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Lauren J. Lieberman

The College at Brockport, llieberm@brockport.edu

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Recreational Activities for Children and Youth Who Are Deafblind

Lauren Lieberman
Department of Physical Education and Sport,
SUNY Brockport

Every individual has the right to participate in recreational activities that meet their needs. Recreational endeavors give us a break from work and the activities of daily living and are a constructive and enjoyable way to spend free time. Recreation provides opportunities to participate in normal activities and feel part of the larger community, and it is a wonderful way to socialize with family and peers.

The suggested activities and modifications described in this article are intended for children who are deafblind and may have additional disabilities, and who range in age from preschool to high school. This article complements one published in the Fall 2006 issue of *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*.

tives about physical activities at home for children who are deafblind (Lieberman & Pecorella, 2006).

General Considerations

There are a number of factors to consider when providing successful and enjoyable recreational activities. The following are some general rules of thumb.

Take time to learn an activity

Allow plenty of time to introduce an activity to a child and help him or her to explore the playing area, become familiar with equipment, and learn game rules. A child who kicks a ball during a kick ball game and is led around the bases will not understand the concept of the game or have any idea why he or she is running in a circle. The child needs time to feel the ball and the bases, practice kicking and running, and learn the concept of the game in order to clearly comprehend what is happening once play begins. This type of orientation takes time.

For example, Darron had ridden a horse on several occasions, but he had always been placed on the horse and never had the opportunity to feel one from head to foot in order to gain an understanding of its size or physical features. This past summer when attending camp, he spent an hour just feeling the horse he was going to ride. He felt its tail, face, nose, back, and underside. It helped him to understand what horseback riding really was and made the experience more meaningful.

Juanita had been bowling many times, but she had never felt a bowling pin and didn't know how the pins were configured or the distance from the player to the pins. Because of this, she did not understand the need to make an effort to roll the ball hard. When the game was explained to her using a single pin and a model of all 10 pins, and she was able to walk the distance of the ball's travel, she began to comprehend the concept of the game. This motivated her to increase her effort and participation and resulted in more enjoyment.

Plan communication breaks

Ensure that there is clear communication before, during, and after an activity. Plan communication breaks to provide feedback and respond to a child's questions and needs. Planned receptive and expressive communication breaks are especially important for *continuous* activities such as rock climbing, biking, running, or swimming. Let the child know when communication breaks will occur. For example, it may be necessary to stop af-

ter running half of the length of a track or swimming one width of a pool in order to check in with the child. *Discrete* activities such as bowling, shot put, or archery have naturally occurring opportunities for communication (Arndt, Lieberman, & Pucci, 2004).

In addition to planned communication breaks, establish ways to communicate important information about a specific activity while it's occurring. These could include signs or cues to indicate "finished" in rock climbing, biking, or swimming; signaling a right turn while bicycling; signaling that a rock is on the right at 3 o'clock for rock climbing; or letting the child know that there are five more strokes until the end of the pool when swimming. Using pre-established ways of communicating will help children to feel comfortable and safe (Arndt, Lieberman, & Pucci, 2004).

Promote socialization

One of the great benefits of recreational activity is that it provides opportunities for socialization. For example, Irish dancing helped one girl who is deafblind to develop balance, endurance, and agility, but it also helped her stay in touch with her heritage and gave her something to do with her sister and something to talk about at school with her peers. She made several lasting friendships through the program and even performed in a talent show at school. Dancing was a normal activity that helped her feel a part of the larger community.

Modifying Activities

Activities should be modified to meet each child's abilities and needs, but not all recreational activities require adaptation. Canoeing, horseback riding, and riding a tandem bike, for example, can all be done with relatively few modifications. Many activities, however, do require modifications to equipment, playing areas, and game rules to suit each child's preferences and abilities.

Visual, auditory, and tactile modifications

Visual modifications make equipment and play areas more visible. Examples include using brightly colored tape to mark a playing area, such as the beginning of a bowling lane, and brightly colored balls for any type of ball game.

Auditory modifications like the following make an activity's objective more apparent to children with usable hearing: positioning a sound source behind a goal (for example, behind a basketball hoop or horseshoe stake) that helps the child to

know where to aim, affixing balloons on an archery target that make a popping sound when struck, and using a radio playing at one end of a running track to help a child keep track of the number of laps he or she has completed.

Children who rely on tactile cues may benefit from the use of tactile markers in activities. For example, a guide rail may mark the start of a bowling lane, or a small floor mat may identify an area for jump rope or aerobics.

Physical modifications

One very useful physical modification is to perform an activity while seated. Most activities can be done while sitting or standing, but some children may only be able to sit during an activity and others may find that an activity is easier when seated. This is particularly helpful when first learning a new skill. For example, archery involves a variety of skills. A seated position provides balance and allows the child to focus on other skills, such as holding the bow and aiming. Other activities that can be done while seated or in a wheelchair include volleyball, horseshoes, shot put, tennis, and basketball.

Altering distances is another great way to match activities to children's physical abilities. For example, if a child does not have the strength to hit a golf ball to the first hole of a golf course, intermediate holes can be created using hula hoops or bright rope.

Closed-skill activities versus open-skill activities

Individuals who are deafblind often find it easier to participate in closed-skill activities than in open-skill activities. Open-skill activities have characteristics that change often, such as the speed or trajectory of a ball, or the use of both offensive and defensive strategies. Activities that involve open skills include volleyball, basketball, tennis, football, and soccer. Closed-skill activities have characteristics that do not vary and include running on a track, archery, bowling, shot put, ice skating, and biking. Although closed-skill activities are often easier, many open-skill activities can be modified. For example, basketball rules can be adapted to allow a child to shoot from the foul line and get 1 point for hitting the backboard, 2 points for hitting the rim, and 3 points for a basket. Modifying open-skill activities increases the variety of sports and activities that children can enjoy (Lieberman, 2005).

Cooperative activities

Competitive activities can be modified to become cooperative activities. This is especially helpful when a child is learning a new skill. For many, activities are more enjoyable if there are no winners or losers. For example, in archery, horseshoes, or bowling, one can add up a team score instead of individual scores. In running, biking, or swimming, one can total the number of laps or distances for all the children collectively to see the accomplishments of the group.

Selected Activities

Following are suggestions for modifying several games using the principles described above.

Ping-Pong

Ping-pong can be played while standing or sitting. Regular ping-pong rules can be used, or the objective of the game can be changed to be cooperative rather than competitive. For example, a goal for the players might be to see how many times they can hit the ball over the net without making a mistake. A child can even play ping-pong alone by folding half of the table up and hitting the ball against the upturned section. Adaptations to the table and ball can be tailored to each individual's needs. Table modifications include adding 2- to 4-inch boards to the sides, so that the ball does not fall off the table, and removing the net so the ball can go back and forth easily. A large bright ball or balloon can be used instead of a typical ping-pong ball. Children with hearing may be able to track a ball that has a bell or noisemaker inside. Children with hearing may also enjoy a similar sport played by blind athletes called Showdown (<http://www.ibsa.es/eng/deportes/showdown/presentacion.htm>).

Horseshoes

In the game of horseshoes, two metal stakes are placed in the ground about 30 feet apart. Each side is given two horseshoes, made of metal or plastic, to throw at the stakes. The object of the game is to get the horseshoes around a stake, and points are awarded for the number of horseshoes that go around a stake, lean against a stake, or that are closest to a stake for each round. Adaptations include using brighter stakes, additional stakes (e.g., five to ten), lighter horseshoes, and varying distances between stakes. The game can be played by individuals or teams.

Bocce

Bocce is played with one small white ball, approximately 3 inches in diameter, and eight larger colored balls, approximately 8 inches in diameter. The white ball is thrown in the grass 6 to 20 feet from the participants. Two to four people can play at a time, and the object of the game is to score points by rolling the larger balls as close as possible to the small white ball. Players are also allowed to hit other players' balls away from the white ball. Bocce can be adapted by using even larger balls, by varying the distance the white ball is thrown, and by giving the players verbal or signed feedback to let them know where a previous player's ball landed. Points can be calculated, or the game can be played just for fun.

Volleyball

A volleyball net can be set up in a backyard, garage, or basement. Volleyball can be played standing up or sitting down, with a regulation volleyball, trainer volleyball, beach ball, or balloon. Volleyball provides an excellent example of how rules can be modified to make a game more inclusive. The rules can be changed to allow players to serve closer to the net, hit the ball more than once, or catch the ball in their hands. Players may even walk with the ball and throw it over the net or be given physical assistance. The game can be played competitively, or it can be played by adding points for the number of times the ball goes over the net or for how many people get to touch the ball in a point.

Summary

These are just a few examples of recreational activities, games, and sports that can be adapted for children who are deafblind. There are a wide variety of additional games that, with modification, can be fun and engaging for children who are deafblind. Each child has the right to be self-determined and experience a variety of recreational activities. It is worth the time and energy spent to modify the activities to meet the needs of each unique child. See the Fall 2006 issue of Deaf-Blind Perspectives for additional resources and suggestions.

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Resources

Book:

Lieberman, L. J., & Cowart, J. F. (1996). *Games for people with sensory impairments: Strategies for including individuals of all ages*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Web site:

American Printing House for the Blind Physical Education Web site: <http://www.aph.org/pe>.

DB-LINK Web site: <http://www.dblink.org> (See "Play and Recreation" in the "Selected Topics" section).



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