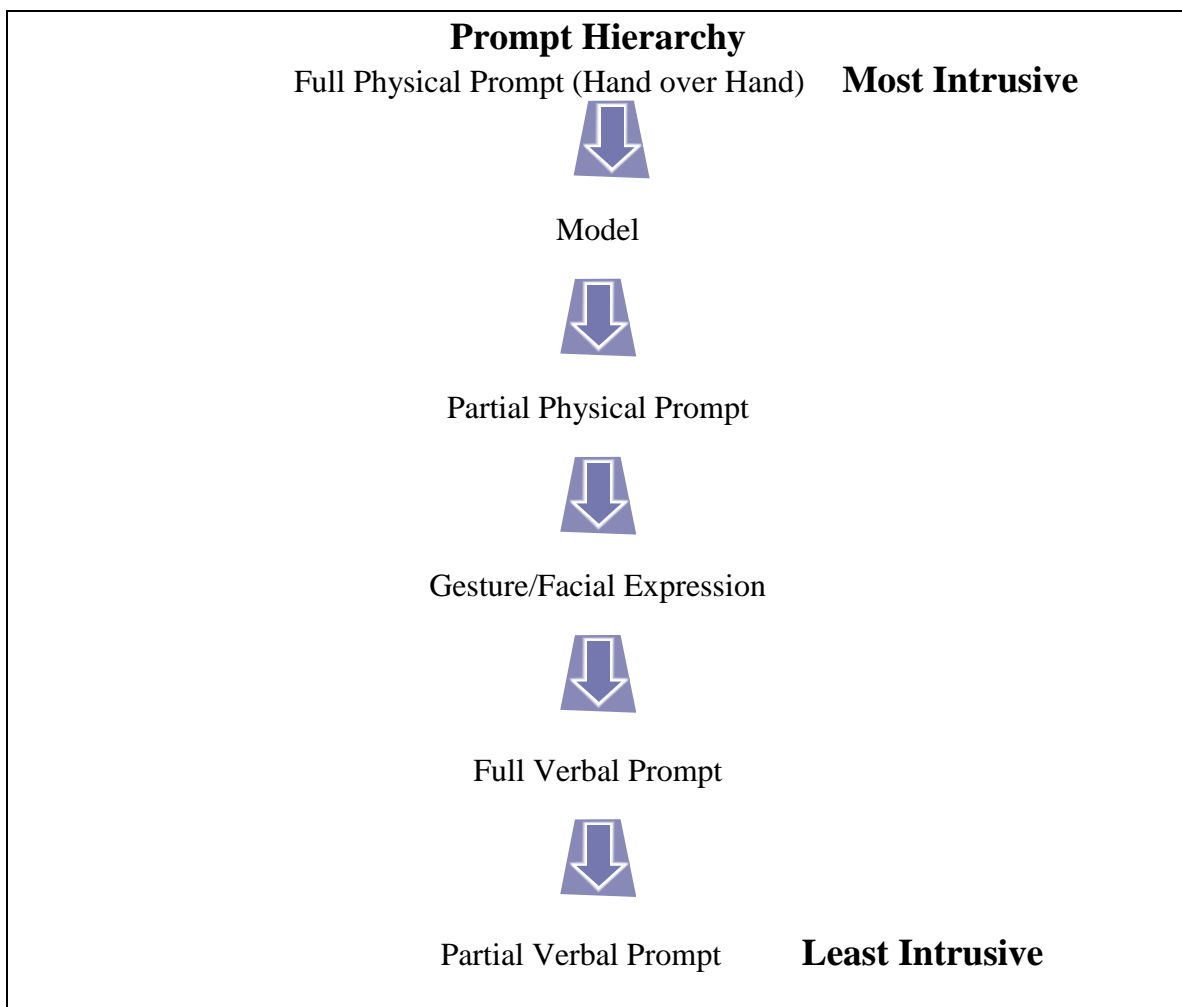
If you give the child a choice ("Do you want to fight first?") and they answer **NO**, then you need to respect that. It is imperative that you respect the child's answer. If the answer is not respected, then it will teach the child that their opinion does not matter. You can revisit

the instruction a few minutes later, but just remember to phrase it as an instruction if you want the child to follow through.

If you want the child to follow through, phrase it as an **instruction**...“It’s your turn to fight now” or “You need to fight now”

Prompts

Prompts are placed on a hierarchy of most intrusive to least intrusive. They may be used more often when teaching a new skill or working with a new child, however, they should be faded out (not used as much) as soon as the child begins to learn the skill. The goal for prompts is that eventually they will not be necessary; however for some children this will not be the case, and the focus will be on minimizing the use of prompts, rather than eliminating them. Prompts should be faded as quickly as possible so as not to leave the child dependent on them. Whenever possible, the least intrusive prompt that still supports the child should be used.



Receptive Task: the child will respond to an instruction by showing you something, or doing something

Expressive Task: the child will respond to an instruction with words

1. TYPE: Full Physical Prompt (Hand over Hand)

DESCRIPTION:

- Give hand-over-hand prompt after giving instruction

WHEN TO USE IT:

- Use for receptive task
- When the child is unsure of the answer
- When the child is struggling with motor planning issues

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- “Put on your belt” Help child to tie belt
- “Put your hand here” Pick up hand and move it

2. TYPE: Model

DESCRIPTION:

- Give the response before asking a question or placing a demand on the child

WHEN TO USE IT:

- Use for receptive tasks
- First time the child is performing the activity
- Child’s attention is low

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- “I am jumping”
- “Let’s try a new exercise”
- “Watch what I do”

3. TYPE: Partial Physical Prompt

DESCRIPTION:

- Give the arm or foot a start after giving the instruction

WHEN TO USE IT:

- Use for receptive task
- When the child is unsure of the answer
- When the child is struggling with motor planning issues

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- “Put your belt on” Hand the child the belt
- “Which hand do you break fall with? Tap the child’s arm

4. TYPE: Gestures/Facial Expression

DESCRIPTION:

- Give the child a look or gesture to support her in following through with the demand

WHEN TO USE IT:

- Use for both expressive and receptive tasks
- When the child is already familiar with the demand
- When the child's attention is fading
- When the child is getting tired

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- Head nod, raise eyebrows
- Point in specific direction

5. TYPE: Full Verbal Prompt

DESCRIPTION:

- Give the answer after giving the instruction or asking the question

WHEN TO USE IT:

- Use for an expressive task
- Child does not attempt to answer after initial instruction

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- "What is this throw called?" "O-soto-gari"
- "What do you do before you leave the mats?" "Bow"

6. TYPE: Partial Verbal Prompt

DESCRIPTION:

- Give the start of the answer after giving the instruction or asking the question

WHEN TO USE IT:

- Use for an expressive task
- Child knows the answer
- When the child knows the answer, but isn't able to express it (tip of the tongue)

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- "What are side break falls called?" "Yo..."
- "Let's count to ten" "Ichi, ni..."

Positive Reinforcement

Types of Positive Reinforcement

Continuous: child receives reinforcement each time they follow through or attempt to follow through with an expectation

Intermittent: child receives periodic reinforcement each time they follow through or attempt to follow through with an expectation. For example, this may mean the child gets reinforced every 3rd time they are successful, or they may get reinforced every 10 or 15 minutes for following directions.

General Guidelines

- A **reinforcement** can be as simple as getting a drink of water
- Reinforcements need to be **immediate** and should be given soon after the child has followed through.
- Reinforcements need to be **earned** and should only be provided when the child has followed through or attempted to follow through with expectations
- Reinforcements should not be given if the child has not earned it, and they should not be used to bribe the child
- Always pair reinforcement with **verbal praise**...The intention is that eventually the verbal praise will be effective for the child so they will no longer need external reinforcements
- When introducing new expectations, reinforce more often to support the child to learn the new skill...eventually move to an **intermittent** schedule
- Ask the child's **parent** what the child enjoys and what might motivate them to be used as reinforcements.
- **Be specific** about what you are trying to reinforce. Instead of saying "good job", try saying "I like that you tied your belt by yourself". This will help the child understand what they are doing correctly

"If", "Then" Statements

You can use “if” “then” statements with a child in your class. This is not a form of bribery as with this method, you would tell the child prior to the expectation what the reinforcement will be.

For example, “If you throw your opponent 10 times, then you can have a break.” If the child does not follow through, then the reinforcement is not given.



Remember...to “catch the child being good” as often as possible. Reinforce good behaviour and give the child lots of positive attention.

Taken from: Help us Learn: A Self-Paced Training Program for ABA, by K. Lear, 2000, Toronto: Ontario.

Sensory Integration

“You Don’t Have Words to Describe What I Experience”

Tactile: “As a young child I hated people touching me, it had left me weak. I thought I would break.”

Hearing: “Everything was always too loud all at the same time.”

Vision: “I have to look at my feet to tell where they are. I will fall down if I don’t look.”

Taken from: “You Don’t Have Words to Describe What I Experience”, The Geneva Centre for Autism (www.autism.net/cgi-bin/viewarticle.pl?ID=90234069)

“Sensory integration dysfunction is a common, but misunderstood, problem which affects children’s behaviour, influencing the way they learn, move, relate to others, and feel about themselves...they struggle with the basic skills of tolerating ordinary sensations; of planning and organizing their actions; and of regulating their attention and activity levels” (Kranowitz, p.3).

- This dysfunction occurs in the central nervous system where the brain struggles to analyze, regulate or process the information that is coming in
- The connection between the brain and behaviour is very strong, so when the child is unable to organize the information that is coming in through the senses, learning becomes very difficult
- When the brain is disorganized, the behaviour that follows will be disorganized as well

“The inability to function smoothly is not because the child won’t, but because he can’t”
(Kranowitz, p.10)

Therefore...coaches need to be aware of this, and if necessary, adapt the expectations and activities to account for the child’s sensory needs. Communication with the child’s parents will assist you in understanding specific sensory needs.

Taken from: The Out-Of-Sync-Child. Kranowitz, C. (1998). New York: the Berkeley Publishing Group.

Behaviour and its Goal	
If a child’s behaviour...	The child’s goal is...
Annoys you	to gain attention
Angers you	to gain power over you
Hurts you	to get revenge
Makes you despair	to display inadequacy

Functions of Behaviour

EVERY BEHAVIOUR HAS A REASON!!!

There are four typical reasons that a child might display a negative behaviour. It is important that we act as detectives to determine the reason behind the behaviour. If we want to change the behaviour, then we need to figure out why the child is engaging in it. Once you have determined the cause of the behaviour, you can make the necessary changes to encourage more appropriate and socially acceptable behaviour. The four reasons are as follows:

Tangible Reasons...these happen for a tangible or real cause, such as a medical or environmental reason. For example, the child is pulling on her ear because she has an ear infection. Or the child may remove her clothing because they are hot or wet. You need to rule out tangible reasons before looking for other functions for behaviour.

To Escape Demands...this behaviour occurs when the child has the intention of delaying or avoiding the demand or required task. For example, a child is asked to follow through with an expectation, and she falls to the floor in a ball. The instructor then tells her to go sit in the corner. In this situation, the child successfully avoided the required task. The next time she is asked to do a non-preferred activity, she is more likely to fall to the floor in a ball.

Always follow through with the original demand: the instructor always needs to follow through with the demand placed on the child. If the child is going into a severe tantrum, then lower the expectation, and have the child follow through with that. For example, if the original demand was to “throw the line”, then lower the expectation to “choose one Uke and throw that person”. This will teach the child that it is not a free pass and that avoidance is not an option. **For this reason, it is imperative that you think about the demand before placing it on the child as you will need to follow through EVERY TIME.**

Self-Stimulatory...most people have self-stimulating behaviours, such as jiggling a knee when sitting in a meeting, twirling hair when writing, or clicking a pen. Most times, these behaviours can be soothing and calming, but sometimes they become distracting. These self-stimulating behaviours become a problem when they interfere with the child’s ability to learn new skills and/or follow through with demands. Some common behaviour seen in children may be flapping hands, humming, fidgeting, or verbal noises.

Attention seeking...this behaviour will occur to gain the attention of the other students, instructors and/or spectators. For example, each time the instructor brings the students together in a circle to teach a new skill, the child runs around the outside of the circle, laughing. The rule of thumb for this type of behaviour is to **IGNORE** it. Anything that is said to the child will be reinforcing to her. As well, if you select this child to help with the demonstration after she has behaved inappropriately, this will teach her that the negative behaviour will be rewarded with extra attention.

Pay as Little Attention as Possible: there will be situations when you cannot ignore the behaviour, such as when the child is causing harm to self or others. The key is to know your student well enough to be proactive when setting up situations and anticipating attempts on the child’s part to gain attention, so as to maintain control of the situation.

Reward Positive Behaviour often...”Catch them being good”...The best way to decrease a negative behaviour is to catch the child being good and give attention and reinforcement immediately. This may mean being extra observant and watch for times that the child is behaving appropriately.

Extinction Burst: be aware that when you begin to ignore the behaviour, chances are the behaviour will increase, this is known as the ‘burst’. For example, the child that runs around the circle laughing may begin to poke other kids, yell or scream, or call names. If you respond at this point, all of the previous behaviours will be reinforced and the child will continue with them.

However, when you ignore the behaviour, the child will eventually get tired and bored with the negative behaviour as she is not being reinforced for it. This is the ‘extinction’. Remember, you are ignoring the behaviour, but not the child. Please note that a specific behaviour may take weeks to extinguish and the most important part in CONSISTENCY IN IGNORING THE BEHAVIOUR.

There are however, strategies you can implement to prevent this situation from occurring. For example:

- Before the class needs to circle around for a demonstration, you can mention to the student “5 minutes until listening time...4 minutes until listening time...etc.”. Repeat this warning every minute until you begin the demonstration. This will prepare the child that the expectation will be to pay attention and focus;
- Have the child do a physical activity right before the demonstration;
- Position an instructor beside the child during the demonstration to let the child know you are monitoring the situation; and
- If the child is able to follow through and focus, then reward the child immediately after the demonstration.



When dealing with negative behaviours...

- 1st ...determine the function of the behaviour (tangible reasons, escape-demand, self-stimulatory, or attention-seeking)
- 2nd ...determine the most appropriate solution or combination of approaches to address the function of the behaviour
- 3rd ...be careful not to reinforce the negative behaviour in any way

Taken from Help Us Learn: A Self-Paced Training Program for ABA. Lear, K. 2000, Lear Consulting Inc, Toronto: Ontario.

Behaviour Cues

Most behaviour that a child exhibits is paired with a **behaviour cue**. A behaviour cue may be seen as a warning that the child is going to react. Behaviour cues let us know that the child is struggling and in need of some immediate support.

Behaviour cues may take a variety of forms, such as:

- Bites nails;
- Chews on lips;
- Makes a face; or
- Wrings hands

When you observe any behaviour cues, provide immediate support in the form of a break, 1 to 1 attention, or use a visual schedule to show the child what is happening. Refer to the section on “Maintaining Self Regulation” for more information.

The Explosive Episode

Sometimes, a child has a meltdown or explosive episode. A meltdown may include yelling, screaming, crying, kicking, biting, hurting self or others. A major premise of understanding the explosive episode is to realize that children do not choose to be inflexible and explosive, rather they do not have the skills required to handle the situation appropriately. The child is not choosing to misbehave or act out (Greene, 2001).

The explosive episode typically consists of three phases, namely vapour lock, crossroads, and meltdown (Greene, 2001).

Vapor lock...this is typically caused by frustration and an inability to deal with it effectively. It can also be described as the inability of a child to switch focus from one idea to the next. At this point, the child is capable of rational thought if given a cool down time; however the child will not be able to focus without having a chance to cool down. If the child is encouraged to calm down, then the situation may be resolved. If however, time and space is not provided, the child will then move into phase 2, **Crossroads**.

Crossroads...this is the point where the adult has the chance to respond to the child and either a) facilitate communication and problem solving, or b) encourage a further meltdown, or explosive episode. If the child continues past the point of rescue, then frustration will take over and the child will be overwhelmed by emotions and lose ability to think rationally. At this point, the child moves into **Meltdown** phase.

Meltdown...at this point, the child is likely to lapse into the most destructive and/or abusive behaviour. The child is not able to learn or retain anything during the meltdown phase. If asked later, the child may not remember anything that was said or done. Further, anything that is said to the child at this point may cause the level of frustration to increase even further.



It is important to look at the situation proactively, rather than reactively. Using the strategies in this package, you can help the child to avoid this type of situation.

Taken from: The Explosive Child. 2001, New York:Quill.

Maintaining Self-Regulation

There are a variety of strategies to assist a child:

- Prior to class;
- During class;
- Prior to an explosive episode; as well as
- During an explosive episode.

Prior to Class...

- Create an environment to ensure that all children in the class are safe
- Get to know your student so that you can predict some of the behaviours before they occur
- Set up a reinforcement system that can be used to reward the child for good behaviour during the class
- Talk about expectations with child and parent
- Go step by step through visual schedule
- Read social story (see below)
- Decide on a plan of action in case the child needs an immediate break during class (i.e....will the child get a drink, take a break, go to bathroom to cool off, etc.)

During Class...

- Remind child of expectations
- Modify expectations if child is struggling (i.e. decrease number of fights she has, increase number of breaks she will get)

Prior to an Explosive Episode...

- Encourage child to go to a quiet space (bathroom, change room, etc. to cool off)
- Provide child with a water break

During an Explosive Episode...

- Limit verbal intervention with child
- Direct child to quiet place
- Sit with child until they are calm
- Wait until child can communicate she is calm before returning to situation
- Decrease expectations and have her complete previous task before moving on

WHAT TO DO WHEN I GET ANGRY

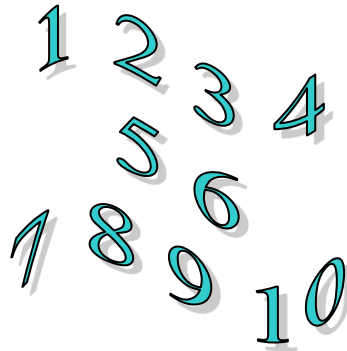
When I get angry...



I need to stop and think...



I will relax and take a deep breath...



And count to ten...

Talk it out in a quiet voice...



And then I can get a drink of water...



This will make me more calm and happy...



I did it...



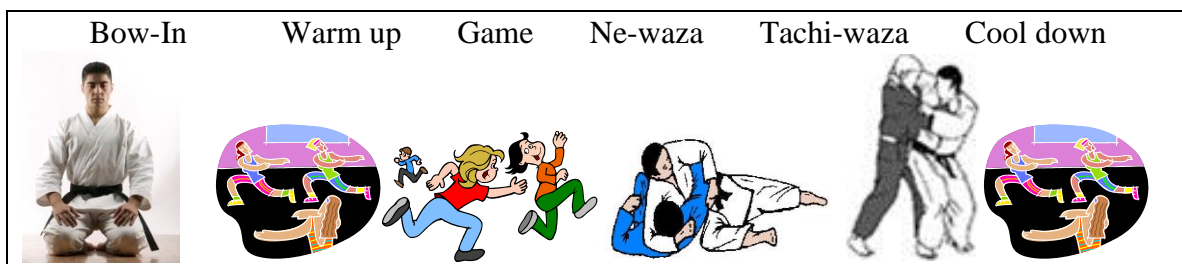
Visual Strategies

A visual schedule presents the abstract concept of time in a concrete form. Visual schedules give the child a sense of what will happen during the practice and what expectations will be placed on them. Using this strategy will help the child to improve predicting and planning skills.

Why use visual strategies:

- Reduce behaviour problems related to transitions
- Help students organize themselves
- Give students information about the schedule for the practice
- Facilitate independence and participation

Use visual strategies at the beginning of practice to outline the schedule for the day



How to create a schedule:

- Take pictures, draw, or cut out pictures of athletes participating in each activity
- Cut the pictures into 2" x 2" squares. Laminate the pictures
- Cut a piece from cardboard (approximately 4" x 18")
- Draw 2.5" x 2.5" squares on the cardboard, with .5" in between
- Attach Velcro to back of each picture
- Attach Velcro to each square on cardboard

How to use the schedule:

- Prior to practice beginning, determine what activities the class will be participating in
- Attach pictures to the cardboard in the order you plan to run the class
- Before each activity, encourage the child to refer to the schedule
- When the activity is complete, have the child remove the picture from the schedule and move on to the next activity
- It is best to limit the amount of verbal prompts used when the child is using the schedule
- Have an "All Done" envelope or basket for the child to put the pictures in after the activity is complete

Pictures taken from: <http://www.judoinfo.com/techjudo.htm>
<http://office.microsoft.com/clipart/default.aspx?lc=en-us>

Strategies for Supporting Children with Special Needs

- Remember that all behaviour is motivated by something...figure out the root cause for the behaviour and deal with that. also remember the behaviour is happening for one of four reasons (tangible reasons, attention seeking, avoidance or self-stimulatory)
- Provide structure, routine, and consistency...this will help to reduce stressful situations in your class.
- Encourage positive aspects of the students own efforts. Encourage them to use positive statements, such as “I’ve been trying hard to learn _____.” You may need to help students develop these statements initially.
- Encourage positive self talk... Help students to replace negative thoughts with more positive ones (i.e. “I can’t...” should be replaced with “I am trying...”).
- Set realistic and achievable short term goals with the student that she will be able to reach in a short period of time, no longer than a few weeks. Support her to achieve her goal and when she does, provide her with positive reinforcement.
- Share success stories in the sport and what strategies were used for them with your students.
- Pick your battles- you can’t take on all of a child’s behaviours in a few hours a week.
- Be proactive...when planning your practice, think about some of the behaviours that may arise and adapt your practice accordingly. You will not always be able to adapt the environment to prevent all behaviours, but preventing even a few will make the class run more smoothly. This will also help you to be prepared for any behaviour that may arise.
- Use redirection and behaviour cues before your student behaves inappropriately. Be observant and look for behaviour cues from the child so you can intervene before it’s too late.
- Create a “time out space” or “quiet space” for use when your student is about to lose control or is behaving inappropriately. Make sure you have talked to the student beforehand as well as her parents.
- Provide extra cues before transition times to support a smoother move from one activity to the next.
- Use these strategies with all your students...this will decrease the amount that students feel singled out and help to make all students feel included.
- Model appropriate behaviour...children learn from us, so be aware that they are always watching you.
- Provide your students with extra positive reinforcement...catch them being good. Let them know you have noticed them being good and trying hard.
- Be specific when praising students...instead of saying “good job”, try saying “you turned the right way”. General statements such as “good job” are confusing as it doesn’t tell the student exactly what they have done well.
- Use repetition to teach skills...ensure that each child has adequate time and opportunities to learn a new skill. Remind the child of the expectations.

- HAVE PATIENCE and HAVE FUN

Further Reading and Resources

Books

Baker, B.L. & Brightman, A.J. (2004). ISBN-13: 978-1-55766-697-X, ISBN-10: 1-55766-697-0.

Dreikurs, R. (1990). Children: the challenge. ISBN 0-452-26655-6.

Greene, R.W. (2001). The explosive child. ISBN 0-06093102-7.

Hodgdon, L.A. (2000). Visual strategies for improving communication. ISBN 0-9616786-1-5.

Kranowitz, C.S. (1998). The out-of-sync child. ISBN 0-399-52386-3.

Lear, K. (2000). Help us learn: a self-paced training program for ABA. Toronto:Ontario.

Visual schedules <http://usd.edu/cd/autism/topicpages/printer/Visual%20Schedules.pdf>

Autism Spectrum Disorder

www.autism.net

www.autismcalgary.com

www.autismsocietycanada.ca

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

www.adhdcanada.com

www.adhdfoundation.ca

**Integrating a Student with a Visual Impairment
Into your Dojo
Tom Thomson
updated by Andrzej Sadej**

Tom Thomson is a judo coach who specializes in visually impaired judoka. He was a winner of a Petro-Canada Coaching Excellence award in 2006.

Visual impairment is much more common than it appears to be. Many visually impaired individuals do not share with their environment the extent to which their modified visual ability affects their life.

The current classification standards for eligibility of visually impaired individuals to compete in Paralympic judo include three levels of reduced visual ability: B3, B2 and B1 with the B1 representing a total or nearly total blindness. It is important to state that regardless of this sport specific classification, all of these individuals would be considered legally blind in Canada.

Minimum Impairment criteria

The eligibility to compete in Paralympic sports should be determined on the basis of performance in the **unadapted** form of the sport. This means that the minimum impairment criteria for judo should reflect the level of vision impairment that has an impact on an athlete's performance in able-sighted judo, with athletes starting a few meters apart.

VI athletes are currently classified on the results for tests of visual acuity and visual field. The severity of the impairment in their best eye must meet at least one of the minimum impairment criteria in the following table:

Measure	Description	Minimum Impairment Criterion
Visual acuity	A measure of the sharpness/clarity of vision	Visual acuity less than or equal to logMAR = 1.00 (6/60 or 20/200). In lay terms, this generally means that a person with 6/60 vision needs to be 6 meters from an object to see detail that a person without vision impairment could see at 60 meters
Visual field	A measure of the area of peripheral vision with which an individual can see (i.e. without moving their eyes)	Visual field with a diameter less than 40 degrees (20 degree radius). This means that the athlete has 'tunnel vision' where their field of view is less than 40 degrees wide (the normal visual field is approximately 200 degrees wide).

The introduction and addition of a student with a visual impairment (VI) into your care and tutelage can seem to be a daunting and precarious adventure for the Dojo Instructor, the associated instructors, and the student body as a whole, as well as the parents of some of the students. This may be the first time that anyone in the dojo has had the occasion to deal with the challenges, both real and imagined, of interacting with a person with a VI. However, if the task is approached in a logical and sequential manner, most of misgivings will be alleviated.

Visually impaired students just like the able-bodied come in all shapes and sizes. In your dojo, in a class of twenty children, there will hardly be any two who are equally “able” at any given time, and in the long run, the abilities of these twenty students will show a wide variance. This could lead you to believe that some of the students were actually “disabled”, even though they showed no apparent difference or disability.

Teaching to a visually impaired judoka can be a rewarding and satisfying experience, just as it is when dealing with all others. Keep in mind that each student is an individual, and that each student will require a customized approach in their learning experience. It is particularly important to recognize the special need of a B1 judoka who will require significant more time to learn complex judo skills. Individuals born blind do not have the special awareness and thus lack the ability to imagine multi-dimensional movement patterns. In such case all movement skills are learned by touch and feeling.

Assessment

First, you must discover the extent of the visual impairment. There is a vast range of possible vision ability, from seeing nothing or nearly nothing at all (B1), to possessing enough sight to navigate the surroundings with very little assistance (B3). This is a starting point in the overall assessment process. This information will determine how much of your club’s resources will be required to accommodate the new student. Can this student function without much personal help, or will they be in need of a guide/assistant for the complete time?

It is useful to know at what age the visual impairment occurred, especially when dealing with total or near-total blindness. If the student had sight for a period of time before the onset of blindness, then certain fundamental movement skills and concepts as well as some spatial awareness may have been developed; whereas, if they were totally blind from birth, then the development of these skills will most often be compromised. Again, as with any other student, you must concentrate the instruction of the student at the basic level of their intrinsic abilities. If the student is older, then you can discover the abilities that they have developed, and adapt these into your program for them. You should also be aware that visual impairment often impacts the sense of balance and that impact for the same individual will vary on a daily basis. One day a VI judoka may perform a skill with great competency and another day the same individual will not be able to achieve that same skill at all.

In addition, one must consider if the student has any additional challenges (physical or intellectual). Visual impairment often cause additional developmental problem: for example, the inability to learn and remember Japanese judo terminology. This will not be a barrier however to a successful experience for as long as the Instructor adapts the approach towards the VI judoka.

Instructors should also be aware that very often visually impaired judoka will not develop social skills at the same pace as their peers. This is often the outcome of the influence of over-enthusiastic or over-protective parents, special schools, isolation, shyness, etc. To

mitigate potential problems, a firm, fair and honest communication with parents of a visually impaired judoka is a must.

Revisiting the assessment process (monitor/reassess) is an ongoing program in every successful dojo. It applies equally for all students (able-bodied and VI). As each student evolves, his needs (and wants) will change. A successful instructor is always sensitive to these changes.

Interacting with the new student

Being much like everyone else, the VI student will be nervous and apprehensive about joining a large and unfamiliar group of people, especially in a “scary atmosphere” of a martial arts venue. Take the time to personally introduce them to everyone. Demonstrate friendly and inviting surroundings; give assurances of a relatively injury-free experience awaiting them.

If the student needs a guide to lead him from place to place, it is proper etiquette to offer your elbow to them which they will grasp from behind, and then be guided to whatever location they need to go to. Never grab a VI's hand, wrist or clothing and attempt to drag them. No one would appreciate this. Make the student aware of all obstacles in the environment (both on and off the mats). Ask them if they have any questions, comments or concerns. Address any of these as promptly as possible. Age-appropriate response and attention to the students is required.

Let the fun begin

With all the preliminaries out of the way, it is now time to impart some of your knowledge to the new student. Students of all visual ranges tend to be more kinaesthetic rather than visual learners. It will probably be necessary (after the general lesson to the class) to repeat the lesson using the student as the recipient of the subject technique. The different parts of the technique may have to be broken down into subsections (the feet, the hips, the hands etc.), so that information overload does not overwhelm the student. Once this information is imparted, the student can now practise this technique (both giving and receiving) with an appropriate (size-wise) partner. It is always advantageous to partner a newcomer with a more experienced judoka who will allow the new student to be “successful” in their attempts of the technique. The more experienced partner shall be careful not to injure or frighten the new student. It is important to closely monitor the visually impaired student until you are satisfied that what they are doing is safe and of value to their learning experience. This monitoring can be done by any accredited instructor in your club.

In the event that there are few or no assistant instructors in the club, and the visually impaired student requires maximum attention; you may wish to recruit one, or both, of the parents as assistants. This must be done carefully and under the right circumstances. It is highly advisable that the parents become a student member of the club, and that they dedicate some time to their own personal training. It is important that the parents be wearing a judogi. Maintaining control of the direction of the program by the Dojo Instructor is essential if the program is to be a success.

If, when reading this article, you disregard all references of VI, you could easily use this guide to train any new student. The differences, problems, needs and wants of any student are universal. Approach this task with your normal confidence.

For more specific information on the training needs of the visually impaired judoka visit:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gOzQKRW8fs&feature=youtu.be>: and
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWr41lpfLMc>