

# Disability-Centred Safety Considerations

This tool provides safety considerations for the following seven disability groupings identified in Ophea's

**Disability-Centred Movement: Supporting Inclusive Physical Education** resource:

- **Students Ambulating Independently or with an Assistive Device**
- **Students who are Wheelchair Users**
- **Students who are Blind or Low Vision**
- **Students with Cognitive Disabilities (Memory, Processing Speed, Attention, Focus, Impulsivity)**
- **Students with Communication Disabilities**
- **Students with Sensory Processing/Integration Disabilities**
- **Students with Motor Coordination Disabilities**

For more information on the seven disability groups including descriptions, examples, and accommodations, visit the **Where Do I Start?** section on Ophea's Disability-Centred Movement resource.

The considerations align with the sections on the activity safety standards and assist teachers establish and maintain a safe learning environment for students with disabilities.

## Students Ambulating Independently or with an Assistive Device

### Equipment

- Determine with trained school staff as identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) that all assistive devices (e.g., a walker) are in good working condition and properly adjusted for the height and mobility needs of the student prior to participation.
- Ensure all individuals supporting student participation know how to use the adaptive equipment (e.g., ankle-foot orthosis, arm brace) included in the student's IEP.

- Use equipment of varying sizes/shapes/weights to help students safely and effectively participate in the activity. For example, use larger balls or rings to assist a student with upper-limb impairments.

## Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear, and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g., getting tangled with an assistive device, causing a distraction).

## Facilities

- Determine that all facilities are safe for use (e.g., entrance and exits have smooth transitions for ease of access) and report issues to appropriate school/school board staff.
- Remove obstacles within the playing area to promote a flow of movement. For example, remove unused pieces of equipment and store safely away from the playing area.
- Establish boundaries of the playing area that allow for safe play and space to stop safely. For example, increase the out of bounds space to give a student time to stop, ensure enough space for turning and moving about the playing area.

## Special Rules/Instructions

- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity. For example, being aware of others and their surroundings when moving around the playing area to avoid contact with others and equipment.
- Provide additional accommodations (e.g., provide breaks during the class for students using a stander or any other assistive device) and/or access individuals needed to support student participation.
- Provide options for the students to participate in the activity based on their identified strengths, abilities, and needs. For example, for students with stability needs, allow the student to keep one or both hands on their assistive device, sit down, use a wall for support.
- Ensure school staff responsible for transitioning a student from different equipment (e.g., lifting) are accessible during the class.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's IEP (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting students.

## Students who are Wheelchair Users

### Equipment

- Determine with trained school staff as identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) that the wheelchair is in good working condition (e.g., tires inflated, brakes are working), adjusted for the student, and ready for use in the activity.
- If using unfamiliar equipment (e.g., sled for winter, all-terrain outdoor wheelchair for cross-country) check with school/school board staff to ensure the equipment is appropriate for the student's size and ability, in good working order, and appropriate for the activity.
- Ensure all individuals supporting student participation know how to use the adaptive equipment properly (as prescribed in the student's IEP).
- Ensure the equipment is accessible to avoid having students overextend when reaching (e.g., bending down low or reaching up high).
- Ensure the equipment is at the appropriate length and/or size for safe use. For example, implements are at the height level for students using wheelchair and/or mobility device.

### Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear, and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g., getting tangled with wheelchair wheels, preventing straps from opening and closing).
- Shoes should be secured (e.g., strapped or tied) to avoid being tangled with the wheels. If the student manually self-propels their wheelchair, gloves can be worn to protect their hands when wheeling (e.g., outdoors, longer distances, trails).

### Facilities

- Determine that all facilities are safe for use (e.g., entrance and exits have smooth transitions, ease of transition between pavement and grass in outdoor areas) and report issues to appropriate

school/school board staff.

- Establish boundaries of the playing area that allow for safe play and space to stop safely (e.g., increase the out of bounds space to give an individual time to stop, ensure enough space for turning and moving about the space).
- Store unused equipment (e.g., the wheelchair of a student who transitioned to using a walker) safely away from the playing area.

## Special Rules/Instructions

- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity. For example, being aware of others and their surroundings when moving around the space, avoiding contact with others and/or equipment.
- Provide additional accommodations (e.g., allow the student to take breaks as needed) and/or assess individuals needed to support student participation.
- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's IEP (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist students if they have difficulty self-propelling their wheelchair.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff, as identified in the student's IEP (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting students.

## Students who are Blind or Low Vision

### Equipment

- Determine the equipment needed for the student to safely and effectively engage in the activity. For example, if the student is a white cane user, work with the student to determine if they will use the white cane during the activity.
- Ensure that all individuals supporting student participation know how to use the equipment properly (as prescribed in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP)).

- Use equipment that provides auditory feedback or visual/tactile contrast (e.g., plastic beaded jump rope, balls containing bells) to assist students in being aware of their position in relation to the equipment, other students, and within the facility.

## Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear, and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g., getting tangled with an assistive device, distraction to students).

## Facilities

- Store all unused equipment (e.g., ball bins/racks) safely away from the playing area.
- Identify specific features (e.g., bleachers, stage, goalposts) of the playing area to support safe movement and engagement. For example, prior to the activity, describe the environment, identify features (e.g., portable goals, temporary tent shelter, cones that identify uneven surface) that are outside of the usual ones in the playing area, and encourage the student to move around the playing area and touch features to familiarize themselves.
- Use equipment to assist the student in identifying boundaries in the playing area (e.g., if the student can see colour, use pylons or markers in a colour with contrast which the student can see, use tactile markings the student might feel when touched/crossed, allow students to touch the markers to familiarize themselves).

## Special Rules/Instructions

- Identify rules and procedures required to ensure the student's safety and the safety of other students. For example, adapting rules, altering boundaries or adjusting the speed of play.
- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity. For example, being aware of others and their surroundings when moving around the play area, avoiding contact with others and/or equipment.
- Provide additional accommodations (e.g., opportunities for the student to attempt an activity first, address any of their safety concerns, schedule regular safety check-ins, provide student with the choice to partner with a peer) and/or access individuals needed to support student participation (e.g., sighted guide).

- Be aware of the additional support (e.g., service dog or guide dog) students may need to safely engage in the activity and the requirements. Be familiar with the commands the student uses for their service dog or guide dog and the role the dog will play in supporting the student during different types of activities. Be aware of the routines of the service dog or guide dog to avoid distracting the dog when working.
- Communicate with students to identify the supports needed to safely participate. For example, how they would like to be guided.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's IEP (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting students.

## Students with Cognitive Disabilities

### Equipment

- Prior to participation, collaborate with school/school board staff (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistant, physiotherapist, occupational therapist) to learn about additional equipment (e.g., prescribed sensory equipment such as weighted vests) that can be used to support safe participation.
- Ensure all individuals supporting student participation know how to use the adaptive equipment properly as prescribed in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Determine the equipment needed for the student to safely and effectively engage in the activity. For example, use sensory-friendly equipment, such as softer balls or textured surfaces, to accommodate students who may be sensitive to certain textures or sounds.

### Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear, and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g., getting tangled with an assistive device, distraction to students).

### Facilities

- Remove obstacles within the playing area to promote a flow of movement. For example, store unused pieces of equipment safely away from the playing area.
- Identify specific features (e.g., bleachers, stage, goalposts) of the playing area to support safe movement and engagement. For example, prior to the activity describe the environment, identify features (e.g., portable goals, temporary tent shelter, cones that identify uneven surface) that are outside of the usual ones in the playing area, and encourage the student to move around the playing area and touch features to familiarize themselves.
- Prior to participation, establish boundaries of the playing area. Provide students the opportunity to identify and touch the boundary makers to familiar themselves with them.
- Identify distractions (e.g., loud noises, bright lights, cluttered spaces that may overwhelm or distract students) in the playing area. Report the issues (e.g., noise) to appropriate school/school board staff to help address the concern (e.g., clean up the space, identify alternative ways to support the student such as noise-cancelling headphones).

## Special Rules/Instructions

- Prior to participation, collaborate with school/school board staff (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistant, physiotherapist, occupational therapist) to learn about tools/strategies used in other subject areas (e.g., visual supports such as a schedule board or pictures, augmentative communication system) that can be used to support safe participation.
- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity. Use clear and concise language, use visual aids and demonstrations as appropriate to help students understand the rules and objectives of activities.
- Provide visual cues and visual prompts (e.g., Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)) to students to assist them in communicating their understanding of safety rules and procedures and stay focused/engaged in the activity.
- Use visual cues (e.g., coloured markers, large cones) to help students stay within the boundaries.
- Identify additional accommodations (e.g., breaking down tasks into steps, then allow time to practice each step in isolation, provide further opportunities to put the steps together in a sequence) and/or individuals needed to support student participation.

- Identify any possible triggers the student may have that would pose a risk for them in physical activity. For example, learn about any safety plans that may be in place for the student in different environments that may transfer into the physical activity setting.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's IEP (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting students.

## Students with Communication Disabilities

### Equipment

- Store communication devices in a predetermined, safe, and easily accessible location for students to access as necessary throughout the activity.
- Determine with trained school staff as identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) that all assistive devices (e.g., communication boards) are in good working condition.
- Ensure students have access to their augmented and alternative communication (e.g., aids, devices, strategies) to facilitate communicating their understanding of safety rules and activity instructions.

### Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear, and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g., getting tangled with an assistive device, causing a distraction).

### Facilities

- Remove obstacles within the playing area to promote a flow of movement. For example, store unused pieces of equipment safely away from the playing area.
- Review the boundaries and features of the playing area with the students prior to participation.

### Special Rules/Instructions

- Review safety terminology that will be used, including relevant words for health and physical education/intramural safety in student's communication device, with the students prior to participation.



- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity using students' preferred communication method (e.g., communication board, speaking, sign language, visual aids).
- Provide additional accommodations for the students to participate in the activity based on their identified strengths, abilities, and needs. For example, regular sensory breaks to allow students to regulate their sensory inputs.
- Position students with a clear line of sight when providing instructions to ensure their understanding of the safety rules, procedures and safe play. For example, ensure the student's view is unobstructed, located close to the individual providing instruction.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's IEP (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting students.

## Students with Sensory Processing/Integration Disabilities

### Equipment

- Determine the equipment needed for the student to safely and effectively engage in the activity and allow students to select preferred equipment based on their sensory needs. For example, a softer ball, a textured surface for balance exercises, or a weighted object for strength training.

### Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the students (e.g., personal sensory items such as chewable jewellery and tactile strips).

### Facilities

- Remove obstacles (e.g., equipment such as benches that can be climbed on and/or may pose a danger) and store them safely away from the playing area to promote a flow of movement.
- Identify specific features (e.g., bleachers, stage, goalposts) of the playing area to support safe movement and engagement. For example, prior to the activity describe the environment, identify features (e.g., portable goals, temporary tent shelter, cones that identify uneven surface) that are

outside of the usual ones in the playing area, and encourage the student to move around the playing area and touch features to familiarize themselves.

- Identify distractions (e.g., loud noises, bright lights, cluttered spaces that may overwhelm or distract students) in the playing area. Report the issues (e.g., noise) to appropriate school/school board staff to help address the concern (e.g., identify alternative ways to support the student such as noise-cancelling headphones, manage noise levels during activities).

## Special Rules/Instructions

- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity. Use visual tools as appropriate to help in providing clear directions.
- Prior to participation in the activity, establish and communicate a signal/strategy to indicate when to start and pause the activity. For example, hand in the air, physical proximity to the teacher, eye contact.
- Establish routines (e.g., a safe space in the activity location, breaks) prior to the activities to prevent students from becoming overwhelmed.
- Provide additional accommodations based on student's strengths, abilities, and needs. For example, allow the student to start with one component of the activity, try it out and then add the next component.
- Use personalized student support to reinforce safe participation. For example, a token system to reinforce positive behaviour by allowing access to a preferred activity or item after earning "tokens" for displaying the wanted behaviour.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) (e.g., special education resource teacher, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting students.

## Students with Motor Coordination Disabilities

### Equipment

- Determine that the student has received instructions on how to use their adaptive equipment (e.g., mobility devices) properly.
- Determine the equipment needed for the student to safely and effectively engage in the activity (e.g., adaptive equipment with larger grips or handles, adaptive seating options, supportive braces to enhance stability and control during activities) and identify rules and procedures (e.g., adapting rules, altering boundaries, or adjusting the speed of play) to ensure the student's safety and the safety of other students.
- Use equipment as necessary to facilitate the students' safe and full engagement in the activity. For example, use ramps to allow the students to send equipment such as Bocce balls.

## Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing, footwear, and jewellery should not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g., clothing should allow for straps/harnesses to be secured).

## Facilities

- Determine that all facilities are safe for use (e.g., entrance and exits have smooth transitions, ease of transition between pavement and grass in outdoor areas) and report issues to appropriate school/school board staff.
- Remove obstacles within the playing area to promote a flow of movement. For example, store benches that may pose a danger safely away from the playing area.

## Special Rules/Instructions

- Inform students of the safety rules and procedures for safe engagement in the activity. As appropriate, use clear and concise language, demonstrations, step-by-step guidance, visual prompts to help in providing clear directions.
- Provide additional accommodations based on the student's strengths, abilities, and needs. For example, break down tasks into smaller steps with time for practice and repetition, provide alternative ways to participate in the activity, and build on life skills students have already learned to assist with instruction and student understanding.

- Be aware of the stability needs of the student (e.g., moving, balance, or an increased risk of falling) and provide alternative ways of engaging in the activity. For example, allowing students to sit, use their feet, or alternate body part to send or receive.
- Provide options for the students to participate in the activity based on their identified strengths, abilities, and needs. For example, for students with stability needs, allow the student to keep one or both hands on their assistive device, sit down, use a wall for support.

## Supervision

- Enlist available trained school staff as identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) (e.g., special education resource teachers, educational assistants) to assist with supervising/monitoring and supporting.