

Top tips for supporting participation in physical activities and sports

Children with motor difficulties tend to have more success with individual sports or physical activities than with team sports. They can concentrate on adapting their own bodies in relation to their environment without having to use the additional effort required to successfully manoeuvre around others. Performance in these activities is measured on an individual basis, which tends to promote individual progress, effort and participation rather than competition. Some examples of these types of individual sporting activities include dance, martial arts, horse riding, gymnastics, swimming. In contrast with the activities listed above, some individual sports require rapid adjustments that require children to position their body in response to objects that move. These sports are generally much more challenging for children with motor difficulties and should only be recommended if the child is really motivated to work on them, e.g. racquet sports.

Whatever the activity, the following 'top tips' should help the child learn the skill:

- When teaching skills/activity break down skill into smaller, meaningful parts.
- Keep instructions short and be prepared to repeat them.
- Use visual prompts e.g. showing rather than just explaining.
- When giving feedback use clear, specific language e.g. "raise your arm higher when you throw."
- Keep the environment as predictable as possible with little or no distraction when teaching a new skill.
- Ask questions to ensure the child understands the game rules or movements.
- Modify or adapt equipment to ensure safety.
- Reward effort rather than proficiency.
- Encourage participation and fun rather than competition
- If possible, introduce a new skill or game in a 1:1 or small group rather than the whole class situation
- Try to review any rules and routines that are associated with the activity e.g. football/tennis rules, at a time when the child is not concentrating on the motor aspects.