

Play Like a Champion Today Educational Initiative

Exceptionalities Modified Practice Plan



Practice Plan for Athletes with Exceptionalities

It's always a challenge to run an engaging, active practice for children, especially if there is a large team, or there is only one coach. It is important that practices are fun, functional, and focused. The goal of coaching is to foster an enjoyable environment that teaches skills (both social and physical) and provides some exercise for children, so a good practice is key element of good coaching.

Coaching children with exceptionalities makes planning a practice extremely important because a practice without a plan is likely to quickly disintegrate because of the ease of distraction. Here are a few tips to keep practices on task:

- Try to pick a remote practice area, to prevent distractions from traffic, pets, or other teams.
- If possible, recruit an assistant coach. Coaching children with exceptionalities can require a lot of attention
- Keep the practice area small, and contain it with cones. Discourage players from going outside the cones. Cones will assist
- in creating rigid structure for exceptional children.
- Have multi-colored cones, to encourage multi-sensory reinforcement. Assign different meanings to different cones (e.g.
- red=passing, yellow=shooting).
- Develop routines that exceptional children can depend on, so that they are not taking on too much new material in one
- practice.
- Exceptional children tend to be visual learners. Keep explanations short, and focus on hands on learning. Avoid trying to "mirror" drills; stand in front and get players to mimic the person teaching a new skill.
- Discourage foul language and behavior. Children with exceptionalities sometimes pick up on negative behavior and habitually mimic it for attention.

Because of the tendency of children with exceptionalities to become easily distracted, it is important to keep them engaged in short, stimulating activities to maintain a dynamic practice with little down time for wandering. In Appendix J of the *Play Like a Champion Coaches Manual*, there is a sample practice plan for youth sports. On the following page is a variation of that plan, modified for coaching children with exceptionalities.



15 minutes Warm-up: Dynamic Movements/Agilities & Stretching

- 5 minutes jogging (2 soccer/football laps or 1-2 baseball/softball laps)
- 2 minutes of jumping jacks (have peers demonstrate)
- 3 minutes of agility work (shuffle/high knees, “grapevine,” etc.)
- 5 minutes of stretching, led by a player. Make sure children with exceptionalities are behind and next to other players if they are having trouble understanding stretches or drills.

2 minutes Team Talk

- Communicate what you want to accomplish in practice, as well as some clear expectations you have for the team. Discuss practice goals. With exceptional children try to set simple quantifiable goals: e.g. “Run 10 sprint drills” or “Catch 20 fly balls.”

15 - 25 minutes Small Skill Development (break into a few skills sets at 10 min. each)

- Design some short drills that develop certain necessary skills. Remember that children with exceptionalities learn physical skills the same way as typical children. Use repetition, and build on skills that they have used before.
- Focus on active rest. The tendency for exceptional children to become distracted can be mitigated by an activity while they are waiting for their turn. In basketball, tell your team to dribble using their non-dominant hand while preparing, or in soccer, create a drill where the active player is assisted by a resting player (e.g. throwing a ball to a player practicing headers).

2 minutes Water Break

10 – 15 minutes Group Work

- Separate your players into groups and work on the same drill at the same time or different drills and switch.
- Keep a watchful eye on exceptional children, as they may struggle in a group setting. Pay special attention, and encourage teammates to help where there might be struggles.

10 minutes High Number Drill Set

- Do a drill that incorporates a high number of players.
- Fewer players on the sidelines equals a more focused practice and builds teamwork.

15 – 20 minutes Game Play

- Play a modified or small game/scrimmage.
- Put it all together. Hopefully, all the skills worked on in the previous part of practice will be utilized in your game play.

5 minutes Water Break & Team Talk

- An excellent time to review what was learned in practice. Ask questions that solicit a detailed reply rather than just “yes” or “no” responses. But keep it brief, as to avoid wandering minds.
- Remember that how a child perceives a practice is by the coach’s reaction. Be positive, and get your athletes’ feelings on the practice.

5 minutes Ending Drill and Conditioning

- POSITIVE NOTE! End on an activity that is fun and builds team spirit.

5 minutes Cool-Down