

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT – PARTICIPATION FOR THE CHILD WITH ALBINISM IN SECONDARY SCHOOL



Children with low vision feel no different to anyone else - they just do things differently! Assistance from teachers/assistants to access the curriculum alongside peers will be necessary, without it being obvious to other students. They desperately want to be one of the crowd and not treated differently. They are **enabled** by excellent memory, other senses, use of technology, ability to adapt and to efficiently use the sight that they have (don't let him trick you into thinking that they see more than they actually can). Encourage self-advocacy, independence and resilience.

One of the primary considerations when classes are outdoors is sun and glare protection. Ensure that their PE uniform includes large brimmed or legionnaire style hat and sunglasses. If they have Oculocutaneous Albinism, Sunscreen (even on cooler or cloudy winter days) must be used on exposed skin, with long sleeves (preferably dark colour to prevent glare) and even long pants if the student wishes. Placement of the class, teacher and student on the field to reduce sun and glare exposure for the student is important. Days of excessive glare (with sun or cloud) can result in further decreased vision (a "white out") and cause severe eye pain to a student who is photosensitive. Always make sure that the student has their back to the light source, even if in the shade or inside. On days of excessive UV levels or glare, they may require a reduced time on the field or an alternate physical activity (there are good phone apps letting you know the daily levels).

They usually cope to learn new physical skills with support (high contrast equipment and markings, non busy background, staged learning, placed with peers using slower speeds for ball games). When playing team games or identifying the tagging person/s it is important that high contrast bibs are used (eg bright yellow on navy). It is often difficult for them, or even frightening, if other class members are moving, as they are unable to fix quickly on a moving object, especially if their nystagmus is significant. When playing minor games, a large area makes it difficult for them to find peers – use a smaller area for their smaller group with clearly defined boundaries.

As they do not see fine detail, during any explanation or demonstration they should be no further than a couple of metres away, or they will not see the movement. You may have to slow down the demonstration as they often do not track movement easily, even when close. They will know the placement of equipment and layout of an area if you have them help to put it out with a friend. When checking if they understand, ask them to verbalise or demonstrate it – if you just ask them "do you understand?" they will generally say "yes", even if they don't. Most do not want to be singled out as different – they just want to be one of the crowd.

Many also have no depth perception, making work on, or jumping off elevated surfaces and judging the speed or distance of a moving object very difficult. When undertaking an activity like vaulting in Gymnastics, it is important to practice the number of steps before the vault before take off. They may also be hesitant to run freely on uneven or shadowy surfaces, as they cannot tell the difference between a shadow or hole in the ground when they see a dark shape. Using a colour band as a tether and another student of equal speed to act as a guide can make running activities inclusive. You can seek the assistance of an O&M instructor to teach this activity. It can be very helpful to let the student explore any equipment or area before the activity to give them a better understanding.

When learning to catch, use a large, brightly coloured, softer ball to assist with sighting the ball and giving confidence, as it will not hurt if they misjudge the catch. A bounce pass will often have better contrast

against the bitumen or floor boards (than a higher pass that will have a busier background), especially if the student is given a verbal cue as the pass is made (Sally, bounce pass). Students with low vision rely on sounds to help them cue into what is happening, but if a class is very noisy, they are easily confused.

Although they have difficulty tracking moving objects, as they get older many with better vision play mainstream larger ball sports such as Soccer, Football, Basketball or Netball with supportive peers in junior teams. As ball games become faster and skills more sophisticated, with strategic play that requires sighting fast moving players, they often find it difficult to keep up and drop out. When other team members can be trained in methods of inclusion (calling positional play, bounce passes, using them for place kicks or throw ins, close tagging players etc) many continue in these sports into adulthood. This early training, builds fitness and movement skills and most importantly the opportunity to socialise with peers and be part of a group. It is therefore important that they are encouraged to participate in a range of activities, and not discouraged or excluded on the basis of low vision.

Many successfully continue in mainstream sports or physical activities which rely less on tracking fast movement and more on feel or personal endeavour like martial arts, gymnastics, athletics, swimming, bowling, fitness training or dancing. Others will become involved in the vision-impaired sports (Goal Ball, Tandem Cycling, Swish, Blind Cricket or Tennis and Paralympic Sports). It is therefore important that they are exposed to a broad range of activities for as long as possible, providing an inclusive curriculum and finding ways to adapt class activities so that they are actively involved and not sent to the Library etc.

The inclusion of a range of suitable activities in secondary mainstream PE or Electives (as mentioned above), will allow them to continue in the curriculum with their peers. Most states now have inclusive interschool categories for athletics, cross country and swimming (based on Paralympic sport) and some are running combined schools teams in Goalball, Blind Cricket and Swish (a form of table tennis) – encourage your student and provide opportunities for them to participate. Blind sport organisations will often assist you to include some of these sports in the normal curriculum so that other students can experience them.

Physical education teachers can contact their state support centre for low vision students, within the state or territory education department (in Victoria the Statewide Vision Resource Centre), for more information on teaching strategies to support and include those with low vision.