

Learning Disability Appendix

Safety and impairment specific considerations

A learning disability affects the way someone learns, communicates or undertakes everyday tasks. Someone has a learning disability all through their life.

There are many different types of learning disability. They can be mild, moderate or severe. Some people with a mild learning disability do not need a lot of support in their lives. Other people may need support with all sorts of things, like getting dressed, going shopping, or filling out forms. Some people with a learning disability also have a physical disability. This can mean they need support 24 hours a day. This is known as profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). A learning disability does not stop someone from learning and achieving a lot in life, if they get the right support.

There are many causes of a learning disability. Often it is not possible to say why someone has a learning disability. But most learning disabilities are caused by the way the brain develops (before, during or soon after birth). A learning disability can greatly affect an individual's life. This is partly because people with a learning disability may find it harder to understand things than other people. Also, other people may not understand what it means for someone to have a learning disability. As a result, people with a learning disability often do not get treated appropriately.

As a coach, you should ensure your players understand the specific safety rules associated with football. Situations that appear to be an obvious danger may not be perceived as such by some individuals with a learning disability. Accidents may occur due to the lack of awareness of the imminent danger of a situation or the inability to respond appropriately and swiftly if given a command. Some players may have relatively poor self-care skills and will need guidance in areas such as:

- Appropriate clothing – is an outfit too hot, too cold, does footwear fit adequately, is an outfit suitable for the sport?
- Avoidance of sunburn, exhaustion and dehydration – players may need to be reminded frequently to drink or use sun barrier creams.
- Players with a learning disability are also more likely than their non-disabled peers to have convulsive disorders such as epilepsy.

When working with players with a learning disability, coaches may need to make significant adaptations to content, dependant on the ability of the individual. You will always need to:

- Be patient, tolerant, consistent and tactful. However, also ensure players understand the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.
- Make sessions fun and enjoyable to aid concentration.
- Break down complex skills into simple steps (but ensure you link them together).
- Be aware that the motor skills and physical fitness of some players may be generally poor due to lack of opportunities to participate in sporting activities or even regular day-to-day exercise.
- Enable simple decision-making.
- Avoid drills that rely heavily on numeracy and literacy skills.
- Teach by showing and copying (avoid 'telling' the individual).

- Assess the physical ability and skill level of the player.
- Assess the ability to learn football-specific rules.
- Assess the individual strengths and challenges.

You need to set challenging and realistic goals:

- Repeat and review continuously.

Effective Communication

Establish the extent to which instructions and directions are understood. It is useful to remember to use simple, brief and concise language without being patronising. Refer to the players according to their chronological age and encourage other players, officials and supporters to use appropriate age and football-specific terminology (e.g. 'you paced yourself well' rather than 'good boy').

Some people with a learning disability may use a signing system to support speech. The individuals are not necessarily deaf or have no speech but may be unable to communicate effectively by oral methods alone.

Rule adaptations

- There are no adaptations to the game and FIFA Rules are applied.

Competition structure

- There are various local, regional and national competitions held by organisations such as Gateway and the Special Olympics.
- The Ability Counts programme includes regional and national competitions.
- The International Sports Federation for persons with an Intellectual Disability (INAS-FID) stage European Championships every four years and World Championships every four years.